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Daddy, can we play Beatles rock band? The lived experiences of a married student with children in a cohort-based education doctoral program

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DADDY, CAN WE PLAY BEATLES ROCK BAND?

THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF A MARRIED STUDENT WITH CHILDREN IN A COHORT-BASED EDUCATION DOCTORAL PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to understand more clearly the lived experiences of married doctoral students with children who are enrolled in a cohort-based program. Attempting to maintain a strong family relationship, balance a career, enroll in a doctoral program, and provide for a family is an avalanche of emotion and pressure on all members of the family. All facets of family relationships that have been strained need to be relieved of stressors and more focus needs to be on the family during each semester. With the time commitment caused by classes, studying, and through the dissertation process, family relationships can be torn apart by the lack of attention to the family. The ability of a doctoral student to survive the outside strains of life is increasingly difficult (Gardner, 2009; Madrey, 1983).

This qualitative, phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of married students with children under 18 years old, in a cohort-based doctoral program at a Midwestern research university. Data were collected from a purposeful sample of 10 participants who had been students in a doctoral cohort-based program between 1998 and 2009. The chosen participants were enrolled in the cohort based doctoral program but did not need to have graduated.

An analysis of the data elicited five themes: support—"can I do this alone?" the effect of a doctoral program on the marital relationship, walkin' the tightrope: balancing it all, filling the gender gap, and advice for present and future doctoral students who are married with children.

This study recognized challenges and opportunities to better understand married doctoral students with children. It also recognized that with communication, cooperation, and compassion, the married doctoral student with children can have a successful academic a career and maintain a strong family relationship.

The findings of this study aim to serve as a guide not only for married doctoral students with children but also for spouses, families, mentors, program faculty, dissertation chairs, friends, and coworkers. The experiences of married doctoral students with children are not only unique, they are also inspirational. It is vital more research on this topic should occur and subsequent findings are discovered to allow similar students to persist toward their educational endeavors and allow for their family relationships to remain strong and thrive.

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When maintaining a marital relationship, raising a family, working full-time, and going to school full-time, there is give and take of which aspect takes precedence over the others. All too often the participants of this study stated that school was the main focus of their lives, and I fully understand that. Now comes the time where I can take one of these aspects off of my life's plate and refocus my priorities where they need: family first. I now take some time to thank some very special people in my life.

Thank you to my dissertation committee headed by Dr. Kandace Hinton, with members Dr. Mary Howard-Hamilton and Dr. Charles Lepper. It has been a long and winding road of writing and rewriting, and I was not always sure why, but the hard work has culminated into a stronger and more focused research dissertation, and I am grateful. I am so thankful for being connected to each of you through this dissertation, and through the best leadership doctoral program in the country. Thank you for helping the future married doctoral students with children to continue to play Beatles Rockband with their children.

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with the theoretical: life-long lessons! Thanks to Dr. Kand McQueen for teaching me even a little knowledge of statistics is good and sometimes dangerous. Thank you to Dr. Denise Collins for the lesson of carefully reading the APA manual. Finally, Dr. Will Barratt, thanks for being a constant source of reality and helping me see the joy in the liminality.

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For my Buddy-Bud and my Girly-Girl, I wish to thank the reasons that I continue with anything and everything. My wonderful children, Veronica and Michael, I want you to realize that you are the reason your mother and I exist. I hope this doctoral adventure was a learning experience for each of you and you will learn to love the search for knowledge. I hope you take pride in your work and know that your mother and I will always be there for you and no matter what, highs and lows, we love you! Remember, at least get your master's degrees before you get married.

For my JillyKat, can you believe we made it through all of this? Of course, I could write a novel about how thankful I am for you—hum, next project? I am happy to say the thread is back to being as strong as steel and it will always be that way. I thank you for being my support, my wife, the mother of our amazing children, and my LOML. Who would have ever thought that education would consume so much of our lives? It will be strange that for the first time in

many years that not all of us will be in school. Perhaps another degree for me? Ok, no. I want you to know that I will support you always and I know you have supported me. I can't imagine this life with anyone but you. Sometimes you have to fall to get up again, but I could not have risen if I didn't have you. Thanks for being my Kat and I can't wait to see you finish your degrees and together we travel to the ends of the Earth. This is only the beginning . . .

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

With the stresses of a family and the workplace, why would a parent want to add more stress to the family relationship? For various reasons some parents decide to continue their education and return to school for a doctorate. For some families with an already taxed life, adding a full-time, cohort-based doctoral program can stretch the family relationship to the point of possible disbandment of the family. Many students who have a family, who work full- or part-time, and who are enrolled full-time succeed in finding the necessary balance for all three aspects of their lives. Unfortunately, many students do not find the family or other support to balance three major demands on their lives, are not successful and the doctoral program is the aspect that is removed from the scale of their life in order to achieve life's balance (Gardner, 2009; Madrey, 1983).

In a 1998 Clemson University Extension program about family relationships, the authors described what is involved in a good family relationship:

> Strong families recognize that there are benefits and pleasures to be gained from time and activities together. They value the family bond and make special efforts to preserve time together for family activities and interaction. By spending pleasant time together, families build a reserve of good feelings and are able to cope with personal and family crisis more effectively. Strong families are deeply committed to the family unit and to promoting the

> happiness and welfare of each other. Family commitment comes from an active involvement in setting and carrying out family goals. Families work to spend prime time together. They don't just take advantage of spare time to devote to the family; they actually PLAN for quality family time. (Thomason & Thames, 1998, para. 1)

Replace the word(s) family or families with "full-time, rigorous, cohort-based education program." The commitment of both a family and a full-time, rigorous, cohort-based education program can be very similar, which is a cause of stress for the student who has to choose which word to use at the time.

Developing a strong family relationship takes many years and much hard work (Madrey, 1983; Middleton, 2001; Sori, Wetchler, Ray, & Niedner, 1996), and many families have a difficult time focusing and refocusing their limited time on their families, their work, or their studies while maintaining an appropriate level of commitment to each. This study examined the experiences through the lenses of students in a cohort-based doctoral program and how the students perceive the effects of program on the family relationship. This study explored how family and other support mechanisms help the student to persist.

Statement of the Problem

Benjamin Franklin stated, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder, but presence brings better results" (as cited in Mieder & Kingsbury, 1992, p. vii). A doctoral program might make the heart grow fonder for the family because the student will be absent or secluded from the family, much of the time due to program requirements; however, Franklin's quote also encompasses a problem in that because of the absence of the student from the family, the lack of presence of the student strips away the bonds of family connection.

Meers and Strober (2009) discussed how getting parents to a 50/50 split in all aspects of family relationship, including the raising of children, care of the house, and generating income, help build a strong and healthy family relationship. They explained how after discussing with hundreds of parents, a pattern emerged:

> Couples win from standing in each other's shoes, day after day—committing themselves equally to raising their children and breadwinning for a family. Mothers work without guilt; fathers bond with their kids; children blossom with the attention of two equally involved parents. (p. 11)

When one parent enrolls in an intensive cohort-based education program, reaching a 50/50 balance in the household and family relationships becomes more difficult to achieve (Lovik, 2004; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009; Middleton, 2001; Sori et al., 1996; Springer, Parker, & Leviten-Reid, 2009; Workman & Bodner, 1996). The student parent must commit time to three characteristics. The student parent must decide what aspect of life will receive the most attention. It is at this point when the student parent decides that the doctoral program will receive more attention; often it is the family relationship that suffers the most (Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2008a; Gonzalez et al., 2001; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lawson & Fuehrer, 1989; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Middleton, 2001; Rovaris, 2004; Sigafus, 1998; Smith, Maroney, Nelson, Abel, & Abel, 2006; Ülkü-Steiner, Kurtz-Costes, & Kinlaw, 2000; Workman & Bodner, 1996). A 2007 study by Nevil and Chen (as cited in Wendler et al., 2010), indicated the most often reason for students leaving doctoral programs is when there is a change in the family structure, whether it is issues with the marriage, the children, the extended family, or a combination of all three.

Graduate schools have seen a change in student demographics over the past 50 years. Gender demographics have moved from a mostly male student body to almost a 50/50 split between women and men (Mason et al., 2009). For the academic year 2010-11, a total of 163,765 doctoral degrees were conferred in the United States (Snyder & Dillow, 2013, Table 315). A total 9,623 of those doctoral degrees were in the field of education (Snyder & Dillow, 2013, Table 315).

The commitment to a doctoral program takes much of the time and energy away from the family, and the stressors of an intensive doctoral program can begin to tear at the seams of even the closest families (Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000; Madrey, 1983). Springer et al. (2009) stated, "There are circumstances often specific to graduate student parents or exacerbated for graduate student parents—including, but not limited, to relationships with advisors [or lack of], financial insecurity, career uncertainty, and open or flexible timelines" (p. 436).

The most important of these circumstances for doctoral parents to persist in school and keep strong family relationships is the need for family support (Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2008b; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lawson & Fuehrer, 1989; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Middleton, 2001; Rovaris, 2004; Sigafus, 1998; Smith et al., 2006; Ülkü-Steiner et al., 2000; Workman & Bodner, 1996). Although family support is vital in both cases, to maintain family relationships for a student with children takes many forms of support, not only from the spouse but from external family members, cohort members, advisors, and the institution (Lovik, 2004; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Mason et al., 2009; Middleton, 2001; Ülkü-Steiner et al., 2000; Workman & Bodner, 1996). As Sori et al. (1996) stated, "graduate school is synonymous with stress" (p. 259), and students often put their families in the background of their lives in pursuit of their academic achievements and in fulfilling program requirements.

The lack of support, specifically family support, is significant because without family support, the student begins to either strain family relationships beyond repair, or the student drops out of the doctoral program in an attempt to reconnect with the family; either result can cause stress to the student and the family (Middleton, 2001; Sigafus, 1998; Smith et al., 2006; Workman & Bordman, 1996). A final issue is if there is any significant difference in the gender or ethnicity, or the intersection of both, of the student in the effect on family cohesion and the effect on children (Lovik, 2004; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992).

There is limited research about graduate programs and family relationships and even less qualitative research about family relationships and a parent enrolled in a doctoral program. There seems to be a lack of research literature on a parent in an intensive cohort-based doctoral program and the effects, emotional or social, that the commitment of the program has on their children.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to understand more clearly the lived experiences of married doctoral students with children who are enrolled in a cohort-based education program. The ability to balance all of aspects of family, school, and work causes great stress and pressure on all members of the family. All facets of family relationships that have been strained need to be relieved of stressors and more focus needs to be on the family during each semester. With the time commitment caused by classes, studying, and through the dissertation process, family relationships can be torn apart by the lack of attention to the family. The ability of a doctoral student to survive the outside strains of life is increasingly difficult. According to the Council of Graduate Schools (King, 2010), just over 50% of all doctoral students finish their programs within 10 years. This means that 50% take longer or never finish. Wendler et al. (2010) listed

the top 10 reasons for leaving graduate school and "change in family status" (p. 16) was number one. Wendler et al. specifically stated,

> Of course many graduate students do manage to balance work, family and educational responsibilities simultaneously. For those who have chosen to leave a graduate degree program, the reason most often given is a change in family status, followed by job/military commitments, dissatisfaction with the particular program, or needing to work. (p. 16)

This research was based on the lived experience of students in a cohort-based doctoral program and highlighted that the added pressures of a doctoral program on the family relationship that usually starts with the marriage and then includes the children. This research allowed the recognition of the internal and the external stressors that are responsible for strengthening or destroying the relationship of the doctoral student's family during their enrollment in a cohort-based education program, and what may lead to the understanding of why these students persisted or abandoned their programs. This study examined if it makes a difference which parent is enrolled in the program and if the race of the student in the doctoral program have any effects on family relationships. It is the hope that with the information gleaned from this study, family relationships can be strengthened. Moreover, this research could assist parents who are thinking of enrolling in an intensive, cohort-based doctoral education program to better understand the internal and external aspects that may affect their family relationship.

Research Question

This study was guided by the following research question: What are the lived experiences of a married student with children in a cohort-based education doctoral program?

Significance of the Study

This study is important because while all graduate students, more specifically doctoral students, are pulled from many angles, understanding the experiences of married doctoral students in an intensive program may unlock issues that affect these students in different aspects. However, studies have shown that 50% of all graduate students do not persist in their programs (Mason et al., 2009; Wendler et al., 2010). Discovering the causes that lead married students with families to persist or abandon their studies could assist in the retention of married students with children in the program and preserve the family relationship.

The results of this research provided qualitative empirical data about married doctoral students with children in (a) how the enrollment of a parent in a doctoral program impacted the marriage, (b) what current and new support mechanisms were available for the students and the families, (c) the impact of a doctoral program and the level of commitment of the student on the children of the student, (d) what is the impact to the family is based on which parent is enrolled, (e) what indicators and reasons were responsible for persistence or attrition of the student, (f) need for more qualitative literature on married doctoral students with children, and (g) supplying recommendations for future studies.

Society and academics are benefitted by understanding that married doctoral students with families are being affected in many ways. The family relationship is being affected due to family stressors from the uncertainties and need for flexibility and family adaptations brought on by the doctoral undertaking, and are unable to persist in the program, not only will the factors of these stressors be presented, but the study may also assist the colleges and universities to understand the student's perspective and develop new or enhance existing measures for these students.

Definition of Terms

Family relationship. The family relationships include, but not limited to physical and emotional, mother/father, mother/children, mother/mother, father/father, father/children, children/children. A family relationship has bonding between family members, a feeling of connectedness, communication between members, and family perception of quality of life (Barnes & Olson, 1985). Family relationships are dynamic. There are many ways to define a family and many ways to explain how a family related to each other. As Skolnick and Skolnick (2007), explained, "Only 7% of American households are traditional families" (p. 2). They defined *traditional* as a household with children under 18 and where the father is the sole financial provider and who works outside the home. For this study, there will be no traditional family here; a family is defined as two spouses with any number of children under the age of 18 during the student's doctoral program. Also, although there are many different structures to defining family relationships, again, in this study, the research focused on the viewpoint of the married student with children in a doctoral program and how the educational pursuit of the student affects the relationship of the family as a whole.

Married. "The meaning of marriage in the United States has been changing for two centuries. These changes have led to a more recent trend toward the acceptance of same-sex relationships as eligible for legal recognition through marriage" (Eshleman & Bulcroft, 2010, p. 6). A married student in this study was a marriage or domestic partnership between a woman and a man, a woman and a woman, or a man and a man whether state, religious, common law, or solemn commitment.

Support. Support involved the emotional and physical cooperation with the student to ensure that student has all opportunities to complete tasks associated with doctoral program.

These support mechanisms can be familial, cohort, school services, and career support received by the doctoral student (Madrey, 1983).

Commitment. Commitment involved the directed focus of time and mental capacity used by the student towards a single project, activity, or goal. The student's commitment can be devoted to family, work, or school, but all three can be directly focused to one aspect.

Graduate student. These students were enrolled in a master's or a doctoral program. This study will focus as much as possible on doctoral students.

Persistence. Persistence was measured by an individual student record reflecting enrollment each semester throughout the program.

Participants. Students who were members of a higher education leadership program (cohorts between 1998 and 2009). The criteria for selecting the participants were: that they must have been married with children younger than 18 years of age at the time of initial enrollment in the program. The chosen participants were enrolled in the cohort-based doctoral program but did not need to have graduated. Participants were selected from current and previous cohorts of higher education leadership doctoral programs from a Carnegie classification Doc/Prof: Doctoral, research dominant university in the Midwest.

Personal Statement

I have always tried to achieve some sort of balance in my life, between family, school and work. I finished my bachelor's degree before I was married, but started and finished my master's degree after both marriage and children. We had just had our first child, a son named Michael. We were beginning to achieve a nice balance when it was recommended to me that for my professional career, returning to school would be a good move. Taking one or two courses at a time allowed me to focus on family, work, and school—all in that order. Completing the

master's degree seemed to balance my life professionally and academically, and with concern to my family, the balance was always maintained, even with the birth of our second child, Veronica. With the strength and inconveniences for my wife when I had class or needed to study, and my own inner fortitude, I completed my master's degree and truly thought my academic career would be finished. Sometimes life has an interesting way of surprising us. I was told by my supervisors that when I complete a master's degree, I could move up the ladder in no time. That was not quite the reality of the situation. I enrolled in a program at a local university in the only master's degree available: education with a concentration in elementary education. It was a self-paced program and there was limited research, but more important to me was there was no thesis, it was portfolio based. Great! I did not have to write 30 pages or do much research.

My work and school began to balance and soon we had a certain "flow" to our lives. Although my wife, Jill, still had the brunt of the load having to take care of both children, the household, and ensuring my ability to complete my school work. At this time we were fortunate to have the luxury of Jill not having to work, but we did add the stress of her now going to college to complete an associate's degree. Even with what seemed to be a tornado of activity in our home, we still managed to balance all aspects of our lives with limited and minor stretching of the family relationship, work, and academic progress. In my cohort, the majority of students were married, and most of them had children. In group work, I had many students who were in the same situation as I was: married with children, working full-time, and going to school. Of those students, most were like me and taking one or two courses a semester and were balancing their lives. However, I remember two who were taking three and four courses and were so stressed and tired that many times others in our courses would work extra for them—their lives

were way out of balance, and one did get divorced by the end of the program. I finished my program in four years and was able to maintain my life's balance. I had resigned myself to the educational attainment of a master's degree and had no thought of anything more, but again, life could not wait to surprise me again.

With the suffering economy and fewer and fewer jobs, more people were looking for work, people with more credentials than a master's degree. When a new position opened, I was informed that being in a Ph.D. program would greatly increase my odds for being promoted. I had a few colleagues who had gone through a Ph.D. program and I had even helped a few by proofreading papers. I had heard all of the horror stories about how it rips apart the individual and even some stories of how it shatters a family. The demands and rigor of the program had great negative effect on these students and their families. The only one I saw with less stress was one student who had no family. He was still quite stressed, but did not have the additional weight to carry of a family. I discussed the idea of applying to the program with my wife and my colleagues. I applied and was rejected. That did not deter me, for my only goal was to be accepted in the program when I applied for the open position. I applied for the position and again for the program, I did not get the job, but was accepted for the program. I then refocused my energies to the life of a pending doctoral student. How hard could it be? The master's degree was relatively easy and did not cause that much of a disruption to my family's life. Even after many more discussions with my colleagues who had gone through this rigorous program before, and all of our reassuring each other that this would be good for us and we could handle it, we were still not prepared for the amount of stress, family turmoil, and sacrifice from all that would encompass the next two years of our lives.

My cohort was made up of 13 students: seven students from the United States and six international students. Of the original 13, there were seven married students, and of those seven, five had children, and one was a grandmother. After the first semester, the grandmother dropped from the cohort due to many issues, family being one of them. Another student in the cohort also had children but was divorced before entering the program. There were eight professors during the coursework, four women and four men. All four male professors were married with children and one of the women professors was married with children. The first inkling of how a doctoral program affects the life of the student happened the third weekend after the semester began. Normally weekends were for family and my homework was done at night, after the children had gone to bed. For the first two weekends I thought I had a handle on the school work. However, with three courses, a full-time job, and my family, I was not able to stay awake late enough to finish my work or keep up with the reading and writing. I needed to work all day Saturday and Sunday. I knew this was going to have an effect on all aspects of my life when my son came up to me asked, "Daddy, can you come and play Beatles Rock Band with me?" but I was just too busy with school work to say yes. I had to say no to playing and just being around many, many times in the next two years. My wife, Jill, suggested early in the second semester that a study on how this program affects a marriage needed to be done. Discussing how other cohort members who were also married with children were coping started me thinking that Jill was right and that solidified the idea of studying how a married doctoral student with children in a cohort-based program survives. Many struggles with my own conscience about whether I should study, whether I should focus on work, whether I should just take some time for my wife and me, or whether I should take a few minutes and play with my children have torn me from each angle on my spirit throughout the two years of my courses. Now with the dissertation process, the

restrains of professor imposed due dates and time management are lessened, but now I am under the control of self-imposed due dates and responsible for my own time management, which many times still takes away from the family relationship.

Personal Values

At the beginning of the program, my wife and I had agreed upon a schedule for my school work. I would study after the children went to bed and "a little" on the weekends—silly us**.** As one who always put family first, that weekend when I had to explain to my children that I could not stop and play, that I really had to work all day and all of the night was a wakeup call that my priorities were to be reorganized—at least temporarily.

The two years of my coursework completely engulfed my life much at the expense of my family. Many times I pushed my family farther and farther away from me and replaced them with my cohort members. A very wise cohort member, Scott O'Daniel, expressed this scenario as "the foxhole syndrome." This is where during war soldiers who are in very stressful and mentally and physically challenging situations will bond together in ways that no one else can ever understand. Where a person would have sought safety and security with family, after a relationship challenging situation such as a doctoral program, the students often feel they can only share this time with those who truly understand. I tried to share my experiences with my wife, but sadly I could not fully express myself and she could not, through no fault of her own, understand what I was saying. There were many times I felt us drifting from each other and one time even very close to losing each other. Thankfully because of our faith in each other and the knowing that this course must be taken, sometimes individually, but always knowing that we would make it through together.

The dissertation phase was a very emotional and physical battle. The lack of structure in caparison to coursework was daunting. It took a while to discover a new routine and to discover that I was in charge of my own schedule. I allowed family to regain priority in my life, at the expense of putting completion of the program farther down the road. Even in the best faculty/chair relationship, the feeling of being alone is overwhelming. I have sought support from previous cohort members who have finished and they have been amazing support systems. Now that I have completed the dissertation, I am not only grateful for the persistence, but the support of my family and my friends. When I decided on the topic of the lived experiences of married doctoral students with children, I donned a university rubber-wrist band as a symbolic ring of my own marriage to the doctoral program and this dissertation. When the papers are signed and the diploma is in my hand, I will dissolve the bond with the program and will completely give my life back to my family.

What a physical and emotional roller-coaster the pursuit of a doctorate has been—from having my work be accepted to present at national and international conferences and meeting some of the greatest, smartest, and kindest friends, professors, and cohort members to the day my children came into my study area and said, "Daddy, we were going to ask you go come and play with us but we know your work is more important." I think of having the heartbreaking decision between playing with my children and doing my school work. Through all of these ups and downs, through the amazing times and the bad decisions, there has been one constant: my family. Whereas my professional and academic careers play large roles in my life, my family is the most important part of me, and I intend to keep it that way forever.

Organization of the Dissertation Proposal

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the personal, professional, and academic experiences of married students with children in a cohort-based education doctoral program. This introductory chapter provides an overview of the students' life issues, both positive and negative, that impedes or improves the students' lives while furthering their academic careers. I conclude Chapter 1 with my personal statement of how the idea for the research was conceived, a personal values statement that indicates my own struggles with being a student enrolled in a program of which I am studying. All personal involvement was not applied in the final analysis of the data, but was reserved and only shared in brackets.

Chapter 2 reviews the available literature in relation to how graduate school affects married students, with as much specific research on married doctoral students with children. After examining the literature, I have divided the chapter into four themes beginning with marital impact studies, including how the student's enrollment in doctoral program affects the entire family. The next section delves into the literature about how the student finds support throughout the program. The third theme researched is on race/ethnic/gender in relation to the student enrolled in the program. The chapter concludes with an exploration of literature examining the attrition and persistence of the students and they try to balance their lives as parents, students, and professionals.

Chapter 3 explains the research design that was used in this study: qualitative phenomenological. Each step of research is described including the role I played, how the participants were selected, how the data were collected, how the data were analyzed, and how the data were verified. Chapter 3 concludes with a summary of the methodology used in this research.

Chapters 4 through 6 share the results of this study. In Chapter 4, the unique story of each of the eight participants is told by focusing on three major events in her life: becoming a mother, becoming a terminal degree holder, and becoming a professor. Chapter 4 also identifies themes that were discovered in this study: Support—"Can I Do This Alone?;" The Effect of a Doctoral Program on the Marital Relationship; Walkin' the Tightrope: Balancing It All; Filling the Gender Gap; and advice for present and future doctoral students who are married with children. Chapter 5 identifies and discusses the subthemes that emerged from the themes. Chapter 6 provides an analysis of the five themes, and their subthemes, that emerged from the data.

Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation. This chapter reviews the importance of this study and its limitations. Also, this chapter offers recommendations for the institutions—the employment and the academic and for future married doctoral students with children. Finally, recommendations for future research are listed.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

> After a man [or woman] passes entirely through the mill of American formal education and has reached that point where, so far as scholastic degrees are concerned, he [or she] can go no further, ideally he [or she] should sit down at the top of the intellectual mountain and ask himself [or herself] what it is all about, has the climb upward been worth the effort, and now that finally he [or she] has gained the Ph.D., what is he [or she] going to do with it. (Atkinson, 1939, pp. 1-2)

The questions "is this degree worth it?" and "what am I going to do with it?" are often asked by doctoral students, but perhaps they are scrutinized more by the families of students in doctoral programs who are married with children. The everyday life and the academic life that encompass the existence of a married doctoral student with children are much different than the single student and are also different than the married doctoral student. The purpose of this study was to help understand the lived experiences of married doctoral students with children in a program and gain insight into the identity of the individuals, their reasons for persistence and attrition, and the effects on the family dynamic. This study is based on a review of the literature over the last three decades regarding doctoral students and their family relationships. A 2010 study of graduate schools by Wendler et al. indicated there is a demographic shift from students

age 30 and younger to age 40 and older students; "in addition, the percentage of doctoral students who are married and/or have children has also slightly increased" (p. 12).

Although there are many aspects affecting married doctoral students with children, this chapter will focus on five aspects: (a) family relationships, (b) marital impact, (c) support, (d) gender, and (e) attrition and persistence. The next sections of this literature review aim to provide an analysis of the major findings of the studies representing each aspect, based on the comparison of the relevant literature available.

Family Relationships

A History of Higher Education and the Family Relationship

Higher education in the United States has been a part of family relationships since its beginning in 1636 (Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 2004). The effect on the family relationship and on the family dynamic occurred as the eldest son, and sometimes other sons, began formal education at the collegiate level. However, as the country grew physically, culturally, socially, and academically, the inclusion of women in higher education also expanded (Geiger, 2005; Rudolph, 1990; Skolnick & Skolnick, 2007; Thelin, 2004). Led by the Industrial Revolution and new technological breakthroughs in other occupational areas, more advanced education was needed both by workers and by the faculty of colleges and universities (Stubblefield, 1988; Stubblefield & Keane, 1994). The diversity of college students broadened in the middle of the eighteenth century, but it was not until the latter part of the century that students returned to graduate school for the newly established master's degrees and the even newer degree, copied from German universities, the doctorate of philosophy (Ph.D.; Geiger, 2005; Rudolph, 1990; Skolnick & Skolnick, 2007; Thelin, 2004). The Industrial Revolution sparked the growth of the "common" person's need for higher education and to the "democratization of knowledge and

culture" (Stubblefield, 1988, p. 178) and for the community (Geiger, 2005; Hammon & Albiston, 1998; Rudolph, 1990; Skolnick & Skolnick, 2007; Stubblefield, 1988; Stubblefield & Keane, 1994; Thelin, 2004). The need to remain competitive in the work force was not limited to just non-married people or married people without children. Many times a parent, usually the father, would return for higher education (Stubblefield, 1988; Stubblefield & Keane, 1994). This returning parent was one who already had a degree from a college or university but now returned to school for professional and academic reasons.

In the 20th century, advancing technology and competition between countries and corporations catapulted by two world wars also brought the need for parents to become or remain current with their education, leading more and more parents, now including mothers, to return to school for graduate degrees (Hammon & Albiston, 1998; Stubblefield & Keane, 1994). As the century progressed, the main motivation for parents to enter graduate schools continued to be employment needs; however, more and more parents began to enter graduate school for a new reason, personal enrichment (Thelin, 2004).

Although single men have been the staple of higher education in the United States, the concept of fathers being in higher education did not become reality until the latter half of the 19th century with Lewis Richard Packard being the first father to receive a doctorate ("Doctors of Philosophy of Yale University," 1916). Packard's son Charles was three years old when his father received his doctor of philosophy from Yale, "in the department of classical philology and archaeology, Indo-Iranian philology, comparative philology, and linguistics" (http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=jacquelinesr&id=I28043).

As doctoral education became more and more accepted as the academic pinnacle of knowledge and education, men were still the only Ph.D. recipients (Rudolph, 1992; Thelin, 2004;

Thurgood, Golladay, & Hill, 2006). Traditional and cultural norms maintaining the men were to have college educations and continue their postgraduate work limited the educational growth of women in pursuing post K-12 education (Geiger, 2005; Rudolph, 1990; Skolnick & Skolnick, 2007; Stubblefield, 1988; Stubblefield & Keane, 1994; Thelin, 2004). Following the traditional and cultural cues of men pursuing higher education brought on by global changes such as the Industrial Revolution, along with the ending of both World Wars and incentives such as the GI Bill, made it more of a responsibility for men to go to college (Geiger, 2005; Rudolph, 1990; Skolnick & Skolnick, 2007; Stubblefield, 1988; Stubblefield & Keane, 1994; Thelin, 2004). Thelin (2004) described the push of men into colleges after World War II using the GI Bill:

> Hence one consequence of the GI Bill was to masculinize the postwar campus—both in terms of sheer numbers of new male students matriculating, and by intensifying the split between the typically male fields of study and those now deemed appropriate for women. . . . In sum, the social transformation of higher education set into motion by the GI Bill had a differential impact in that it enhanced the opportunities across lines of economic class, but with the opportunities inordinately favoring men rather than women. (p. 267)

This trend of male-dominated Ph.Ds. continued until the beginning of the 21st century, "Throughout the 20th century men earned the majority of doctorates and accounted for much of the substantial increase in total doctorate production. . . . The period 1920—99 men received 73 percent of all doctorates awarded and women received 27 percent" (Thurgood et al., 2006).

With the admittance of women into higher education beginning with Oberlin College in 1837, the idea of a mother attending college was still a very far vision for parental higher education. However in 1851, Antoinette B. Blackwell, a mother of six children, became not only

the first woman accepted into Oberlin, she also became the first woman graduate despite centuries of precedent in opposition to her goal (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994). In the early eighteenth century when fathers were just being accepted into higher education, the even more obscure concept of mothers earning a college degree was not to be realized for almost 30 years.

Aud et al. (2006) highlighted the achievement of the doctorate degree by both women and men was increasing as well as

> the number of disciplinary fields in which scholarly study was offered at the doctoral level; the number of doctorates awarded annually; and the number of women, minorities, and foreign nationals earning doctorates also grew over the course of the century. By 1999 the number of research doctorates conferred annually had reached more than 41,000, with these representing nearly 400 institutions across the United States. (p. 15)

This rising trend in doctorates awarded during the 20th century included those students who were married with children. The study indicates that the total percentage of married doctoral students with dependents (including both children and adult dependents) was 74% during 1960-64, but then declined dramatically to 43.3% during the 1995-99 time periods. During the same time periods, the decline in married male students with dependents was equally as dramatic: 80.5% (1960-64) down to 51.3% (1995-99). However, with women, the opposite trend occurred. During the period of 1960-64, only 13.8% of married women with dependents were in doctoral programs; during the period of 1995-99, this number increased to 31.8%. The data from this study indicated approximately 20% of all doctorates awarded were to students who were married with dependents, with 43.3% of education doctoral students being married with dependents.

With the concept of married doctoral students with children attending institutions of higher education changing from the late 18th century to becoming more and more a reality, the

idea of the family relationship began to change. No longer was there the family picture of the father going to work while the mother attended to the daily family needs, where the father would return from work and there could be quality family time. With the advent of either one or both parents enrolling in doctoral programs, the glossy picture of the family setting above quickly became distorted by the constant demands of extra-familial activities or the missing-in-action of the parent who is enrolled in the doctoral program because of school work (Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2009; Madrey, 1983; Moore, 2005; Sori et al., 1996). Some parents are not willing to give up their time with the family in trade for the quicker completion of the dissertation and the degree. One reader response to an article in the *Chronicle of Higher education* entitled "Why So Few Doctoral-Student Parents?" stated,

> I'm ABD as of Sept. 2008, two months before my daughter was born. Since then, finding time to work on my dissertation in the context of parenthood, marriage, and full-time employment has been very difficult.
>
> It was much simpler when I was single and before we had a child. I could sit for hours and read, write, think, attend talks, go to conferences, and feel academic, in general.
>
> There is no easy answer except to keep slogging away at it as best as I can and balance, balance, balance along the way. I'm not going to phone-in fatherhood. That's a recipe for familial disaster. (Mason, 2009, para 38)

This reader's response is just one of many attempting to share with others the demands of a doctoral program on students who are married with children. Family relationships vary in relational definition; they can be close and they can be distant. The next section of the literature review deciphers what constitutes a family relationship.

What is a Family and What is a Family Relationship?

There are a multitude of definitions of what a family is or what constitutes a family (Barnes & Olson, 1985; Eshleman & Bulcroft, 2010; McGoldrick & Carter, 2003; Olson, DeFrain, & Skogrand, 2008; Walsh, 2003). How a family interacts and exists is uniquely defined by each member and each member's level of cohesiveness at any given time of the relationship. Developing a strong family relationship can take years and much work from all members (Barnes & Olson, 1985; Eshleman & Bulcroft, 2010; McGoldrick & Carter, 2003; Olson et al., 2008; Walsh, 2003). Because of the complexity and uniqueness of defining a family, as stated previously, for this study a family consisted of two heads of the household for the parents, women and men or domestic partners, as the parents and from one of the parents will be the married doctoral student. The student in this study must be expecting, have a child, or children during the program.

In this study, the family relationship involved the relationships, physical and emotional, between members of the family. The relationships are, but are not limited to; mother/father, mother/mother, father/father/, mother/children, father/children, children/children. A family has varying bonding aspects between family members, feeling of connectedness, communication level, and family perception of quality of life (Barnes & Olson, 1985). Family relationships are dynamic.

Eshleman and Bulcroft (2010) referred to the sociological term of *primary groups* to describe "a small number of people who interact in direct, personal, and intimate ways. Primary-group relationships are facilitated by; (1) face-to-face contact, (2) smallness of size, and (3) frequent and intense contact" (p. 15). Although these may be the preferred actions of a traditional family, the doctoral experience often limits these interactions and causes the student

to often be moved to the limits of the primary group, or worse, remove or be removed from the group all together (Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2008a, 2009; Gold, 2006; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lawson & Fuehrer, 1989; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; McGoldrick & Carter, 2003; Middleton, 2001; Rovaris, 2004 ; Sigafus, 1998; Smith et al., 2006; Sori et al., 1996; Ülkü-Steiner et al., 2000; Workman & Bodner, 1996).

Because of the family relationship being in need of constant nurturing and caring, many families see the doctoral program as the "stealing" of the student from the family relationship during the time of the coursework (Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2009; Gold, 2006; Madrey, 1983; McGoldrick & Carter, 2003). Many family relationships develop and build because of the hard work and sacrifice of family members; however, when one of the members is taking more than they are giving, it is a drain on the family relationship, which can cause strain on all other members of the family.

Dyk (1987) reviewed the literature on family relationships and the role confusion of graduate students. Dyk attempted to gain and continue balance in the family structure as well as the marriage itself. In her study, Dyk interviewed graduate students and listed the major coping strategies "found to be effective in minimizing the pressures of managing family and academic roles" (p. 330). Dyk's findings agree that balance in a relationship is vital to the success of the marriage and to the family relationship as a whole (Brus, 2006; Feldman, 1973; Gilbert, 1982; Madrey, 1983; Ülkü-Steiner et al., 2000).

In a 2001 study of 57 New Zealand Ph.D. candidates in the field of education during their years of writing their theses (dissertations), Middleton concurred with Madrey (1983) and Dyk (1987) in their research that balance between home life, personal life, and professional life was the goal for doctoral students. She also included the addition of self to the need to balance their

lives in different ways; one person responded she keeps her university life and her domestic life balanced by separating them:

> Pretty separate in the sense I didn't ever really talk to Edward [partner] about it. I talked to my friends about it. I didn't talk to Edward about it. I just came home and I became the mother. I enjoyed that, the separation actually. I became more and more depressed while I did the thesis and more and more isolated and more and more confused — that horrible sense of isolation. The mood of the thesis came home with me a lot and it's amazing what Edward put up with. I used to cry in the evening sometimes, just desperate really. He must have felt that stress that I brought home with me. (Middleton, 2001, p. 4)

Although another student responded to relying on the spouse to help keep the balance, Middleton (2001) told of a student who recalled he

> can still remember their mother saying, "Don't disrupt Daddy, he's working on his Ph.D.". They never knew what this Ph.D. meant, but they can still remember Daddy was working on his Ph.D., he was buried away out in his study. I can remember working out there often late at night and so on when the children were in bed. But I don't do any Ph.D. work in my office [on campus] because I found that I had to keep the two things separate. (p. 8)

As the previous studies indicated, achieving balance of home, work, and school responsibilities is often reported as very difficult or impossible. This was again confirmed by West, Gokalp, Pena, Fischer, and Gupton (2011) in their quantitative study of 103 doctorate of education (Ed.D.) students where it was reported, "Among the challenges experienced by the students, those most commonly reported were time management issues, including balancing

work and life commitments, as well as their relationships with their dissertation chairs" (p. 8). Their study also revealed that a doctoral program has a splitting effect on the family relationship.

> One student explained, "I work full-time and have many work and personal responsibilities, i.e., caring for an elder parent, spouse with health problems." In other cases, students struggled to meet their academic responsibilities due to child-care demands. "I had a 10-month-old when I started the program and I gave birth again eight weeks ago!" said one student. . . . "Sadly, my family and friends miss our 'normal' relationships." These types of concerns were corroborated during focus groups: "For me obviously, time probably is the number one challenge just because I think, you know, having a family. My wife works full time and having no family here, working substantial hours, I have no social time. All my free time is put towards just going on the time of having opportunities to figure out when I can write," explained a student. (p. 9)

Gilbert (1982) studied the graduate student and the relationship between how the "system" works and the impact on the family of a spouse in graduate school. His report discussed the roles of and social impacts on the 1970s married graduate students and their family relationships. Gilbert noticed that even after an increase in women in higher education, his study concluded that

> family theorists have generally stressed the adaptive-passive nature of the family in its interaction with the large social system. . . . Despite the potentially destructive impact of graduate school on the family life, the family generally seems to be able to adapt well. (p. 134)

This is a positive message for the married student with children highlighting that the family dynamic may be shaken during graduate school, including the dissertation phase, but the family

relationship can survive the stresses of the program if the family can learn to be flexible and adaptable during this time.

Marital Impact

> We are two working moms who believe that everyone wins when men are full parents and women have full careers. When both parents pay the bills and care for kids, this life is possible-we know from experience. In our homes, we don't assume that Mom is destined to be the "primary parent." Our kids see Dad as equal to Mom because we set it up that way. (Meers & Strober, 2009, p. 3)

The ability to achieve the 50/50 split Meers and Strober (2009) indicated above becomes increasingly more difficult to achieve when one parent enters a doctoral program. According to Thurgood et al. (2006) in their National Science Foundation (NSF) report, *U.S. Doctorates in the 20th Century*,

> throughout the century, a majority of doctorate recipients were married at the time of graduation. The proportion of married graduates, however, declined from 75 to 60 percent between the early 1960s and 1995–99.
>
> The percentage of doctorate recipients with children or adult dependents (regardless of marital status) also declined in this period. Men were more likely than women to be married and have dependents. (p. 11)

A marriage is considered a partnership between each spouse (Barnes & Olson, 1985; Eshleman & Bulcroft, 2010; McGoldrick & Carter, 2003; Olson et al., 2008; Walsh, 2003) and when a spouse is in a cohort-based, doctoral program and becomes deeply immersed and increasingly focused into studies; the shared commitments of a marriage are oftentimes strained,

and sometimes are severed (Allan & Dory, 2001; Gardner, 2008a; Gilbert, 1982; Lovitts, 2001; Nedleman, 1991).

Scheinkman (1988) defined two types of marriages in relation to graduate school students. First is symmetrical, this is where both students are enrolled in a higher education program at the same time. The second type is asymmetrical, in which one spouse is enrolled in school and the other spouse is not. Scheinkman's model was one of the first where the participants are not mainly the traditional roles of the men as the student and the woman as non-student. The model is a "systemic/interactional model. The major focus is on how specific organizational and interactional dilemmas promote disengagement in these marriages (Scheinkman, 1988, p. 1). In her model, Scheinkman described how a couple develops a "marital organization" where spouses support each other in daily life and create a certain balance or natural expectation. She also discussed the couple's previous accomplishments and how they can impact the ways the couple will be able to continue to balance the marital organization or if the impact of a spouse in graduate school will cause an imbalance in the marriage:

> A couple will be more or less equipped to deal with the impact of graduate school on their relationship depending on how long they have been together, on what they have established previously with their families of origin and with one another, on whether they have children or not, and where they are in the family life cycle. New marriages are especially vulnerable because the interactional patterns that evolve around graduate school are usually the only patterns that the spouses have experienced with one another. Couples who have been together for several years may have a longer-term perspective on their marriage, which may help them even if the graduate school situation temporarily does not fit with their individual needs. Couples with children have the additional task of

> parenting. Raising children can either add more stress or it may pull the couple closer together. (p. 2)

Scheinkman's (1988) systemic interactional model provides a good representation on how a couple's marriage stability is based on stressors, symmetrical and asymmetrical roles, equality of roles and participation of each spouse in the balancing of the roles, the ability to keep communication lines free and open, and finally the understanding that when any of these issues arise, interventions must happen quickly to save the marriage.

In his germinal work, Feldman (1973) examined 33,000 completed mailed responses from graduate students—funded by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. In his study Feldman discussed the history and role of women in higher education and "examines how the spouse role affects both men and women in graduate education" (p. 983), and Feldman also explored the effects of conflicts on the graduate student's marriage. His study first discussed the separate roles each spouse adopts when one spouse is a graduate student and their ability to conflict at times and complement at other times. Feldman (1973) did not go into great detail of the roles of each spouse; many others (Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2008a; Gilbert, 1982; Gold, 2006; Hagedorn, 1999; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Scheinkman, 1988) further divide the effect of the symmetrical and asymmetrical roles of the nonstudent and the student spouse in the marriage.

Another interesting point from Feldman's (1973) work is his assertion that stress caused by a parent entering graduate school is not only limited to the student but to the entire family unit:

> The primary implication for the family system is that the psychological strain experienced by the graduate students will be related to family strain, though not in a clear

> cause-and-effect manner. This strain will probably be felt more acutely in those cases where the student is less competent and is experiencing difficulty competing. (p. 131)

Feldman equated family stress and balance with the married student's academic work in in competition with the cohort or fellow students work. The student's work is the variable—if the student is doing well in comparison with the rest of the class, the family relationship should be more stable and see less stress caused by the married student's work; however, Feldman (1973) posited that the reverse is true: If the student is not doing well in the coursework, the stress of the married student's limited success in the classroom will be diverted and shared with the entire family, thus undermining the balance of the family relationship.

The study of the married student has had its share of research over the past 40 years; the 1980s were a fervent time for research on married students in higher education. Although there were many studies, the majority were conducted using a quantitative method. In a study to examine how "the married student couple copes with the educational experience," Madrey (1983, p. 1) conducted an ethnographic study using in-depth interviews, collecting data on the culture of married students, and developed hypotheses about the data of 16 married doctoral students (eight women and eight men) at Ohio State University. The study included married doctoral students with children. The large scope of the findings in this research has contributed to set the foundations for the study of this topic and this dissertation. Although the study did not test her hypotheses, one of the main conclusions in Madrey's study was there are principal factors/aspects regarding family relationship that affect the students' experiences in their doctoral programs. The study listed factors crucial in the development of the student. These factors included "the educational level of the spouses, financial problems, time pressures, children, communication, sexual concerns, decision-making, role conflict, and physical and

emotional separation" (Madrey, 1983, p. 16). Madrey stated the recognition and coordination of these factors help to keep the student focused on the goal, and bring the couple closer. Madrey addressed the marital stability issue in her findings that enrollment of a spouse in higher education does have negative effects, but is usually balanced or outweighed by the positive effects. Madrey stated,

> The stability of the marriage can be threatened by the college environment, which is often perceived as being deleterious to marriage. The process of negotiating role demands and developing skills to cope with these demands may enhance the marital relationship. . . . Heightened awareness of these factors may lead to greater coordination of time schedules, appreciation for each other's involvements, and the tendency to evade or neglect activities and associations which do not contribute to goal attainment. This tendency leads to what the student refers to as "myopia" or "tunnel vision", which may further isolate the couple socially but bring the spouses closer to one another. (pp. 50-51)

While working on his master's thesis, Nedleman (1991) conducted a survey of 84 married graduate students in the Education program at the University of California–Northridge. The respondents comprised 60% without children and 40% with children. Although much of Nedleman's findings are similar to previous findings (Dyk, 1988; Madrey, 1983; Scheinkman, 1988), his finding of the years of marriage and when the student returned to graduate school were of interest:

> Most of the respondents had been married from one to five years (44%) followed by those who were married six to ten years, 16%, and longer than ten years, 29%. This finding may reflect a tendency of students to pursue schooling at the beginning of the marriage or pursue it later, after the children are in grade school. (p. 27)

Along with his finding on years of marriage and the return to graduate school Nedleman (1991) found the greatest stressor of the students was their relationship with their spouses, which coincided with Madrey's (1983) findings.

Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) surveyed graduate students with families and asked about what social supports their academic programs offered for their family situations, what recent stress event has happened, and if this stress has caused anxiety and/or depression. The results indicated that women had much more stress, more symptoms of stress, and significantly less support from their academic departments and families than did men. This finding is backed by more recent studies (Brus, 2006; Gardner, 2008a, 2009; Gupchup, Borrego, & Konduri, 2004; Lovitts, 2001; Sweitzer, 2008). Each study indicated more social support is necessary for both men and women, but women need more support mainly from personal relationships.

In 1998, Sigafus conducted a qualitative study of 25 education doctoral students at the University of Kentucky who had completed their qualifying exams but had not earned their doctoral degrees. Sigafus examined "how professional educators who added a doctoral program to their lives experienced the increased commitment of graduate work" (p. 1). During her research, two of the students divorced and one student who was single married during the program. Whereas the study does not indicate any specifics about the cause(s) of why the couples divorced, it does give an indication that sometimes the pressures of a doctoral program can be a stressor for some marriages and can ultimately be a factor in the dissolution of a marriage and a major reason for not completing the degree.

The connection between marital educational roles and the marriage's stability were also studied by Nettles and Millett (2006). Nettles and Millett's study included doctoral students from 17 doctoral granting universities in the U.S., from 11 fields of study, including education.

The participants in the survey results indicated (survey sample of over 9000 students) over half of the students surveyed were married at the time of the study. The married students in the study included both symmetrical and asymmetrical married couples, along with domestic partners, one of the first studies to include domestic partners in the married category. In the study, the participants of 11 doctoral fields were surveyed and the findings indicated that overall 54% were married; the field with the most married students was education (68%). Another finding of note with regards to marital impact of students with children was that, "students in many fields are forgoing parenthood, at least temporarily" (Nettles and Millett, 2006, p. 53) and there was a difference in gender as in who were parents during the doctoral program:

> In education, engineering, and sciences and mathematics, we discovered a difference between the percentages of men and women having children under eighteen. In each case, fewer women than men in our sample reported having children under the age of eighteen. (Nettles and Millett, 2006, p. 53)

Nettles and Millet's (2006) results show that more doctoral students (especially women) are waiting to have children until they finish their degrees, which coincides with Tuckman, Coyle, and Bae's 1990 study on the length of time to doctorate (TTD) and how the larger the family size the longer it takes to earn a doctorate—thus affecting the marital stability and the marital roles:

> An opportunity-cost argument can also be made for the effects of family size. Other things remaining equal, as the number of dependents increases, the amount of time the student spends with the family also increases, causing TTD to rise. To the extent that women take primary responsibility for child rearing, married women with children will have a higher TTD than will married men with children. (p. 37)

Brannock et al.'s (2000) study surveyed graduate students to measure if marital relationships were affected by spouses in doctoral programs. The study surveyed 54 students who were enrolled in school and were at different stages in their doctoral programs. Brannock et al.'s study indicated there was marital dissatisfaction and stress, which concurs with Madrey's (1983) study, and indicates that when a spouse is in a graduate program stress levels are raised by internal and external factors affecting the marriage. Gardner (2008b) indicated in her qualitative study that social aspects are integral to student success and without them, attrition can occur which is a strain on the marital and family dynamic. While Madrey indicated that the leaving behind of social aspects of family life can often bring a marriage and therefore a family closer together, Gardner indicated from her study that the choice of program and the time requirements—both socially and academically are a source of stress for the doctoral student when deciding on which program to study:

> For students like Lynn, a chemistry Flagship student, the pace of the research culture was particularly difficult for her family. She explained that she had to choose her research division based on its flexibility for her family, "I can't be an experimentalist; it doesn't work for my lifestyle. I have a family; I have a life outside that's very important to me." (Gardner, 2008a, p. 134)

While studying doctoral student attrition, Lovitts (2001) surveyed "noncompleters" or doctoral students who, for various reasons, did not complete their degrees. Lovitts stated that students, who were married, with and without children, indicated it was in many cases a choice between a spouse or family and the program and some students even

> experienced discrimination based on religion, race/ethnicity, gender (including white males), sexual orientation, and marital status: "There was a strong feeling that married

> women students had to choose between their studies or their spouses. . . . My adviser told me I had to decide between literature and my husband." (p. 177)

Gardner (2009) described the strain doctoral students feel even before the initial coursework begins and later how the program strains the connections as soon as the workload begins to take the student parent away from the family, quoting a student from her article:

> The only thing I had to focus on [when and undergraduate] was school and now as a Ph.D. student and working full time and married, there [are] other time pressures that I deal with now that I didn't have to deal with then. (p. 47)

Gardner also referenced her earlier work, "In addition, many students talk about the need to find balance among academic responsibilities, work duties, and personal relationships. For part-time students and students with children and mature relationships, finding this balance maybe even more difficult" (p. 48).

Maintaining mental health is vital to keeping focused on educational goals (Rovaris, 2004), which in turn allows for continuing marital and family relations (Madrey, 1983). In order to maintain proper mental health, the student must try to balance the internal and external factors that may imbalance the mental health of the student (Brus, 2006). These internal and external factors include: the family (children and spouses), financial pressures, social needs, peer involvement and respect, role conflict, academic success, control of academics and relationships, communication with family, work pressures, sexual relations, absence of student from family, career stability, physical and mental fitness (Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2008a, 2009; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lawson & Fuehrer, 1989; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Middleton, 2001; Rovaris, 2004; Sigafus, 1998; Sheinkman,1988; Smith et al., 2006; Sori et al., 1996; Ülkü-Steiner et al., 2000Workman & Bodner, 1996). Middleton (2001) conducted a

qualitative study of doctoral students in New Zealand from 1957-1995 who were in relationships and who were writing their dissertations; most were "focusing on their internal struggles" (p. 1). The findings agree with the previous studies that there are high stress levels for graduate students, but that students with children were the most stressed; however, the students with children also received the most support from family members, again agreeing that the positives of a doctoral program outweigh the negatives. In addition, when the research incorporates a familial aspect, Sori et al.'s (1996) study of 145 couples who were in a marriage and family training graduate programs found that both students and their spouses agreed that "probably the major source of stress for graduate students is insufficient time to accomplish everything that is demanded of them. This is especially crucial for married students, particularly those with children" (p. 260). However, the same students stated that the program experience was more enhancing than stressing in their abilities to "deal with marital issues" (Sori et al., 1996, p. 265). Brannock et al. (2000) explained that even though the Sori et al. study displays a positive learning experience for the student and the spouse, this could be related to the program being studied and that students from other programs would not feel such enhancement because they are not being trained in marriage and family therapy.

In a study of time to program completion, Price (2005) conducted a quantitative study on married graduate students and concluded that "married male students are 75% more likely to complete their degree by the 4^{th} year and 66%, 39%, and 29% more likely than single males students to complete by years 4, 5, and 6 respectively" (p. 9). Married women students were also more likely to graduate before single women students in the first six years, but after seven years, the difference between married and single students was not that different. Although the study indicated the subjects were married students and did not indicate if they had children or not, the

study did declare that being in graduate school does include role differences, such as married women graduate students often being more responsible for household chores and family obligations which coincide with the findings of Brannock et al. (2000), Dyk (1987), Lovik, (2004), Madrey (1983), Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992), and Ülkü-Steiner et al. (2000). The study did indicate that being a married graduate student does not prevent the married student from finishing the degree before single graduate students. Finding a balance between roles for family members is not always easy. The studies indicate a married student enrolled in a doctoral program makes the balancing of family roles even more difficult.

Although balancing family roles is often shaken by a parent devoting more time to studies rather than the family, it is often the satisfaction of the marriage that is the first indicator of the shifting roles. In a study to ascertain marital satisfaction in graduate students, Gold (2006) conducted a quantitative study of 65 married graduate students enrolled in an education program at a large southwestern university. Of the 65 students who participated, 42 were married with children. The study found that when marital satisfaction was measured, women were more dissatisfied with the lack of emotional and communicative outcomes of having a graduate student spouse, whereas men were more materialistic in their dissatisfaction. Gold's findings indicated that women found the lack of problem-solving in the areas of "failure to resolve minor difficulties, lack of specific problem-solving skills, and an over-sensitivity of one's partner, and an inability to discuss and resolve sensitive topics" (p. 491) the greatest issues of dissatisfaction in the marriage. However, for men, the study indicated finances were the major stressor which concurs with the findings of men's dissatisfaction in the studies of Brannock et al. (2000), Dyk (1987), Lovik, (2004), Madrey (1983), Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992), Scheinkman (1988), Sori et al. (1996), and Ülkü-Steiner et al. (2000). In those studies, women's dissatisfaction was varied

from emotional issues (lack of attention by the student spouse) and materialistic (lack of finances).

Research indicates that graduate studies, doctoral programs in particular, constitute a substantial source of stress on marital and family relationships (Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2008a, 2009; Madrey, 1983; Gold, 2006; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lawson & Fuehrer, 1989; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Middleton, 2001; Nedleman, 1991; Rovaris, 2004; Sigafus, 1998; Smith et al., 2006; Sori et al., 1996; Ülkü-Steiner et al., 2000; Workman & Bodner, 1996). Stressors identified in the literature cause strains on the family connection due to many internal and external factors of the student—stressors range from social issues such as peer and institutional relationships and support to personal issues such as mental and physical problems due to family situations. The studies discussed in this section agree stress is a major part of the doctoral student's experience. How the student and the family react and adapt to the stress that is caused to both the marriage and the family relationship, specifically the support mechanisms utilized by the student, is explored in the next section.

Support

> At the doctoral level, sources of challenge abound. Students who enter a doctoral program for the first time face the new challenges of meeting their peers, proving their abilities to faculty, and becoming competent in their subject matter. As students' progress, the challenges change, be it mastering coursework, passing a comprehensive examination, or completing a dissertation. Indeed, without the support of others, these challenges can become overwhelming. (Gardner, 2009, pp. 7-8)

The support systems a doctoral student needs to succeed is the most important and most studied aspect in maintaining a healthy marital and family relationship (Dyk, 1987; Lovik, 2004;

Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Mason et al., 2009; Middleton, 2001; Sori et al., 1996; Workman & Bodner, 1996). The several roles that a graduate student assumes make them a population with particular support needs that are often unattended (Brannock et al., 2000; Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2009; Golde, 2000; Lovitts, 1996, 2001; Madrey, 1983). Dyk (1987) described three major roles of doctoral students: (a) family member role, (b) student role, and (c) personal role. In her study, Dyk found that the complexity in assuming multiple roles and the unfulfilled support of these roles constitute a major stressor in the graduate student experience. Dyk stated the main cause of conflict between student and family roles is pressures students feel about the lack of time and the emotional strain. An important contribution of Madrey's (1983) study is that it establishes that marital stability relies on the negotiating of roles for each spouse as well as the support roles.

Therefore, in order to reduce the stress experienced by the married doctoral student and the negative consequences that role confusion and stress could have in the achievement of their academic goals, professional goals, and life, the student has to feel that the student can count on a strong support network. Several studies have been conducted on the topic of support for student (Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2008a, 2009; Golde, 2000; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lawson & Fuehrer, 1989; Lovitts, 1996, 2001; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Middleton, 2001; Rovaris, 2004; Sigafus, 1998; Smith et al., 2006; Ülkü-Steiner et al., 2000; Workman & Bodner, 1996) from which the following main factors can be highlighted (a) family support, (b) institutional support, (c) classmates/cohort support, and (d) financial support.

Two main areas of support for the married doctoral student with children are institutional and family. Students who use institutional supports such as peer/cohort mentors and partners, involvement in school functions, childcare, and academic and emotional services offered through

the institution are more prepared to face the academic stressors that can damage a marital and family relationship (Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2008a; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lawson & Fuehrer, 1989; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Middleton, 2001; Rovaris, 2004; Sigafus, 1998; Smith et al., 2006; Ülkü-Steiner et al., 2000; Workman & Bodner, 1996). Family support systems are more complex in that the studies indicate that without a strong family support system, academic, marital, and family relationships are all at risk (Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2008a; Gozalez et al., 2001; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lawson & Fuehrer, 1989; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Madrey, 1983; Middleton, 2001; Rovaris, 2004; Sigafus, 1998; Smith et al., 2006; Ülkü-Steiner et al., 2000; Workman & Bodner, 1996). Family support includes spousal, parental, friend, and peer relationships. All of these aspects of family support are influential in the social and psychological well-being of the student. A final aspect of both institutional and family support is the distinction of the student's role in both support systems. Many times the student is attempting to manage many different roles, and this confusion can cause strain on the family relationship. These conflicting roles, such as student versus parent role, student versus child role, and student versus friend role, can divide the student from the family support, and the student/family member versus the academic/institution role can divide the student from the school (Lovik, 2004; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Mason et al., 2009; Middleton, 2001; Workman & Bodner, 1996). These divisions contribute to the separation from the marital and family relationship unless strong family and institutional support systems are in place.

Family Support

How much support a student receives from the family varies as well as which parent receives the support. Feldman (1973) indicated in his study results that female graduate students

receive less family support than male graduate students. Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) conducted one of the most important studies regarding the support systems needed by graduate students. Different to other studies that focused only on family support, Mallinckrodt and Leong examined the multiple social support entities that constituted the support systems for the graduate students. This study focused on what stresses affect women and men and what social supports would be best for them. The study surveyed graduate students who were married couples or married with children about the social supports their academic programs offered for their family situations, what recent stress event had happened, and if this stress had caused anxiety and/or depression. Stress events included such as changes in academic, professional, and homemaker roles of the student and non-student spouse. Stress events for the student spouse included perception of student/faculty relations, quality of instruction facilities and curriculum flexibility, and support of other students. For the non-student spouse, stressors included perceptions on communication and cohesion of the relationship, financial issues, child rearing, and living conditions (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). The findings indicated married women were significantly more likely to receive less family support than married men were, which leads to more role confusion and depression for the woman who is a student and the woman who is a non-student (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). The Ülkü-Steiner et al. (2000) study found that married students received more support from family than did unmarried students. This conclusion is supported by several studies in which the researchers have found that spousal support constitutes one of the most important sources of support for the graduate student (Dyk, 1987; Feldman, 1973; Gardner, 2008a; Gonzalez et al., 2001; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lawson & Fuehrer, 1989; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Middleton, 2001;

Nedleman, 1991; Rovaris, 2004; Sigafus, 1998; Smith et al., 2006; Ülkü-Steiner et al., 2000; Workman & Bodner, 1996).

As Madrey (1983) demonstrated, the support for graduate student family relationship is fundamental; in particular, for married students, the spousal support constitutes the most influential factor in their success. The spousal support affects multiple dimensions of a graduate student's life. Madrey described this type of support as "financial, emotional/psychological, and basic needs support—household tasks, child care, financial management. . . . related matters which make the home more conducive for study and relaxation" (pp. 49-50). Sori et al. (1996) also concluded the stress and demands of a doctoral program can affect the stress level of the student and the student's spouse:

> This stress seems to affect spouses as well, who are often required to fill in the void left by a too-busy student/spouse. One wife and mother wrote, "The expectations placed on my spouse by professors and the requirements are overwhelming—it's humanly impossible to fulfill them and fulfill the needs of the family as a father and a husband." (p. 265)

Correspondingly, Ülkü-Steiner et al. (2000) found students with children received significantly more peer support than students without children and that spousal support during the student's academic career is fundamental (Lovik, 2004; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Mason et al., 2009; Middleton, 2001; Workman & Bodner, 1996). Studies indicate having children did not have either a great effect on stress or only slightly more stress than students without children (Lovik, 2004; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Mason et al., 2009; Middleton, 2001; Sori et al., 1996; Springer et al., 2009; Workman & Bodner, 1996).

However, Lovik (2004) reported students who are women have significantly more stress than students who are men because of real and perceived family roles.

For the graduate student, it is important to have as many sources of support as he or she can get. For example, another fundamental source of support is the parents of the students (Madrey, 1983, Gonzalez et al., 2001). In her study, Madrey (1983) also found that in the absence of spousal support, parental support is a critical factor in determining the success of the student. However, the parental support is dependent upon the level of education of the parent; which Gonzalez et al. (2001) discovered that many Latino doctoral students do not receive the support from family due to the lack of education of the adult family members. This is also true with African American doctoral students (Rovaris, 2004). These studies found that the doctoral students whose parents have a higher educational level received more support than did those students with parents with a lower educational level.

In summary, the studies and literature indicate that when a parent is enrolled in graduate school there is more of a negative effect on the family relationship (Brannock et al., 2000; Lovik, 2004; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Mason et al., 2009; Middleton, 2001; Sori et al., 1996; Springer et al., 2009; Workman & Bodner, 1996). The same literature indicates that family support might start strong; however, the demands and rigor of the doctoral program often diminish the level of family support as the parent student is removed more and more from the family dynamic.

Institutional Support

Lawson and Fuehrer (1989) concluded stress is a positive motivator in graduate students provided the school offers proper social support. Proper social support depends on the stressor, for instance separation from family and friends would require separate support than support for a

financial crisis suffered by the student and when the stressor is identified the institution should be prepared to make the proper accommodations (Dyk, 1987; Bennett, 1999; Gardner, 2008a, 2009; Gold, 2006; Golde & Dore, 2001; Hagedorn, 1999; Kim & Otis, 2010; Lovitts, 2001; Mason, 2009; Mason et al., 2009; Meers & Strober, 2009; Nedleman, 1991; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Price, 2005, 2006; Rovaris, 2004; Scheinkman, 1988; Sigafus, 1998; Sori et al., 1996; West et al., 2011).

Mason et al. (2009) based on their survey of more than eight thousand doctoral student respondents across the University of California system asking their views on doctoral fast track programs designed to move doctoral students into tenure track positions as quickly as possible; many students view the academic fast track as a negative academic alternative, and it is unrelenting work hours that allow little or no room for a satisfying family life (Mason et al., 2009). "Less than half of the men (46 percent) and only a third of the women (29 percent) imagine jobs in these settings to be somewhat or very family friendly" (Mason et al., 2009, para. 3). The study also found women were more likely to see these fast track programs as less likely to have women mentors or role models who had children. In fact, the results indicated "the fewer women faculty with children they see or know in their departments or units, the less likely women doctoral students are to feel tenure track faculty careers at research intensive universities are family" (Mason et al., 2009, para. 4). The results also indicated the modern graduate student is seeking alternative career paths with better work-life balance, agreeing with Ali and Kohun (2007), Brus (2006), and Lovitts (2001). Springer et al., (2009) stated the biggest issue besides institutions not offering support services for married doctoral students is when they do offer them, but students are unaware of them.

Gilbert (1982) described the important role of the institutional employee who helps advise or counsel a graduate student:

> The findings reported in this article have relevance for those who counsel, advise, and supervise graduate students. The potentially destructive impact of graduate school on family life can be ameliorated by counselors and other who can serve as change agents capable of mediation between a powerful system and relatively powerless students. (p. 134)

The role of the married doctoral student's faculty advisor is of absolute importance to the persistence or the attrition of the student based on the advisor's knowledge of the unique needs of married doctoral students with children (Brus, 2006; Gardner, 2009; Gilbert, 1982; Lovitts, 1996, 2001; Madrey, 1983; Swietzer, 2008). "The adviser is often the central and most powerful person not only on the graduate student's dissertation committee but also during the student's trajectory through graduate school" (Lovitts, 2001, p. 131). Lovitts (2001) also indicated from her study there is a relationship between the number of meetings between the student and the advisor and the relationship between completers and "noncompleters" (p. 142) of the student's dissertations. Brus (2006) explained the unique needs the married graduate student with children has and sometimes the ability to achieve balance is for the faculty/advisor to understand these needs. Brus described scenarios that graduate students with children often experience when dealing with an "inflexible academic environment":

> Imagine grappling with quandaries such as these: (1) staying home with a sick child and not getting paid because you have no sick or vacation benefits, (2) taking a child to work, (3) missing a rescheduled midterm review or taking a parent to a scheduled doctor's

> appointment, or (4) quickly taking a midterm and then leaving to meet family responsibilities before returning for an evening meeting with an advisor. (2006, p. 35)

Beginning with more in-depth orientations about the programs, more poignant discussion and focus needs to be placed on the needs of the married students with children (Gardner, 2009; Gold, 2006; Golde, 2000; Madrey, 1983). It was interesting to note that in his book on the Ph.D. experiences in the 1930s and his observations of the role of the dissertation advisor, Atkinson (1939) stated, "When the candidate has selected his [sic] major professor, that faculty member then and there assumes a certain amount of responsibility for the candidate" (p. 77); and 70 years later Gardner (2009) wrote, "In the existing literature, the doctoral advisor plays an integral role in the successful completion of the dissertation (p. 83). This highlights the vital role the faculty advisor plays in the success or attrition of the doctoral student.

The literature suggests the institution and the faculty become more aware of not only doctoral students and their need for support through the extremely stressful academic rigor, but also to focus more on the special needs of doctoral students who are married with children. Studies also indicate that one major issue graduate student parents have is the lack of institutional support when it comes to child care and other support systems for parents with children (Brus, 2006; Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2008a , 2009; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lawson & Fuehrer, 1989; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Middleton, 2001; Rovaris, 2004; Sigafus, 1998; Smith et al., 2006; Ülkü-Steiner et al., 2000; Workman & Bodner, 1996).

Classmate/Cohort Support

"In recent years two models of program delivery have become prevalent in higher education, programs offered in cohort or on line" (Fallahi & Gulley, 2008, p. 39). The cohort model defined in Fallahi and Gulley's (2008) study of graduate schools described the concern for

lagging completion rates and the school's decision to change the trend of offering programs from the individual student model to the cohort model. Their findings suggested that this type of instruction aided in student success, and is defined as "forms of program delivery where groups of students sign up for a program and take a prescribed sequence of courses at pre-determined time and schedule" (Fallahi and Gulley, 2008, p. 39). This is similar to the definition of cohort for this study except the program is a hybrid of on line and weekend cohort meetings on campus throughout the semester.

Golde (2000) stated from his research "that the primary agents of socialization and integration are faculty. Relationships with faculty advisors consistently seem more important in doctoral student completion than relationships with peers" (p. 202). Although it is well researched that faculty involvement and faculty advisors are vital to the success of doctoral student at the dissertation stage (Allen & Dory, 2001; Brus, 2006; Gardner, 2009; Gilbert, 1982; Golde & Dore, 2001; Hagedorn, 1999; Lovitts, 2001; Miller & Stone, 2011; Swietzer, 2008), the cohort can become the student's closest support system during the coursework stage based on the cohort's unique knowledge of what each member is experiencing (Gardner, 2008a; Fallahi & Gulley, 2008; Hagedorn, 1999; Madrey, 1983; Sigafus, 1998; Swietzer, 2008). Golde continued with case studies of how cohorts can play a vital role in the support of a student—if the student can or is willing to participate:

> Nathan described an active and inclusive community, in which even new students are participants in research colloquia. Jane contrasted her early academic period, in which students socialized and studied together, with the stark isolation of her research efforts: "I started talking to the books, and they weren't talking back." Don described how students would prepare one another for their orals and was aware of many opportunities for

> socializing with other students, although he chose not to participate as frequently as other students. (p. 221)

Fallahi and Gulley (2008) explained that the change from the traditional process of graduate school programs of students applying, being accepted, and then moving to campus worked well until recently when "gradually the demographics of individuals interested in advanced degrees changed to include mostly individuals who chose to pursue a graduate degree as they were raising a family, having a career, or both" (p. 41). This new method of instruction allows the nontraditional student with work and family to participate in the social aspect of school and continue the student's current life style, as well as maintain academic integrity (Fallahi & Gulley, 2008).

Sweitzer (2008) interviewed and observed 12 first-semester doctoral students, studying how they developed their professional identity by working with partners inside and outside of academia. The findings of the study included that students rely on many people for the support needed in the first semester of courses including family and their network partners; however, seven of the twelve students specifically identified their cohort members as "important to their first-semester progress" (Sweitzer, 2008, p. 50).

In a study of how an Australian university's changed its supervision of students completing their doctoral dissertations, Burnett (1999) studied the change of program supervision from the apprentice master model, where the professor is the information deliverer and the student is the receptacle, to the collaborative cohort model, which incorporates more student-to-student engagement and learning. The university in Burnett's study did require a faculty supervisor for each cohort, the cohort model for this study did not. Burnett found students were more satisfied with this method and believed they were learning more effectively

with this more participatory model. One student from the study replied, "The mutual support given by students and staff provided motivation to keep going when 'the going got tough'" (Burnett, 1999, p. 50). Burnett described another student addressing the emotional support sometime needed in doctoral study, "I gained emotional support to continue with the degree, especially in the early stages" (p. 50). This is also expressed in Sigafus's (1998) study: "There were 12 people in my cohort, and there was no one else that knew what I was going through" and "The friendships I made in classes are very important to me. Sometimes that was my only interaction with friendly adults" (p. 22).

Finally, Ali and Kohun (2007) described the cohort model in helping to break the feeling of social isolation in the doctoral process and allowing students to have meaningful relationships with fellow students, "Cohort approach also appears to help in building the sense of a team in which each student can relate to each other, which appears to be the main antidote to feeling of social isolation (p. 44). Cohort study models do allow for students to work closer and become more of a tight unit, form life-long connections, and use the opportunity to learn from each other and create professional networks (Gardner, 2009). This connection with the cohort can also become more than an academic connection. Studies indicate that cohort relationships can develop into a more familial relationship, and sometimes into deeper relationships (Madrey, 1983; Sheinkman, 1988).

Financial support

"Adequate financial support of all levels of graduate students is one of the most important concerns identified by graduate deans" (Wendler et al., 2010, p. 37).

One of the major issues that married doctoral students with children have faced for many years is the never-ending concern of finances (Feldman, 1973; Gilbert, 1982; Gold, 2006; Golde

& Dore, 2001; Lovitts, 2001; Madrey, 1983; Sheinkman, 1988; Springer et al., 2009; Wendler et al., 2010). While financial burdens for doctoral students are a significant issue that can lead to attrition, the literature tends to group all doctoral and graduate students together, and the research is lacking in focus on married doctoral students with children.

Although finances for married students with children are a concern, Feldman's (1973) study found married men and women (not with children) believed their finances were adequate. Gilbert (1982) agreed that previous literature does indicate that even married doctoral students with children believe they have adequate finances. He also believed, "[Previous findings] do not discount the impact of financial strain can have on the family system" (p. 132) and asserted a family is accustomed to a certain amount of income. When that income is decreased by one parent entering doctoral school, the impact to the family standard of living is great, and the larger the family, the larger the impact. Both Feldman and Gilbert believed that when the non-student becomes the only spouse employed, this situation does play a role in the family relationship strain as the employment causes role conflict.

Madrey (1983) delved deeper in student/non-student employment for the financial support of the family during a parent's doctoral studies. Madrey stated that usually when a parent enters graduate school, that parent also works. Madrey's study and literature review is very sexist in time-relevant way; she discussed the participants of her study in pre-online courses where the family moves on campus and the "doctoral student wife" (p. 9) is able to find employment and, "seems pleased with her new role" (p. 9) as the bread winner. Although Madrey's findings coincide with Feldman (1973) and Gilbert (1982) that most graduate students believe their financial situation is adequate, even though the academic lifestyle requires the

family to adapt to less income, there is one finding that stands out when it comes to the wife of the doctoral student and her patience of their financial situation:

> The wife tends to accept their condition and does not usually apply pressure on her husband to finish unless (a) he has been enrolled for three years, (b) he has been enrolled continuously since completion of the master's, (c) they have or want children, or (d) she feels he is enjoying the student role more than the prospects of returning to work. (p. 21)

Gold (2006), in his study of graduate student marital satisfaction found "male students report greater concern regarding 'finances', which is defended as general concern, a lack of confidence in the way one's partner handles finances and arguments with one's partner regarding finances" (p. 491). In relation to Gold's findings and the stress of finances on the doctoral student and often their families, Lovitt's (2001) highlighted a student's frustration and accompanying stress with attempting to reach the goal of the doctorate, "Lack of funding & [sic] the corresponding stress of working two jobs & [sic] having faculty complain one is not 'serious' about their academics if working externally to the program" (p. 179).

Feldman (1973), Gilbert (1982), and Madrey (1983) each mentioned that one source of income beyond the nonstudent spouse working was for the student parent to work as a graduate assistant or in some other institutional employment. The opportunity for such employment extends mainly to students who live on campus, but for those in an online program, those student parents often work outside the home like their nonstudent spouse. Ivankova and Stick (2007) discussed that some students have the luxury of having employers who give release time for study, but the employers also offer financial assistance. Either having funding or trying to find funding is an ongoing issue for doctoral students, especially married doctoral students with children.

The Influence of Gender, Race, and Sexual Orientation

The majority of literature about gender and doctoral students covers studies either on comparing women and men in their doctoral pursuits or the research is only about women. In this study, domestic partners were considered married. When it comes to which parent or spouse is enrolled in graduate school or, more specifically, a doctoral program, gender plays a large role in much of the literature. Lovik (2004) found that although there are more unmarried students in graduate school, findings from the study suggest men and women who earned a graduate degree were more likely to be married rather than unmarried; however, the marriage rate is higher for women than for men. Lovik's findings are not congruent with Hagedorn's (1999) study of 81 respondents that found unmarried students were more successful in graduate school than married students. Lovik also found that spouse-student without children were more likely to graduate than was the spouse-student with children. This finding is confirmed by Springer et al. (2009) who found because of inadequate institutional support parents are less likely to complete their graduate programs than nonparents, especially women students who are mothers. Thornton (2005) stated having children plays a large part in the attrition of mothers, but the lack of the aforementioned support services such as child care severely reduces the retention of graduate students who are mothers.

The gender of the married student with children has been studied by many researchers (Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2008a, Gardner, 2009; Golde, 2000; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lawson & Fuehrer, 1989; Lovitts, 2001; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Middleton, 2001; Miller & Stone, 2011; Nedleman, 1991; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Rovaris, 2004 ; Scheinkman, 1988; Sigafus, 1998; Smith et al., 2006; Ülkü-Steiner et al. 2000; Workman & Bodner, 1996). The studies located about gender issues in doctoral students overwhelmingly favored female

students compared to available studies on male students. The studies examined a variety of different aspects of gender roles in doctoral programs and how it affects the family unit. These studies focus on the aspects of married and non-married students, married students with children and just married students, as well as stress levels of the genders. These studies are indicative of the imbalance women and racial/ethnic groups have compared to the White male students pursuing a doctoral degree and the effect on the family relationship. The studies also showed how women perceive their roles much differently than men. Women are expected to take on more roles than men. This section gives light to how these underrepresented married students with children attempt to succeed. The next section helps to explain how the married doctoral student with children persists in pursuit of the degree and keeps together the family relationship.

Married Female Doctoral Students with Children

> I can hear of the Brilliant accomplishments of any of my Sex with pleasure and rejoice in that Liberality of Sentiment which acknowledges them. At the same time I regret the trifling narrow contracted Education of the Females of my own country. . . . But in this country it was too much. . . . you need not be told how much female Education is neglected, nor how fashionable it has been to ridicule Female learning, tho *[sic]* I acknowledge it my happiness to be connected with a person of a more generous mind and liberal Sentiments. (Adams, as cited in the Massachusetts Historical Society, 2008, p. 2)

In a letter to her husband in 1778, Abigail Adams described the "trifling narrow" (p. 2) views of education for women of the time. Women in higher education have come a long way since Abigail Adams. The married woman doctoral student with children has come even farther, "Most Ph.D. holders who realized professional goals remained single. Of the 229 women who received the doctorate in the nineteenth century, only sixteen were married at the time the degree

was conferred" (Solomon, 1985, p. 137-38). In the academic year 2010-2011, 51.4% of the students who earned a doctorate were women and that is expected to rise to 53.6% by the academic year 2020-2021 (Snyder & Dillow, 2013, Table 310).

Although women have made marked strides in overcoming the obstacles of achieving doctoral degrees, there are still perceptions and other obstacles that must be removed to create a level field for all doctoral students, especially married students with children. Along with negative perceptions, other major obstacles that have been studied and observed are stress and family obligations.

The perceptions of women in doctoral programs have improved dramatically over the years; sadly, there is still a discriminatory view represented by the following statements that are almost 70 years apart:

> A most pitiful incident of carelessness in this respect was that of a lady candidate who took her examinations at the same time mine were being given. As stated before, a woman aspirant for the Ph.D. needs to be much more clever than the average man who is successful. Her sex starts her out under a severe handicap. (Atkinson, 1939, p. 76)
>
> I wanted marriage and children, yet I wanted to do important work and use my mind doing it. . . . There are scholars in my field more successful than I, but I have no illusions that my limitations have been caused by my children or my marriage. (Lynch, 2002, para. 3)

In her unpublished dissertation regarding women with children seeking tenure, Sipes (2010) described of her first discussion of entering a doctoral program and how it was received by her professor. Gender disparity and the insinuation that married women have a harder time entered her mind and she began to question the academy:

> During a class discussion about future career plans, a couple of male students and I expressed interest in pursuing a Ph.D. The men were encouraged by the professor to pursue the degree; conversely, the professor told me, "If you get a Ph.D., you will end up divorced." I began to wonder about the ways in which the culture of higher education affects men and women differently.

Gender disparity often depicts the struggles of women and attempts to highlight the inequality in academics, the statistics of the role of women in doctoral studies show a different picture. More women are emerging in academics. Since 1879-80 to 2010-11, women have increased in percentage the completion of doctoral degrees from 6% to over half of all earned doctorates (51.4%; Snyder & Dillow, 2013, Table 310).

In interviewing hundreds of women and men throughout the United States, Meers and Strober, (2009) noted many women students understand that their role is perceived as the sex that is expected to dive back into the domestic role: "When we speak to groups of young women, often in college or graduate school, we are struck by how frequently we hear the same concern from these accomplished students, 'When I have kids, I know I'll feel guilty if I keep working. I'll have to stop, at least for a while'" (p. 230).

In writing their requisite book for anyone wanting to enter the doctoral race, *Mama Ph.D.: Women Write about Motherhood and Academic Life,* E. Evans and Grant (2008) gathered experiences from women in graduate programs and in postgraduate roles. In addressing the question of family versus higher education, they asked the question, "So what's a Mama Ph.D. to do? Academic women who choose to embrace the body and the brain and themselves caught between the demands of their families and the demands of the academy." (E. Evans & Grant,

2008, p. xx). E. Evans and Grant continue to explain that the academy needs to not only include more women, but to embrace and expect more diversity of women in graduate study:

> The submissions we received reflect the current makeup of the academy: a majority of the essays were from white women in the humanities, fewer by women in the sciences, fewer still by women of color. Making the academy more family friendly will be an important step toward improving the racial and social diversity of women within the academy, and we hope that this anthology is a step toward making the ivory tower a far less exclusionary place, one that more accurately mirrors, rather than isolates itself from, the broader world. We want the essays in this book to start a conversation that will continue to both inspire, and, more importantly, provoke change. (p. xxiv)

In many studies, women doctoral students experienced much greater emotional stress and academic stress than that experienced by men doctoral students (e.g., Allan & Dory, 2001; Gilbert, 1982; Lovitts, 2001; Madrey, 1983; Nedleman, 1991; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Mallinckrodt & Leong (1992) reported women have much more stress in graduate programs than men, show more symptoms of stress, and receive less social support from the family and from the institutions.

Even with the added stress of being enrolled in a doctoral program, women continue to graduate at higher percentage rates (Aud et al., 2011). As more and more institutions develop better and more individual mentoring and services, women doctoral students will continue to add to the number of graduates (Gardner, 2008a; Gold, 2006; Lovitts, 2001; Price, 2006). In reference to the importance of women enrolling in doctoral programs and then their ability to graduate, Price (2006) stated from his findings:

> In the past it has been thought that married women would be limited in their ability to be successful in graduate school. . . . The results of this paper show that married women are just as likely to complete their Ph.D. as single women, conditional on enrolling in a graduate program. (p. 13)

Family obligation is a major stressor and a role that is not always equal for women (Feldman, 1973; Lovitts, 2001; Madrey, 1983; Price, 2005). Mason et al. (2009) described the results of their study of participants who were worried about adequate academic success and time and family obligations:

> According to our data on respondents who are currently parents, these fears are not unfounded: while women and men without children spend approximately seventy-five hours a week combined on Ph.D. work, employment, housework, and caregiving, mothers log a crushing hundred-plus hours a week in these activities (and fathers ninety hours). (para. 9)

This imbalance of family obligations highlighted by Mason et al. (2009) is not new; Gilbert (1982) also referenced Feldman (1973) in identifying that women are expected to take on more family roles along with previous references in this literature review such as by Atkinson (1939). Gilbert stated:

> Marital strain may be greater for professional school students because of financial dependence, and on marriages in which the husband is the student and the wife has no activities in her life to mitigate her social isolation and lack of purpose (asymmetrical; Sheinkman, 1988). In the reverse situation, the married women graduate student will experience severe time pressures at home and school, which is compounded by children in the home. (p. 134)

Because one or both spouse may have to work, the gender of the working spouse plays a role in the family relationship. Madrey (1983) coinciding with Gilbert (1982), indicated that the non-student spouse feels a loss of control of his or her life because of the student spouse's school. This is especially true for the female non-student.

Sori et al. (1996) found women felt they gained more out of the program than felt stress compared to the spouses who were men: "This difference may be related to traditional gender roles, in which women have usually been socialized to be in a more subordinate, supportive role in their marriage" (p. 266). This view that it is the woman's job to do the domestic work and be the student was also confirmed by many studies, including Feldman's (1973) who stated, "For married women, who have in addition to their academic responsibilities those of caring for a husband and family, the student role may become secondary; hence, the lower publication rate" (pp. 988-989).

Married Male Doctoral Students with Children

The literature on doctoral students who are men with children is very unsubstantial. The research often lumps all married doctoral students with children into one group or focuses on (and as the research indicates, rightfully so) the female married doctoral student with children and the extra roles she must play in pursuit of the degree. Because of this lack of research on doctoral students who are married men with children, this section of the literature review will examine some general information on married male doctoral students from the research that related to this study.

According to Price (2005), married men finish their degrees 75% faster than single men. Price did not give any suggestions as to why this is, but it could be related to the studies indicating married female doctoral students often are delegated to, or believe they should take

more of the family obligations. Mason, Goulden, Fasch, & Page-Medrich, (2006) surveyed over 8000 doctoral students at the University of California (all campuses) asking questions concerning student parents. A fascinating result showed that in answer to the question, "Whether or not you currently have children, do you expect to have or adopt any in the future?" women and men answered "yes" similarly—women 65% and men 64%. However, when those who said "yes" were then asked, "If 'yes,' would you consider having children as a Ph.D. student?" women answered 58% "no" although men answered 67% "no." This was interesting that men would be so overwhelmingly against having children during the doctoral program because of the other research of women taking on more of the domestic roles than men (Madrey, 1983; Mason et al., 2006). The study did indicate that the two main reasons for men not having or being certain about having a child were, "Time demands of current Ph.D. program/employment are 68% and Current level of personal/household income" 67% (Mason et al., 2006, slide 14).

Sori et al. (1996) indicated men are more socially ingrained to put their own needs before the professional needs of their wives; it can be postulated that because of this selfishness men in their study experienced more stress than their wives. Alternately, men seem to be socially ingrained to have better relationships with faculty and advisors (Hagedorn, 1999).

When examining the available literature, it is well documented that overall, women are disadvantaged when it comes to pursuing a doctoral degree. Adding marriage and children to the equation, women have even harder challenges, such as increased stress, increased family obligations, and the perception that they cannot be as successful as men in achieving their academic goals. Along the line of the disadvantages of women in a doctoral program, underrepresented doctoral students and international doctoral students who are either married or married with children also have negative perceptions and other issues to overcome. However,

according to the NCES, women, underrepresented students, and international students all are increasing in graduating from doctoral programs (Snyder & Dillow, 2013, Tables 310 & 336). It is recommended that more research be conducted specifically on married doctoral students with children as to get more data on this often forgotten academic category.

Race and Married Doctoral Students With Children

The study of underrepresented doctoral students has become a more focused topic of study and discussion (Gonzalez et al., 2001; Greer-Williams, 2007; Kim & Otis, 2010; Lovitts, 2001; Miller & Stone, 2011; Rovaris, 2004); however, the study of the married doctoral student with children is not a wide focus yet. While the studies on the specifics of this narrow segment of the doctoral demographic is lacking, this study contributed to the deficient scholarship. In light of this, there is an important unique theme that has been exposed by the current literature about the underrepresented doctoral student that can be related to this study: the role of the extended family. This characteristic of some underrepresented doctoral students can in some circumstances be generalized to married underrepresented doctoral students with children.

The NCES categorizes students using six descriptors: White, Black, and Hispanic, Asian /Pacific Islander, American Indian, and two or more races (Snyder & Dillow, 2013, Tables 336 & 337). Using the latest NCES statistics (2010-11) for total doctoral degrees conferred, underrepresented doctoral students make up 29.3% of all Ph.Ds. As for the breakdown for degree conferment, Asian students are the largest group of students with 12.4% of the total 29.3% of underrepresented groups, Blacks made up 9.2%, Hispanics were 6.1%, Two or more races were 0.9%, and American Indian/Alaska Native rounded out the underrepresented groups with 0.6% doctoral graduates from degree-granting schools reporting standards (Snyder & Dillow, 2013, Table 336). In education, Blacks were the largest underrepresented group with

18.1% of the students, Hispanics represented 6.2%, Asian/Pacific Islanders were 3.4%, American Indian/Alaska Native totaled .8%, and two or more races were .7%. An interesting note, 6.7% were categorized non-resident alien (Snyder & Dillow, 2013, Table 337); this was defined as, "A person who is not a citizen of the United States and who is in this country on a temporary basis and does not have the right to remain indefinitely" (Snyder & Dillow, 2013, p. 767).

One look at these statistics indicates there is extensive discrepancy in the enrollment of underrepresented doctoral students in the United States. Many theories have been associated to this lack of underrepresented students in higher education that assuredly includes married doctoral students with children, including social identity theories, racial identity theories, and ethnic identity and acculturation theories that give credence and help in the understanding of the struggles, acknowledgment of unique identifiers, and the emergence and expansion of underrepresented students in higher education (N. J. Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

Whereas these theories may be applied to all students in higher education, but the persistence of students does not involve only the self-identity of the underrepresented student or any student. Hinton, Grim, and Howard-Hamilton (2009), in their introspective exploration of the mentoring of underrepresented woman doctoral students, insisted that the institution is similarly responsible, if not more, in the assurance that all students receive an equitable opportunity for an education:

> Institutions of higher education must embrace the notion of success for all students, particularly those who struggle to fit academically and socially. Given the fact that the discipline is the locus of instruction and socialization, it is also the incumbent on

> academic departments to identify strategies for acclimating graduate students of color and then to provide appropriate resources to ensure their success. (p. 200)

Miller and Stone (2011) interviewed 10 doctoral students of color and agreed the extended family also plays a part in the doctoral student's initiative to pursue the degree and where to work once the degree is earned:

> One participant articulated that doctoral "students of color may not be from an affluent family of origin, and they choose clinical work because the private sector pays more," thus enabling them to financially support their extended family. Another voiced a similar perspective, saying that "maybe they [doctoral students of color] are supporting not just themselves, but other family members of multiple generations." (p.107)

Kim and Otis (2010) using NSF data found that financial issues for African Americans and Latina/os found family responsibility and parenthood affected the length of completion, which then affected the amount of financial debt. Gonzalez et al. (2001) studied six Latina/o doctoral students at large universities across the country and found that being a first-generation student was a major obstacle in their programs. Espinoza (2010) also studied Latina graduate students in an attempt to discover strategies on how Latinas can balance family and school. He reported a symbiotic relationship between family and graduate school:

> Latinas with high collectivist orientation often find the individualistic culture of school alienating prompting them to maintain strong ties to family. Thus, although their obligations to family may conflict with school, those connections are very important to their ability to get through successfully. (p. 319)

Greer-Williams (2007) conducted a qualitative study with 15 doctoral students of color including African American women and men, Latina/o women and men, and one Native

American woman. Although her findings do not declare if any of the participants are married or with children, Greer-Williams also stated the importance of the family and the issue of first-generational issues concerning doctoral students' experiences during the program.

The need of extended family for support is often not met for international married doctoral students. Poyrazli and Kavanaugh (2006) conducted a quantitative study of 149 international graduate students with one-third of the respondents being married. According to their findings, a major concern related to this study for married international students is the lack of the extended family for support and the complete reliance on the spouse throughout the process led the students to believe that they did not need outside social relationships.

Taking into consideration the Gonzalez et al., (2001), Greer-Williams, (2007), Kim & Otis, (2010), Lovitts, (2001), Miller and Stone, (2011); and Rovaris, (2004) findings, the relationship of the doctoral student—whether married with children or not—agree with Madrey's (1983) findings emphasizing the disconnect between parent's knowledge of doctoral programs and doctoral students. Not only can most parents and family members of doctoral students not relate to the students' environment and psyche, most parents of doctoral students cannot understand why their children desire to return to school (Espinoza, 2010; Greer-Williams, 2007; Gonzalez et al., 2001; Kim & Otis, 2010; Lovitts, 2001; Madrey, 1983; Miller & Stone, 2011). Further research needs to be conducted for better understanding of the effect of higher education on underrepresented and international married doctoral students with children.

Same-Sex Married Doctoral Student With Children

Literature on the recognition and acculturation of same-sex couples has become more prevalent in the last decade. The pros and cons of same-sex marriage are often in the spotlight in all media outlets and heavily debated: "thus, debate exists as to whether certain types of intimate

relationships (such as among same-sex partners or unmarried co-habitors) are socially and legally recognized as marriages or families" (Eshleman & Bulcroft, 2010 p. 19). It was not this study's goal to enter the debate of the legal or cultural acceptance of same-sex marriage, only to include all doctoral students with children who match the description designed by this study. As previously indicated, a married student in this study were a marriage or domestic partnership between a woman and a man, a woman and a woman, or a man and a man, whether by state, religious, or common law or solemn commitment.

Statistics on sexual orientation or gender identity are not officially tracked by the U.S. Census Bureau (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010). However, this is lack of tracking is changing. In two reports, one published by the U.S. Census Bureau in cooperation with the Williams Institute that surveyed same-sex couples demographics and a more in-depth report of same-sex couple household was conducted by Gates (2012) reflects the shift in allowing same-sex couples to self-identify in matters that are surveyed. The 2010 Census is the first time same-sex partners could self-identify (United States Census Bureau, 2010). According to the 2010 Census report of same-sex couples in the U.S., 78% are White, 9% are Latino/a, 8% are African American, 2% are Asian (including Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander), 2% are multiracial/other, and 1% are American Indian/Alaska Native (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Of these percentages, more underrepresented same-sex couples have children than White same-sex couples: 65% of multiracial/other, 58% of Asian (including Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander), 33% Latino/a, 29% American Indian/Alaska Native, 25% of African American, and 17% of White (Gates, 2012, p. 3). "The number of same-sex couple households has increased between 2000 and 2010 at a faster rate than the increases observed for all households, or for married or unmarried different-sex couple households (Gates, 2012, p. 1). Gates (2012) also stated:

> Among all racial and ethnic groups, same-sex couples are less likely to be raising children than their different-sex counterparts. However, like their different-sex counterparts, same-sex couples with a householder who is a racial or ethnic minority are more likely to have children. (p. 3)

These statistics are valuable in estimating the same-sex demographics in the United States, but there are some issues that may blur the true results and validity of the statistics. As confided to me by an administrator of a Western community college, who is a gay man and wished to remain anonymous,

> It is great that so many LGBT people [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered] people are willing to self-identify; there are so many more out there [LGBT people] who are either afraid of physical or cultural retribution, or are shamed by their families and peers, that they do not admit it [self-identify]. (personal communication, July 26, 2012)

A recent issue in the same vein as the lack of self-identifying by LGBT citizens is the alleged misconduct of a peer-reviewed survey of gay-parenting that was in the Chronicle of Higher Education, July 26, 2012. The study was allegedly reviewed by anti-gay peers: "It has been used by opponents of same-sex marriage to make their case, and it's been blasted by gay-rights activists as flawed and biased" (Bartlett, 2012, para. 3). Unfortunately, these situations add to the inability to acquire accurate data on same-sex couples.

Although literature on same-sex marriage is blossoming, literature on same-sex married doctoral students with children is still very uncommon. In an email from Steven Jacobson, a researcher at ProCon.org, he stated, "We do not currently have information on LGBT doctoral students' partnerships and marriages amongst our resources" (personal communication, July 27,

2008). The was hoped this study and many more included same-sex doctoral students with children in better understanding all married doctoral students with children.

Attrition and Persistence

> Paradoxically, the most academically capable, most academically successful, most stringently evaluated, and most carefully selected students in the entire higher education system—doctoral students—are the least likely to complete their chosen academic goals. (Golde, 2000, p. 199)

As King (2010) reported, just over 50% of all doctoral students finish their programs within 10 years. This is more than a "half-full/half-empty" perspective on completion rates; it means that 50% take longer than 10 years to finish the degree or never finish. To compound this fact, Golde (2000) cited a 1960 study that indicates doctoral graduation rates were between 40% and 60%. Using this information, it is reasonable to postulate that for at least the last 50 years this trend of half-full/half-empty perspective on completion rates for doctoral students seems to be acceptable to administrators and faculty.

There are many reasons for attrition and persistence of a doctoral student and many of those reasons overlap and have been consistent throughout the literature in this review and throughout the past 14 decades. Madrey (1983) stated that because most of the social and support needs of the doctoral student are met by the family, there is little need for relationships to develop between peers, but this is not always the case. Brannock, et al. (2000) recommended schools develop a peer mentoring system for all doctoral students, and they also recommended the development of a spouse support system for all non-student spouses in order to assist students in persisting toward their goals.

Ali and Kohun (2007) discussed the effects that a doctoral program has on the family in terms of finances and family responsibilities, but also in the emotional toll it takes on the student, then on the family members, and then ultimately the collective toll it takes on the family:

> Among the personal reasons that related to the student includes financial issues and family obligations. Doctoral programs are recognized to be a costly process and students usually attend later in their lives where family responsibilities are higher. Thus the sacrifices to the family while necessary, place a strain on the family. (p. 24)

Golde (2000) conducted a qualitative study of a total of 68 former doctoral students (10 were from her 1994 initial study and 58 were from this new study) who did not finish their chosen programs. In the findings, Golde used case studies to report why students had many reasons for not completing the programs, ranging from lack of advisor support, lack of institutional support, lack of peer support, and also from family pressures:

> Nevertheless, there were still pressures to work on his dissertation from his department and his family. Nathan recalled the decision to leave school: I was getting pressure at the same time from my family, "Are you going to finish that degree?" It was important to them. So I continued under the increasingly stronger facade of working on my dissertation stuff, when in fact I was spending less and less time working on it, and was having less and less frequent conversations with my advisor, and I was spending more and more time working on my work. . . . The point came, a year or so after I started as a full-time employee, that I said, "Well, I am not going to finish this." . . . The department had been sending me increasingly frequent letters saying, "Are you working on this?" "What are you doing?" And I am saying, "Yeah, yeah--oh, maybe--no." Then I actually

withdrew from the program. . . . And they said, "We are really sorry that happened." (pp. 211-212)

Ali and Kohun (2007) concluded the idea that attrition is not only academic, but familial and financial:

> But the reasons mentioned above ignore an important factor that deals with the emotional aspect that is normally neglected when talking about doctoral attrition. This emotional aspect is either easily overlooked in the design of doctoral programs or it is not fully addressed in the design of the same programs. (p. 24)

Gardner (2009) indicated from her monograph on *The Development of Doctoral Students* that attrition in doctoral students is often enhanced because institutions are not responding to include and assist students with families in "socialization, academic structures, conventions, and traditions" (p. 133). Middleton (2001) found there was a myriad of responses to her qualitative study on 57 doctoral students in New Zealand. Middleton stated there some students who received little or no support from family and even one woman who stated her marriage ended because of the additional stress induced by the rigors of doctoral work. Middleton also reported the opposite with students who stated they could not have completed the degree without the support of their families.

While family support is vital for student success, when it is not available, attrition is highly likely; the same can be deduced from the lack of institutional support. Sigafus (1998) and Lovitts (2001) found family support is strongest during the doctoral student's coursework, but wanes when the time comes for the student to write the dissertation, thus leading to attrition in completion of the degree. This lack of direction and advisor assistance and the leading to student attrition was also concluded by Gardner (2009), Lovitts (2001), Lovitts & Nelson (2000): Smith

et al. (2006) studied previous research on reasons for attrition and concluded in relation to married doctoral students with children that graduate students' persistence is based upon the support structures of family and friends. Smith et al. also found that the reduction of stress is the most important element in graduate student persistence; those students who do persist usually have support systems from both family and institutional support. Workman and Bordman (1996) studied the attrition of women in science programs, focusing on chemistry. Their main objective was to study why students attempting to earn a Ph.D. stopped their pursuit and settled for master's degrees. Workman and Boardman used a qualitative study at a large, Midwestern university. A major discovery was that women felt their parents, family, and friends made them feel more ashamed of their decision to drop out of the doctoral program. On the contrary, families and friends of the men congratulated the men for their decision to quit the doctoral programs, citing they now knew what they wanted to do with their lives (Workman & Bordman, 1996). Working towards the degree is set with challenges, but the support of family and the determination of the student lead to completion (Madrey, 1983).

In a report on the future of graduate education in the United States, Wendler et al. (2010) posited the self-evident conclusion to bring up persistence and completion rates: "The number of doctorates awarded in the U.S. would be greatly increased simply by ensuring that most of the students who enroll in a doctoral program actually complete it" (p. 15). Mason et al. (2009) added a thought-provoking comment that inspires the reader to understand that most students make the difficult choices in attempting to balance school, family, and many times work:

> Many mothers and fathers also report a great deal of stress in parenting as a result of specific educational and career requirements of their Ph.D. programs, and most have slowed down or made sacrifices in their educational careers to be good parents. (para 9)

A Model for This Study: Van Gannep—Rites of Passage

"The family is a system moving through time" (McGoldrick & Carter, 2003, p. 375).

This statement is representative of doctoral students' connection with the family and their complete relationship before, during, and after the doctoral experience. The educational journey for the student and the family relationship can experience many different emotions and levels of the strength of the family connection and cohesion (Gold, 2006; Madrey, 1983; Sori et al., 1996), especially when the demands of the doctoral program takes away the student family member from the expected or wanted time with the family.

During the early part of the 19 century while anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep (1909/1960) was developing the concept of "rites of passage," it is reasonable to believe that the scholar never imagined his work could be availed to the lived experiences of married doctoral students with children. However, the theory of the rites of passage can be adapted to most doctoral students and specifically married doctoral students with children. Each phase is relational to each student and each student moves through each phase individually or sometimes together (Hockey, 2002; Shere, 1993; Turner, 2008; Van Gennep, 1909/1960).

Van Gennep (1909/1960) explained that the origin of his theory is from the concept of when children go through the rite of passage from child to adult—this transition is developed over time and place. Turner (2008) detailed Van Gennep's theory:

> Van Gennep has shown that all rites of passage or 'transition' are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or limen, signifying 'threshold' in Latin), and aggregation. The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'), or from both. During the intervening 'liminal' period,

> the characteristics of the ritual subject (the 'passenger') are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation), the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others of a clearly defined and 'structural' type. (pp. 94-95)

Using Van Gennep's (1909/1960) theory allows another perspective on the experiences of married doctoral student with children with a more transitional approach, as Hockey (2002) explained in her review of Van Gennep's book:

> Van Gennep offered a schema which allows the overwhelming details of ritual practices to yield up their commonalities. What he identified were the ways in which individuals move between social locations which are often age-related: for example, between boyhood and manhood or from being single to the married state. (p. 212)

In this study, the parallel of the above timeframes is between being accepted into a doctoral program to reestablishing the family relationship after the dissertation process and the elevation of academic scholarship.

Phase 1: Detachment

The detachment phase can begin for the married doctoral student with children when the letter of acceptance into the program arrives or at any point during the program. This time of separation from the family life the student has known is now transcending into a life that is relatively unknown and the detachment phase is in progress, which is "sometimes confusing, sad, and painful" (Shere, 1993, p. 9) for the student and the family. A whole new universe, one different than experienced before is developing often in between the student and the family, as

Gardner (2009) quoted a student's view of the beginning of a doctoral program and connected the detachment phase and the uncertainty of what to expect that often accompanies doctoral students:

> I don't think I would have known exactly what to expect before I got here. I think that is the case for a lot of people going to graduate school; they don't know the questions to ask and they don't know what to expect and sometimes they're disappointed. (Gardner, 2009, p. 41)

Phase 2: Liminal

During the liminal phase, the married doctoral student with children begins an academic journey like no other—marked by ambiguity and oftentimes great misperception of roles occurs. Along with the rigor and the demands of the program's coursework begin to entrap the student into total involvement and the academic and family relationships of previous times are blurred by a line of separation where they are now becoming a distant memory (Turner, 2008; Van Gennep, 1960/1909). In 1967, Turner expanded on Van Gennep's second phase to describe this liminal phase when, in this case, students or families who are unsure of what is happening begin to construct an agreed-upon reality (Turner, 2008). Liminality is often connected to what in social constructivism is called *sensemaking*. Weick (1993) described sensemaking as, "…reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs" (p. 653).

The liminal phase is also related to the married doctoral student with children's experience during the program and the development of a connectedness or almost "family" relationship with cohort members and possibly the faculty. Van Gennep (1960/1909) described

how a shared meal for a tribe can become more than a gastronomic event, but can become a bonding and relation building event:

> The rite of eating and drinking together. . . is clearly a rite of incorporation, of physical union, and has been called the sacrament of communion. A union by this means may be permanent, but more often it lasts only during the period of digestion. (p. 29)

Using Van Gennep's (1909/1960) description of tribal eating and drinking together as a metaphor for cohort and classwork, it is indicative of the closeness that is sometimes achieved by the cohort members, sometimes lasting a lifetime, but usually only during the program, or the digestion. This eating and drinking together is both figurative and literal in that cohorts often are together so often that not only are they eating and drinking academia, but breakfasts, lunches, dinners, and at social events.

Phase 3: Reincorporation

Reincorporation phase is often experienced by a ritual or celebration that indicates the individual has completed the transition and developed into a new entity, usually with a new social status (Van Gannep, 1909/1960)—in this study and in the literature (Brannock et al., 2000; Dyk, 1987; E. Evans & Grant, 2008; Gardner, 2009; Gilbert, 1982; Gold, 2006; Golde, 1998; Lovik, 2004; Lovitts, 2001; Madrey, 1983; Mason et al., 2008; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Price, 2006; Scheinkman, 1988; Sori et al., 1998; Springer et al., 2009) it has been postulated that the married doctoral student with children will experience the formal ritual process of preliminary exams, dissertation writing, and graduation, thus rebuilding, creating, and transforming the student and the family with a new dynamic of a new individual and a new family relationship (Van Gennep, 1909/1960).

During the reincorporation phase, the married doctoral student with children begins to lessen the rigidness of the coursework of the program and depending on the student and the student's motivation, the time constraints are loosened and the student can begin the reconnection of the family relationship (Golde, 1998; Lovik, 2004; Lovitts; 2001, Madrey, 1983; Springer et al., 2009). Because the reincorporation phase includes the preliminary exams through the completion of the dissertation, and possibly the student's attrition, the married student with children will need individual time to transition into the new relationship, whether they believe the relationship is worse, remained the same, or is better (Shere, 1993).

Summary of Van Gennep's Theoretical Model

Following the academic journey of a married doctoral student with children in a cohort-based program, the Van Gennep model of rites of passage (1909/1960) can be used to closely monitor the effects of the student's family, marriage, and cohort relationships. The model is founded upon the idea that a person is transitioning from a familiar scenario and then travels an unknown path through unfamiliar and often confusing terrain, then returns to a sometimes similar, but not necessarily the same, scenario before the journey. Additionally, the model states each individual student can experience the three phases at different times and places, and each outcome can be different for each student (Turner, 2008; Van Gannep, 1909/1960). Based on the literature review and my own experience, the Van Gannep theoretical model of rites of passage is a faithful guide of the experiences of the married doctoral student with children before, during, and after she or he is in the program.

Summary of Literature Review

This chapter has reviewed the literature on the effects of graduate and/or doctoral programs on the family relationship. The effects on the spouse and the family of a doctoral

student were the focus and most of the literature covered the topic thoroughly. Many articles broke down the effects on the family into subcategories and allowed for more in-depth study of the specific effect of the subcategory on the student and the family. Along with studies of the spouse and family relationship, some focused on socialization and support system such as peer/cohort support and institutionally available support. The studies also discussed the lack of support available for students both academically and familial.

Some noticeable observations that I made about the literature: (a) the research conducted on the topic appears to happen in waves during the time span of the gathered literature—every four to five years from 1973-2011, and although not extensively researched, it appears that this trend also is reflected for previous years; (b) the majority of articles were quantitative studies. Because of their nature, the quantitative studies were unable to lend the voice to the problematic issues in family relationships that bring the depth necessary for intimate and personal background. The few qualitative studies brought to life the doctoral experience of the family and helped give further definition to issues in the doctoral student's family relationship. (c) There seemed to be very little research on the effects of a parent in a doctoral program on children. One reason could be it is too hard for children to articulate their true emotions. (d) That the pursuit of a Ph.D. has not changed much from the earliest reference from 1939 through all of the time and literature between then and now and the challenges to all students remain, especially for the married student with children.

When the stress and the strain of many different aspects of a student's life begin to pull at once, the desire to quit becomes very strong. However, the studies demonstrate that if the graduate student has a support system in place, students are more likely to persist in their studies. There are times when the pressure becomes too much and the student "settles" for not achieving

the goal, but for what they consider to be "good enough" and then remain all but dissertation (ABD). Fortunately, students who have the strong support systems continue towards their goals and pursue and utilize every aspect of support that is available to them. It is only when a student does not use the support systems available that persistence of the academic dream and the family relationship are at risk.

Doctoral students in pursuit of their degrees face challenges and stresses that affect not only them but their families. How the student is able to cope with the obstacles that could possible derail their educational goals is of great concern for higher education as well as society and needs to be studied. With the studies in this literature review reporting that one out of two doctoral students finishes their programs, that indicates one doctoral student does not. The shared experiences of the students in this study should help to understand some of the reasons for attrition as well as the persistence of these students as well as understanding more about the unique needs, the stresses, the reliance on family, and the fragile connection of the family relationship before, during, and after the doctoral process. Hammon and Albiston (1998) accurately advised:

> As we have discussed, we strongly suggest including your family at every stage throughout the process…. Graduate school, whether it be completed long distance or on campus, is one of the most grueling events you will ever experience in your life, and it is important to take care of yourself along the way. (p. 34)

The following chapter will describe the methods used in this study to lend voice and understand the familial and academic realities of married doctoral students with children.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter described the design and methodology of this study, which was conducted to add a voice and more qualitative literature about married doctoral students with children and the experiences and challenges that each person confronts. The study was based on the research question "what are the lived experiences of married doctoral students with families who are enrolled in a cohort-based higher education program?" This study examined the common themes of the student-parent's academic journey and how the connected experiences positively or negatively affect the student-parent, the family, and the family relationship.

The remainder of the chapter described the qualitative method of study, more precisely the phenomenological approach utilized for this study. The participants that made up the sample of the study, the data collection, and data analysis are also discussed.

Qualitative Design

This study utilized the qualitative mode of inquiry. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative inquiry makes meaning of and clarifies experiences of individuals and groups. Data are usually collected from field work while observing the participants, using inductive reasoning from data analysis operating from specifics to general themes (Creswell, 2009). Effective qualitative study probes the situation to learn the context of the setting and report the findings in a comprehensive picture (Vockell & Asher, 1995). Vockell and Asher (1995) explained that it is

the researcher's role to use qualitative method to extract more specific and personal meaning from the data to develop a more descriptive view of the study than the quantitative method allows.

Qualitative research seeks to interpret the constructed meanings of a person or group's lived experience and to understand themes and patterns of those experiences (Merriam, 2009). The use of qualitative research design helped tell the stories of these married students with children and explored their experiences during the doctoral program in that "qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases" (Patton, 2002, p. 14). According to Creswell (2009), some of the benefits of qualitative research are to "focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation (p. 4). Qualitative studies allow the reader to gain a more personal understanding of the experiences of the phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). This study used a derivative of qualitative method, phenomenology to interpret and understand the lived experiences of married students with children in a cohort-based doctoral program. The next section described phenomenology in more detail.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is used when the researcher wishes to explore in-depth into an occurrence or a phenomenon and gain a clearer understanding of the exact nature of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). According to Merriam (2009), understanding the lived experiences of individuals or groups helps to uncover the "conscious experience of their life-world" (p. 25), or as Patton (2002) described that the phenomenon has "a unique *essence* [emphasis original] of shared experiences of the individual or of the group" (p. 106). Bringing together the shared experiences of participants and defining the essence of the lived experiences of participants,

when analyzed, draws the meaning of the constructed realties into an identifiable common phenomenon (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002).

Merriam (2009) states "a phenomenological approach is well suited to studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences" (p. 26); this worked perfectly with the purpose of this study—to lend voice and description to the shared experiences of married doctoral students with families. McMillian and Schumacher (2001) explained that phenomenology is more than having discussion about a topic of interest. The researcher must work "methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (Patton, 2002, p. 104).

Personal perspective is often one way the researcher becomes connected to the study and the phenomenon. Patton (2002) stated, "The only way for us to really know what another person experiences is to experience the phenomenon as directly as possible for ourselves" (p. 106). Phenomenological study allows the researcher to have intimate background knowledge of the phenomenon, but the researcher must stay neutral and bracket all personal information relating to the research and the phenomenon itself (Creswell, 2009; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002).

This qualitative, phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of married students with children under 18 years old in a cohort-based doctoral program. The participants and the requirements for the participants of this study are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Participants

Material for this qualitative phenomenological research design was collected from a purposeful sample of 10 students who were members of higher education leadership program cohorts between 1998 and 2009. A criterion for selecting the participants was that they must have been married with children younger than 18 years of age at the time of initial enrollment in the program. The chosen participants were enrolled in the cohort-based doctoral program, but did not need to have graduated. Maximum variation (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002) was a goal of participant selection, for example, on gender, race/ethnicity, and years of marriage. To aim for maximum variation, participants were selected from the first twelve cohorts of a higher education leadership doctoral program from a Carnegie classification Doc/Prof: Doctoral, professional dominant universities in the Midwest.

After sending emails to the previous 12 cohorts asking for volunteers who met the study criteria, 21 responded. Of the 21 volunteers, five decided not to participate; three were not available during the data collection period. Originally, 12 participants were interviewed, five women and seven men. Two of the men were removed from the study due to saturation. Finally, 10 participants were purposefully selected for the study. There were an equal number of women participants and men participants, five of each, who fulfilled the criteria.

Data Collection

Data were collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews, follow-up telephone interviews, or email interviews, if necessary, to elicit salient direct quotations about each participant's lived experiences, feelings, beliefs, and knowledge (Creswell, 2009). Each participant was contacted via email, and we made arrangements for interview meeting dates, times, and locations. Each interview was conducted at a location of the participant's choosing.

Interviews were designed in a semi-structured manner as to provoke thought and recollections about the participant's views, feelings, thoughts, intentions, opinions, and experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. The recordings were transcribed verbatim and saved electronically as well as printed (Creswell, 2009). The exact wording of the questions and the order of the questions varied from participant to participant. This format allowed me to be adaptive to the situation and adjust the tone and direction of interview if new ideas or questions emerged (Merriam, 2009). When available, artifacts gathered from the participants between themselves and their families, such as letters, emails, or text messages, were requested and used as data (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). In accordance with the Institutional Research Board, all participants voluntarily signed an interview consent form (Appendix B). The analyzing of the data for this study will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Data Analysis

"The process of data analysis involves making sense out of the text and image data" (Creswell, 2009, p. 183). The data from this study was analyzed by using the six-step procedure designed by Creswell (2009). Creswell recommended that the first step is that the data be organized and prepared—transcribed interviews and notes, etc. All interviews were transcribed verbatim from the digital recordings. Step 2 is to read all of the data and, "…gain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning" (Creswell, 2009, p. 185). Step 3 is coding the thematic data. Each transcript was read and reread to find similar phrases, descriptions, and/or ideas from the data and taking that information and coding into categories and labeling the categories for future use in the assigning meaning of these categories. Categories included: children = yellow, relationships = purple, support = bright green, roles =

pink, study habits = light blue, contradiction/admissions = gray, family history = green, communication = teal, general/advice = dark yellow, quotes = blue, mentors = dark red, and cohort = orange. In Step 4, the coded categories were brought together to clarify any reoccurring themes in the data. As each interview was coded and then reread, the similar codes were brought together to start forming similar and unique experiences. Developing the themes can now be "shaped into a general description" (Creswell, 2009, p. 189) of the phenomenon. Step 5 involves plotting the themes that are to be used as a narrative to discuss themes that intersect by using subthemes, multiple perspective that are related, and quotations. The final step is the interpretation of the data. For this step Creswell recommended asking "what were the lessons learned?" (p. 189). The interpretations can be made from the researcher's own background with the topic or comparison to previous literature. Because I was personally connected to this study, I was careful to bracket my thoughts and to allow the data to tell the stories, in pursuit of the goal of the data analysis: finding the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2009; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002).

After analyzing the data, it was imperative to check for validity by checking the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2009). In checking for validity, triangulation of data sources was utilized. Triangulation is discovering the point of connection using different data, such as interviews, letters, and results of the participant's life; such as divorce, and/or repeated statements that develop into a theme. The converging of the reoccurring data—the triangulation—helped to establish validity of the findings (Creswell, 2009; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Patton, 2002).

The use of triangulation for validity involves "comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means within qualitative

methods" (Patton, 2002, p. 559). For this study, not only were the participant data used for validity of the findings, but member checking and peer debriefing were used for the overall validity of the findings. Member checking is having the participants check the finished transcripts of the interviews for accuracy. After each interview, I transcribed verbatim the digital recordings of the interviews and the participant's transcripts were emailed to the respective participant for accuracy with the request that the participant verify her or his statements and that her or his views were correctly clarified to properly understand the participant's experiences. As for peer debriefing, the themes of the data were reviewed by a person who is not involved with this research, who is familiar with doctoral studies, and who will offer feedback about the themes of the study. Two peer debriefers who have higher education experience but not involved in this study were utilized to assist in theme evaluation. Both are employed by institutions of higher education: one is a faculty member and the other is in administration. Each peer debriefer has been in higher education for nearly 10 years.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS I

The purpose of this research was to understand more clearly the lived experiences of married doctoral students with families, enrolled in one of 12 cohorts in 12 years at an educational program based at a midsized, Midwestern research university. Using the statements and descriptions of the participants, this chapter offers an exploration of the 10 participants' experiences of the academic journey of a doctoral program while also aiming to balance a career and a family. In the first part of this chapter, in their own words, the participants tell the stories and the experiences in their doctoral pursuits that provide first-hand accounts of their challenges and successes. The participants often shared similar stories on both academic and familial levels. Other stories offered the unique perspectives of the experience of married students with children in a doctoral program. In the second part of this chapter, after the analysis of the data was completed, discussion of five major themes that emerged will be revealed and highlighted.

As the participants were telling their stories, I noticed on their faces and in their comments the multitude of thoughts that must have been raging in their minds. These verbal and nonverbal cues indicated to me there was sometimes conflict of memory: happiness in a memory they enjoyed sharing and conversely an unpleasant recall of a memory the participant believed should not be shared. In the beginning of the program, it was full of academic newness, convergent ideas, and new knowledge combined with emotional toil and strain that the

interviews elicited an array of emotion and sometimes the inability to phrase the thoughts coherently.

Program Description

Participants for this study were drawn from 12 years of cohorts at a midsize Midwestern research university. This university has a nationally recognized educational leadership doctoral program. Each participant had completed the two years of coursework of the program but may not have completed their dissertations. The program is a full-time, distance education (two-way video) program with three weekend cohort meetings per semester where on-campus classes are required. There is also an intensive three week on-campus semester in the summer between the first and second years of course work. Although faculty has changed and the curriculum has been updated regularly, the overall structure of the program has changed little in the 12 years of the program.

Table 1 describes the participants' personal demographics organized by relationship status, race/ethnicity, generational education, the age/ages of children at the beginning of the program, and if the participants completed their degrees or was not successful, along with the participants' cohort: This chapter reveals the participants' experiences. Following Van Gennep's (1909/1960) experiential time frames, each participant's story is divided into three time periods: life before entering the program, life during the program, and life after the program. Whereas the individual participants' exposure to each time sequence was varied, each participant did traverse through each of these phases of time.

Table 1

Personal Demographics of Participants

Pseudonym	Relationship Status	Race/Ethnicity	Generational Education	Children's Ages at the Beginning of the Program	Completed Degree/Cohort
Pete	Married	Black/White	Second	Daughter 16 Son 12	Yes/ Cohort #12
Kurt	Remarried	White	First	Daughter 4	No/ Cohorts #9 &11
Tim	Married	Latino	First	Son 11 Son 9	Yes/ Cohort #1
Shari	Married	White	First	Son 18 Son 16 Son 13	Yes/ Cohort #7
Debbie	Married	White	First	Son 13 Daughter 9 Son 7 Daughter 6	Yes/ Cohort #8
Dave	Married	White	First	Daughter (Born first semester) Son (Born during dissertation)	Yes/ Cohort #9
Kathy	Married	Black	First	Daughter 10 Daughter 7	Yes/ Cohort #7
Dutch	Married	Black, Japanese, White	Second	Daughter 14 Daughter 13 Daughter 11 Son 10	Yes/ Cohort #5
Gabby	Divorced	Black	First	Son 26 Son 18 Son 14	Yes/ Cohorts #2 & 8
Shelly	Married	White	Second	Daughter 15 Daughter 12	No/ Cohort #9

Pete's Story

Pete is the regional dean of the school of health sciences at a Midwestern community college. He is married with two adult children; he and his wife will be celebrating their 30th wedding anniversary next year. Pete stated he has had several careers before entering higher education and before pursuing his doctorate. He was in the medical field for many years as a respiratory therapist. It was not until he entered the world of higher education that he decided to pursue a doctoral degree.

He completed an associate's degree in respiratory therapy and then studied business administration for both his undergraduate and graduate degrees. Pete is a second-generation college student. His mother received a baccalaureate degree. His father did not attend college but did obtain a high school diploma. He has a sister who also received a baccalaureate degree. His wife has a master's degree and is employed in the healthcare industry.

Pete is multiracial; he has a White mother and an African American father. He was raised in California, and along with his diverse background he stated, "I get to see both sides of the world, so to speak." His father was from the South, and his mother was raised in the Midwest. This mix of Southern and Midwestern philosophies exposed Pete to a "hodgepodge of people and places and cultures." His parents were business owners who saw good times and some bad times, which he attested has contributed to his ability to see the world through different lenses in many aspects. He continued, "I think that in terms of growing up out West and having experiences I have had. . . . gives you kind of a more tolerant and patient approach to how the world works or how things work." Is I spoke to Pete, I realized that this balance of experiences was a great base upon which Pete approached his personal life and his academic life.

As I listened to Pete, he spoke with calmness in his voice that relaxed me, and I could understand how that could help the family situation remain tranquil, even under great pressure from a doctoral program. Pete also stressed that his background in the healthcare industry indirectly prepared him for his doctoral program experiences involving his family relationship. In his family life and in his doctoral program, he used this prior learning experience to help delineate between family and academics: "You learn to triage things in your mind and you try not to take it with you, to coin a phrase, you kinda check it at the door." According to Pete, his life experiences developed his academic framework expressed in his explanation of how and what a student and a family need in managing a relationship while pursuing a doctoral degree:

> Flexibility. Life happens. Cars break down, people get sick, and schedules change. You have to be able to or willing to find or look for a different way to get the same results you're looking for. It may take you a little longer. People have had to leave the program or exit a course and retake that course at a later time, but still keeping the same mindset and commitment to completing the program. I think it's an understanding family that this is not like taking a class for continuing education; this is a marathon not a sprint. It's certainly a marathon and it has many hills and peaks and valleys along the pathway, but you just have to keep the goal in mind. If you're able to do that, then it doesn't guarantee that you'll succeed but you'll stand a better chance than most in succeeding. Be willing to regroup when necessary. Things aren't always going to go the way you want.

Life before entering the program. Pete and his wife got married in their early twenties but decided not to have children right away: "We had been married 8 years before we had our first child. And the reasoning behind that was intentional. We decided we would like to travel and do some fun things and enjoy life, so to speak." They each had stable careers and were

consciously waiting to start a family. While Pete and his wife were continuing their education, they had two children, a daughter and a son. Both of their children were born before Pete's decision to enter a doctoral program.

There was a peaceful look in Pete's eyes as he discussed the pre-doctoral days. He spoke of relaxed days and travel—both before the children and the early years of life with the children. Hearing Pete speak about this time in his life, I could sense a feeling of contentment and relaxation that comes from having a strong family relationship in his life. Pete spoke of his family relationship and what it means to him: "It means a lot. It means a sense of belonging, a sense of consistency, a sense of comfort, a foundation if you will."

Before entering the program, Pete's philosophy for work was very free-spirited:

> My philosophy is that you work to make a living, ideally find something you are passionate about and that you would like to continue to do either for your lifetime or when you tire of that and decide that you want to take the left turn, which is my situation most of the time.

However, when the time arrived for Pete to enter the doctoral program, he realized he needed to buckle down and commit to the process. He also took the step of discussing what was involved with this commitment and how it would also involve the family's commitment and understanding. Pete had made the conscious choice to attempt to keep family life and academic life separate: "I decided that before I entered the program; should I, if accepted; my family, we all talked about it. My admittance will not affect my family situation in any shape or form. That was my commitment."

Life during the program. When Pete decided to enroll in the doctoral program, he had a full-time career, as did his wife. Their daughter was 16 and their son was 12; both children

were active in all aspects of school. With the family becoming more involved in outside interests, Pete shared what his family's relationship was like when he embarked upon the doctoral program: "Solid. Really solid. Very consistent. Family relationship during the program, I feel was solid as well." Although he felt his family relationship was solid, Pete still felt the need for a change, "but, also acknowledging that there was a desire or need to do something different with education, with my life."

Pete credits his pre-program discussion with the family for keeping his family relationship solid. When discussing the time constraints between spending time with family and time studying and what the solution was, he stated:

> Structure, I would say. I mean that in terms of again, allotting the time, but also understanding that, again, there may be deviations from the plan when something in the family might occur and it is 11:30 at night and you are not going to get to study tonight. That is just the way it is, you accept it, you turn the page; you accept the problem and you move on.

Pete contends his academic life and his family relationship were not greatly affected because of pre-doctoral program communication and acceptance on the part of the entire family. This "contract" between Pete and his family helped the family to negotiate any potential issue causing scenarios during Pete's doctoral journey:

> For me, it was a matter of commitment. I just decided this is how I am going to get my work done and that's what I kind of chose to do. So there was never a, "Gosh, I need to study, gosh, I need to do this." And I wouldn't be truthful if I didn't say that sometimes it didn't wear you down, because it did. But, I think the benefits far outweighs the inconvenience maybe I experienced during this time. I think it strengthened our

> relationship in some ways that there was never question as to whether or not dad was going to go into the office and be locked up in the office for 6 hours. That conversation never came up, because what we had all previously discussed prior to the beginning of the program.

Life after the program. I had the opportunity to witness Pete's hooding ceremony upon completing his degree. I asked him how he and his family were, and he commented that he is learning he does not have to stay up late and study or write papers and that his life is "returning to normal, pre-doctoral days." He was very upbeat and excited that the journey had finished with a success. He is in the same position at work, he is still married, and his daughter is now 20 and his son is 16. Pete is especially happy that he gets to spend more time with family and "not be so tired." He stated in regards to any changes in himself or the family relationship after the program,

> I haven't noticed any changes. In fact, from a family perspective or from the perspectives of my kids, I think, because I try to be a low key person, but I am a direct person in terms of formulating plans to resolve problems and thinking creatively. I think they've seen, they haven't seen a change, per se, in their father, who had a master's degree or a bachelor's degree to the same guy who has a Ph.D. Conceptually, obviously if we were to ask them they would tell you anything different, but, I think I've been the same person. I think they should see the same person.

Kurt's Story

Kurt was a first-generation college student, but he is no stranger when it comes to higher education. He currently works in student support for a large distance education university. Kurt focused his undergraduate studies in aviation technology and then found a new focus for his

master's degree by earning his degree in education with a focus on student affairs counseling. Along with the degree, he also became credentialed in counseling. Kurt was quite successful with his undergraduate and his master's degrees. Sadly, Kurt was not as successful with his doctoral journey—neither time.

Kurt is a very welcoming person. As I entered his early 1900s house in a small Midwestern town, Kurt was all smiles as he invited me into his house. He did request that we keep it quiet because his daughter was still sleeping. He is now a stay-at-home father and works as an online mentor for an online university. Kurt is the father of three children (two of his own and one is his stepson). His first wife is the mother of his oldest daughter. They were married while Kurt was in the program and were divorced after he stopped his Ph.D. pursuit. His oldest daughter was born between Kurt's first attempt at the program and his second attempt. Since then, Kurt has recently remarried and his new family consists of his daughter, his new wife's nine-year-old son and his and his new wife's two-year-old daughter. He is very happy with his new family life. Kurt acknowledged that some may consider this an unusual circumstance:

> I've been married twice. I got married the first time 10 years ago this April. That was the first time. I just turned 46 so that was 10 years ago. And then I got married the second time this last October before I turned 46, so I would have been 45. It may seem strange, but sometimes that is how life is, at least mine.

Life before entering the program. Kurt's experiences in higher education and the professional world have been prolific, ranging from part-time jobs to heading multimillion dollar budgets at a major university. As Kurt stated, "Most of my life has been in higher education in some capacity or another." Kurt and I discussed the irony that his birth family was not at all involved in higher education and how his entire adult working life was guided by higher

education. His father and mother were both high school graduates and "were older parents, World War II generation. He graduated high school and he went into the military before the draft. He was promoted quickly in the Army Air Force." His mother was a beauty school graduate and was a stay-at-home mother until World War II where she was "an original 'Rosy the Riveter' working at a factory in Indianapolis." His parents encouraged higher education and Kurt's three older brothers all received bachelor's degrees and one continued for his master's.

Kurt decided early that his chosen program of aviation technology was not what he wanted to do for a living. It was after deciding this that he chose to make higher education his life:

> Most of my life has been in higher education in some capacity or another. Here is a quick synopsis from my getting involved in higher ed. First as an undergrad I was an RA, then an RA supervisor. Then I was a graduate assistant when I got my graduate degree from [a large Midwestern] university. Then lots of odd jobs part-time or co-op for the Federal Aviation Administration as an undergrad, but that was more professional. I was working full-time, but I was both there and at school.

He decided that staying at one university was not going to help him further his career. He also realized that he would need more education to move up the university ladder and he would need to broaden his academic horizons. Kurt was encouraged by his parents to move to where the jobs were. He enrolled in graduate school and

> after receiving my master's, there was a full-time position in Jacksonville, Florida, as live-in resident director, then came back to here [to the Midwest] and held a position primarily in the business side of the operation in housing and food. I started as assistant manager, then manager, and then department head. I was even an instructor for a course.

> I was in that position, department head, when I started the doctoral program, then everything changed.

Life during the program. Upon his return to the Midwest and while still working as a department head, he entered the Ph.D. program at a nearby university [the same program in this study]. He stated that he was really enjoying the program; however, it was quite a challenge balancing work with school. At this point he was faced with an ultimatum:

> I got into the program and then took a promotion at work, and basically the boss said, "You kind of need to make a decision here. You either take the promotion or finish school because you won't have time for both." So I took the promotion and stepped out of the program, and then I stepped back into the program after I was married.

As Kurt was reflecting on the time during the first attempt at a Ph.D., I noticed a tone of frustration with his work situation. Although he made the decision to put work before the program, during this time he met and married his first wife. She had her master's degree and a proficient professional life, so Kurt indicated that he believed that he made the correct choice. After a year of marriage, their daughter was born. Kurt and his wife believed that now was a time for a change and Kurt reenrolled in the program.

Kurt discussed that his reenrolling in the program was stressful on his marriage. He was thankful his daughter was young at the time and believes that she does not remember the tension during this time. Kurt believes his wife used his enrollment in a Ph.D. program as a spark for other issues in their relationship:

> My ex-wife, I could tell with my counseling background, I don't know why I was blind at the beginning, I did know she had some bipolar issues, and she also, to a lesser degree,

> combined with the bipolar issues was that she was a daughter of an alcoholic. So, she had some issues along those lines too.

Kurt stated he was oblivious to his wife's mental issues. He was very sincere as he spoke about the severity of her mental health and the impact it had on all aspects of the marriage:

> As our relationship matured and we were together longer, those issues compounded and it got worse. So, the mood swings got worse so it was just a matter of, well at first it was noticeable, but, wasn't as bad, you know, but the swings were really terrible. You know, she did some crazy things and we got help for them, but, you know. . . .

Kurt was very solemn as he spoke about his second time in the program and how not only the pressures of the program kept him from moving forward, but the addition of family issues and situations compounded the lack of success for him in the program. He was also disappointed because he thought this time he was mentally, emotionally, and relationally prepared. Like Pete, Kurt had discussed the program with his wife and thought there was a "contract of understanding" between them:

> I always thought entering the program that family came first. That may have been the wrong attitude, but that was my personal philosophy, but that is why I thought it was so important to have the agreement from both parties about the program, the constant communication, and that was the reason why there were periods during the program at the end of the semester there were times, "Ok, are we going to continue?" That question wouldn't have been asked if the philosophy wasn't that the family came first. The only reason we wouldn't continue would be if the family was disrupted by this. Otherwise, at the end of the semester it would be like, "Well, just put up with it. Or prepare, we are going forwards." Sadly, we didn't move forward.

Life after the program. Kurt understands what happened during both attempts at his Ph.D. helped to shape his life now. He has since married a woman he met while teaching English in Germany. They have a daughter together and share their home with his daughter from his first marriage and a stepson. Kurt works as a mentor for an online university and loves both his family relationship and his job. He wishes this could have happened previously, but he says he understands it is part of the family dynamic of a growing relationship:

> I learned so much from my experiences that I am taking with me. For instance, I think, most relationships you are trying to make your spouse happy. With the knowledge from my counseling degree, one spouse cannot make another spouse happy. But it's that innate, "I want to make her happy." But knowing that you can never make them happy, they can be happy with you, they can be happy with the situation, but you can't make them happy. I am taking those lessons and building on them with my new, and much happier, relationships.

Tim's Story

Tim's story is that of a loving and hardworking son, husband, and father. As we spoke in his office at a branch campus of a Midwestern state university where Tim is the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, I had the sense of a man who had worked hard to achieve his position but is also someone who genuinely cares about people. Tim was a first-generation college student whose parents instilled that family and dedication to family is "las mas importante." His devotion to faith and family were strongly evident as Tim spoke of his Latino roots and the strong work ethic that was implanted in him by his father and the care and discipline inspired in him by his mother. Tim's eyes sparkled as he spoke of his father's service to others and his dedication to his work—all in the name of love of family:

> My dad was a barber, he raised eight kids. He worked six days a week, took off on the Sabbath, the Sunday. He worked standing on his feet, supporting eight kids. . . . He would open his shop for early people who would come in, sometimes 6:30 or 7 and wouldn't come home until seven or eight. I guess I saw that that was the way it was; you did what you needed to get things done.

Tim was raised in a family of eight children, four brothers and three sisters. Education was encouraged—albeit more for the men in the family. All of Tim's brothers received at least bachelor's degrees and one of Tim's sisters is a nurse practitioner. As we spoke, I could see a hardened kindness in his eyes that comes from a tough, but love-filled background.

Growing up in a blue collar neighborhood in a medium size Midwestern city, Tim's own educational journey was postponed by a five year detour into the world of factory work. "I would have to say that if I would have gone to college at 18, I probably would have failed." Tim explained further:

> I started college at the age of 23. I was a factory worker for five years. . . . Then I went to college. I got my bachelor's degree in 2½ years, then I went to Mexico and taught English for a couple of years. Then I went to the University, got a master's degree and then I bounced around at different jobs.

Life before the program. Tim comes from a working class background that was established in family, faith, and work. He took these foundational building blocks and incorporated them in a family of his own, a life-long career in higher education, and his pursuit of his doctorate. After his time in the factories, Tim completed his bachelor's degree in an amazing time of two and one-half years. At the age of 28, Tim met and married his wife, and

they have been married for the last 31 years. His wife is no stranger to higher education as she has a bachelor's degree in nursing.

After earning his master's degree, he and his wife moved back to his home state where Tim got a job at a local branch of the state college very near his family. This was the first of many jobs in higher education for Tim. Their first son was born during their time back home. They stayed near Tim's extended family for a few more years. During this time, the couple had another son. After some time, Tim took a job at a prestigious private college in New England for three years and then for five years at a small liberal arts college in the Mid-Atlantic. It was after working at these two schools that Tim came to the Midwest and worked at a university where he was introduced to its Ph.D. program. He was a member of the program's first cohort.

Tim's family was accustomed to moving at this point, but they would stay at this location for 10 years, including Tim's time in the program. As Tim discussed the multiple times moving, "My family is in [the Midwest] and we were always away from them, so when we moved, it was important to have a tight-knit family." His early years with his parents and family built a strong base upon which Tim was able to build the close family he would need for his professional career.

The stage had been set for the family and the new experience of "Dad" not only working in higher education, but now becoming a student in the process. This new role would demand more time and work and continued to put responsibility on Tim:

> In 1998 my sons were 11 and 13. . . . I was in [the program]; I was the director of the career center [at the university where he worked] while I was working on this degree. Then our vice president of student affairs retired and our associate vice president took the job, then he asked me to oversee the health center, student judicial programs, and the

> counseling center while still being director of the career center. So he gave me more responsibility, so I was stretched, I was working a lot of hours. My wife worked a few hours here and there but she pretty much stayed home and took care of them. So, when I decided to get into the program, I was pretty much the primary breadwinner.

Life during the program. As Tim began this new phase of his academic journey, he understood that on top of his familial responsibilities and his work responsibilities, he would now have to add the necessary devotion to his academic responsibilities. He was confident that they would adjust and overcome all concerns that could possibly arise in the future. Tim believes that his children's early exposed to higher education helped prepare them for their father's new academic journey.

One aspect of Tim's experience in the program is that he was a full-time employee at the institution where he was earning his doctorate. Tim believes this gave him an advantage, not academically but physically. Tim's program was primarily a two-way audio, two-way video program. The majority of cohort members were not on campus. He was closer to resources and to professors. Tim believes his family was not impacted by the stretched feeling that other students had:

> Because I didn't work at home. That's why I stayed at work to read and do all that stuff so that when I came home, I was fully there mentally and every way possible. So they didn't see any of that stuff. I have to say that [the university] was a great university to do this program because our program is geared for working professionals, right? I had a luxury that maybe my cohort friends didn't have in the fact that being on the home campus was so much easier for me to go to the studio [where class was broadcasted] and into classes or however, I could just sit in the audience without being in the class. So I

had more degrees of freedom, I think being on that campus. If I was at a school somewhere it would have been a lot different.

Life after the program. Tim was successful in his doctoral pursuit. He discussed that this was another higher educational journey for him and his family. He expressed he was very thankful that his family was part of the process and that he knows he could not have completed it without them. He stated that because of the family's knowledge of higher education, the journey was smoother and the family continued to be a "very close family." Both Tim's academic journey and his professional journey led him to more responsibilities in his career. He is currently the vice chancellor of student affairs at a regional campus of a major Midwest University. Tim laughed as he explained that his desire for change and something new peaked after he completed the program. The family had fulfilled the "contract" of working together through the program, and Tim realized the family had sacrificed for him and now he appreciated their help and support:

> I stayed in [the city of the university] until they both graduated from high school, so even though I got my degree in 2001, we didn't move until 2005. So I had to stay until they finished high school. I didn't want to take them out of high school because we had moved so many times. They were relieved [when I finished the program] because I was with them a lot more time now than when I was going through the program and we tended to do a lot more as a family, collectively. Relieved was a big word. I became anxious because I had worked so hard to get the degree, with the hopes that it would open up doors beyond, which it did.

Shari's Story

When I met Shari at her office, the entire building was under a remodeling project. As we spoke, it was clear that her career has been remodeled. Shari, a first-generation college student, was raised in a loving family along with her six brothers and sisters. Though all but one of Shari's siblings either attended a university or received a baccalaureate degree, only Shari continued to build on her education. However, after earning her bachelor's degree and then working for a year, she decided that her passion was in counseling:

> I went back for my master's after undergrad and got a counseling degree and worked for a lot of years as a clinician and marital counseling, a lot of adolescent, a lot of pregnancy and adolescent work, troubled youth, that kind of stuff.

After a few years in the world of mental health, Shari remodeled her professional career into the world of higher education. Working in the student success area of the university, Shari had always been attracted to careers that involve helping others. Although she continued her private practice, she started her higher education profession:

> I was working with the program called Upward Bound here: it was a college access program, and so I also had a private practice during that time because I wanted to keep that going. But then I became full-time here, I had an opportunity in counseling in the counseling office, but then I had this opportunity to do more administrative work and then I kind of left counseling at that point, and then I moved into career number two, which was more of retention. But mostly still working with younger people with helping with college access and a lot of first-generational students is kind of "my thing," which was my dissertation.

Life before the program. As Shari finished explaining her decision to change careers, she began to speak about meeting her husband and their decision to start a family. Shari met her husband during their undergraduate studies and began dating while she was in graduate school. They were married after Shari completed her master's degree. Immediately after getting married, they were ready to start a family. Due to medical issues, they were delayed in having a baby. After a couple of years, they tried again and were successful, having three boys who were 16, 14, and 11 when Shari started the program. Having a family and successful careers were not enough for Shari and her husband:

> I was working full-time before I started the program. My husband was working full-time. We had three kids at home, life was really busy. You know, they were all active in school and they were all active in things related to their school. So, you know, we were all wearing a lot of hats. We still do wear lots of hats.

However, just because life was busy for the family did not mean that Shari believed her education was complete. While their children were in middle school and high school, both Shari and her husband decided to return to graduate school:

> I'm thinking that they were 11, 14, and 16 or right around there depending on birthdays. So they were all in or near their teens. My husband went back for his master's. So he got his MFA around that time. So he had finished, I guess he had finished around 2001 and then I started the program.

One situation that assisted Shari in deciding to return to school for her doctorate was a colleague of hers would be in the same cohort as she. As Shari reflected on the work influence, she stated that the decision to return to school for a doctorate was a combination of career necessity and to help inspire her children to pursue education. As Shari spoke, I noticed a

change in her voice from contentment to indecision. She seemed unsure of her desire to return to school because her family life was at a comfortable stage, but she believed she had no choice. She understood the sacrifices she would have to make and benefits she would reap, but Shari's words focused on the effect the program would have on her work. As she spoke, her voice became despondent. Her tone indicated to me that she would have rather focused the time on her family:

> I went back for the Ph.D. because I felt like I was ready to do something different. I wanted to have other opportunities in higher ed. I thought, "I'm in higher education and you have to have your Ph.D. to do that, right?" So that really prompted it, and I had a dean of students who was a graduate of the program, or within the program, and he was very supportive of me pursuing that and taking the time so it was like, "Well, I have this time, and they have good references and people who are willing to support that." And that was the right time. So, work time. It was the right time and the program allowed me to continue to work full-time. Because at some places you don't have the choice. So I had to do that. Well, in regards to my children, it was also for their benefit, an inspirational thing.

Life during the program. Moving from a fast paced lifestyle with the family and with work, Shari's life became even more hectic. There were now more hats to wear including professionally, academically, and familial. Shari's work responsibilities continued with her full-time job, although she had stopped her private practice. The parents traded one graduate school member for another, along with the children's continued education and extracurricular activities, and to add more to the family load: "We took on an international student for 10 months. I think we were nuts." Shari reflected on that decision to add to the family pressure in the middle

of "my doctorate program was probably in retrospect probably not the smartest because it was one more stretch and one more way that I needed to give attention to one more person and that took away from the other kids."

Although her family pressures were increased, Shari worked hard to keep a positive attitude. Both she and her husband also worked to keep the family dynamic in a happy state even with the increased demands. Shari realized sharing time with her family was going to take work—work to which she was not sure if she or the family would adapt:

> I think my kids remember me sitting at my computer all the time and a lot, a lot of. . . . they have this memory of me sitting there. I remember being up until two in the morning, then going to bed and getting up again in the morning to finish papers to meet deadlines, and then getting everybody out of the house, and then going to work. So that was. . . . There were a lot of things we didn't do, I mean financially. We didn't do, and time wise we didn't do, and in terms of the house, you know, that keeping up with that piece of it. Of course we didn't travel, we couldn't keep up with friends, and a lot of that stuff got compromised.

Even with the apprehension of the family's ability to adapt to Shari's new role as student and the exorbitant amount of time the program demanded, in the end, Shari reflects that the final outcome was a positive to the entire family, "To have experienced it, it was in, 'Oh mommy is busy,' because they knew what I was doing. And again, that was just really, really powerful."

Life after the program. When the question arose as to how Shari viewed her family's relationship after the program, her shoulders dropped, her face brightened, and her voice became excited. Her overall expression of relief could physically be felt as she explained:

> I tell you afterwards it was so exciting to have time. But my oldest, by the time I finished, was in college. So, in some ways I had. . . . he had already stepped away. I mean I felt like I could go visit him at school, you know, I had time to make a plan, help with his graduation, there are just things that I couldn't really do before. My husband did a lot of when I was in the program; he was the one who did most of the trip to see colleges because I didn't have time to do those things. So I really appreciated the freedom that came.

Shari's family has gained insight to how sacrifice and determination helps to build relationships—that the "struggle is worth it when you accomplish something" and that the pain is temporary. Shari not only appreciates the increase in time with her family, she also utilizes the knowledge gained from the program in her daily activities. She is currently the director of the student success center at her university and the responsibilities have continued to grow. The lessons learned during the program had helped to improve the family relationship:

> The sacrifices to pursue school were something that was valued in our family. So our kids sacrificed a lot. They sacrificed for my degree, but they've also sacrificed to get their own degrees. Financially, and in terms of freedoms they've sacrificed and I think that was an important lesson. The extended family, you know, you know, it's funny that you never stop being a sibling and it doesn't matter whether you have a Ph.D. or not they were not terribly impressed. [Laughter] so, then that really didn't seem to shift that much in terms of my siblings, but more with my kids.

Debbie's Story

Debbie's story is that of persistence. Debbie had overcome much in her life to achieve her position and her credentials. Through all her struggles Debbie has remained a positive

person who loves her family and serves as an inspiration to her children. Debbie's story is of great hopes and dreams dashed and then reconstructed into positive realities. Throughout our interview, I was impressed with Debbie's honesty and openness and with her devotion to her family. Debbie had a story to tell, and she was not about to hide anything. Debbie is a very strong person with a strong disposition.

Debbie was raised in a low-income and very loving family. Both her mother and father finished high school, albeit her father finished high school in his mid-forties. Understanding the value of education in supporting his family, Debbie's father entered vocational school to better his income opportunities. Debbie indicated that education was always stressed to the children:

> My father told me, he died when I was 19, about when my son was born, he told me to "always focus on your math and education is more important than anything else." My dad was always in school, and I think set an example for me.

This message was not lost on the children. Debbie's parents instilled the message of attaining education and four of their five children attended college; two of the children completed the master's level and Debbie finished her Ph.D. Her motivation for education was not only instilled by her parents, but also by her observations of her siblings. She stated,

> By the time I came along, my parents had realized that college was important, I realized from watching my brother and sister who didn't like college or just went there to party, that that wasn't really what I wanted to do. I just needed to get my degree and get out. I think it all taught me something, it's not like they hadn't gone, they just hadn't completed.

Life before the program. Debbie started her college career with hopes of traveling to Spain and majoring in Spanish, but those plans were interrupted when she became pregnant. As

with most of her life, Debbie quickly adjusted to the situation and focused herself to complete her bachelor's in economics and prepare to have a child. During this time of readjustment, she got married:

> He was 18 when we got married, so there is two and a half year difference between us. I had already established our household. After I had the baby, I was a single mom. I had the baby, then 10 months later we got married. I went to school, got an apartment, family housing apartment, found a babysitter, had a girlfriend move in with me, and lived that way for a few months; then my husband and I got married. I had to wait for him to finish high school.

Debbie continues her explanation of her unique marriage and added that she and her husband agreed to continue to have children throughout her college career:

> It wasn't so much a decision as a happening. For my first one, it was kind of decided that I would get married, because it was the right thing to do. And I liked having children so much; we kept having children, even as I went to school. So I got my bachelor's degree with one child. My second child during my master's program, and my other two were born just after my master's program.

With children and a family established in her life, Debbie was also balancing multiple careers in human resources, payroll, and insurance processing. When she completed her bachelor's degree, she immediately continued into graduate school, completing her master's in business administration (MBA). Following graduate school, she sought out a career in international business but soon realized that a family would prevent her from that dream. Again, Debbie adjusted her focus:

> So I finished my MBA knowing that it would open more doors for me, but figuring it would be more difficult for me to do international with a child. So, I basically went out and looked for work. For a while I worked for [a local business and taught at a local community college]. During that time my husband was working on his bachelor's degree so I was holding three jobs while he was working on his bachelor's degree.

Still looking to provide added stability for the family, Debbie found a couple of jobs in other cities and moved the family each time. "I would say my family relationship is somewhat nontraditional compared to my family I was raised in. It's a matriarchal system, I make more money. We move when I have a career change, generally." This constant moving led the family to her university where she pursued her Ph.D. While working at the university, she entered a doctoral program, but it was not for her:

> I had some good classes, but that whole program is designed for school superintendents and principals. I kind of picked the classes that were of most interest to me, but I knew that the whole program was not going to work for me, cause I was one of only two people in the program who wasn't a school superintendent wannabe or a principal wannabe. It was not a cohort program and the tuition reimbursement wasn't very generous, and you were limited to only six credit hours a year. Part of my motivation for coming here was it would take care of most of the tuition, I could get my Ph.D., and if I didn't really like it here, I could stay long enough to do that.

Life during the program. As Debbie continued to tell of her experiences in the program, it was apparent that this was a stressful time for the family and for her. As with other participants of this study, Debbie and her husband had agreed on a "contract" of how the family would support each other during her schooling. However, the contract of support was not as

strong as other participants'. As she spoke, the smiles were infrequent and her voice was very serious and focused. In the beginning of the interview, Debbie inter-mixed jokes and funny anecdotes, followed by her infectious laugh; on the contrary her in-program stories were very serious and to the point. Her children were very young when she started the program. Her children were 14, 9, 7, and 6. The stress of a young family, the pressures of a full-time job, and academic struggle combined to seriously affect Debbie's health. One such serious experience was that of how the stress of the program was affecting her mental health and her physical health:

> I came to a point where I thought I was going to have a mental breakdown. I went to my doctor; I was put on, she tried to put me on Paxil, that made me loopy. She tried to put me on anti-anxiety medications, but that one, I could function on, and I stayed on it for close to a year and a half, got real fat, but I didn't get divorced. I kinda thought I was losing my mind; I had trouble speaking sometimes in meetings. The words would not form because of the stress. People would ask me questions and I couldn't answer because I couldn't remember the question. There was absolutely signs of extreme stress happening.

This mental and physical breakdown was due in part to the inability of Debbie's husband to understand the intensity of the program. It forced Debbie to stretch and divide into many roles, some which are new for the family dynamic, and difficult to adjust. Debbie believes her husband was not able to understand the nuances of the program, and choosing her school-work over her family.

This extremely stressful time during the program would have broken many strong-willed people, but Debbie worked hard to overcome these struggles and work with her family to persist.

She realized that it was up to her to focus and complete. She worked with her family and took control of her physical and mental health issues:

> After a year and a half, I decided that the medicine was putting me in a fog, and although that fog helped, I was going to have to deal without it, so I started exercising and weaned myself off of the pills. I got down to the point where I said, "[Debbie], you're either going to do this and get it done and move on, or you are going to quit it and regret it the rest of your life."

She successfully completed her degree.

Life after the program. Debbie's life after the program settled more and the family recuperated. Her children are now 23, 18, 16, and 15. They have seen the educational struggles their mother endured and are proud of her. For instance, her daughter and "her friends call me Doctress, and I'm like, 'Please.' There's some pride there just knowing that I finished it and they know I finished it, and it's just pretty cool."

In a recent email from Debbie, she said that she was happy and her family is doing well. In fact, she is healthy and is feeling great. During the interview Debbie reflected on her doctoral experience and commented, "Sometimes I'm surprised we made it through, just because the extra stresses that working full-time, having four kids, and doing a Ph.D. program full-time puts on your relationship." Even with the stresses and struggles, Debbie persisted and overcame many challenges and is now Dr. Debbie.

Dave's Story

Dave's interview was very sentimental and emotional. Dave had the unique experience (some say the unthinkable experience) of having children *during* the program—the first child was born in the first year, and the second child was born at the beginning of the dissertation

process. When asked if it were a conscious decision to have the children at that time, Dave responded, "Um, not really," followed by hardy laughter and an anecdote of how he and his wife handled the stress of the program:

> The funny part when I think about it is, it's become a little bit of a joke with others, that even with friends here at work and others have made the comment, you know, other people deal with stress of doctoral program they deal with it differently, and um, yes, there's probably relationship stress and everything else, and I handled stress very differently cause I had two kids through the process [laughs] and they were like, "[Dave], we know what you were doing during the program." And I was like, "I can't argue this." [Laughter].

The interview with Dave was very relaxed and there was much laughter and even a few tears. As we discussed his doctoral venture, Dave was animated and there was joy in eyes as he spoke about his family. He spoke about moving up the higher educational ladder during his younger days, but now he was getting older and wanted to start a family. As he explained:

> I was 34, that was, that was a little bit later and there was an intention at that point that I was the one with the ticking clock. She is years, years younger than me so I was the one who wanted to have the family in order to be able to retire at an age that the kids would be out of school.

Life before the program. Raised in the Eastern seaboard, Dave was raised in a working class family. His mother finished high school and his step father received an associate's degree. Although the technical definition of first-generational student is that no one before you has any higher education and Dave's stepfather did complete a degree, Dave believes that there is both a

physical and a mental component to this definition. Dave considers himself a first-generation student because of the educational views of his family:

> On my side, I am first-generation college student, so there. . . . and my family being in [in the East] they didn't see it as personally as, as close, and they've never completely understood that constant seeking degree enhancement and what's it for, and what it's about. So, there was always this disconnect and that just has occurred ever since, probably since my undergraduate days.

Even without a strong early view of adding credentials from higher education, Dave realized that his calling was in higher education and he needed to continue his own education to improve his chances of climbing the higher education leadership ladder. As he finished his bachelor's degree, Dave entered the world of working at a higher education institution. He has continued this career path and has received his master's from a medium-sized Midwestern research university (also where he received his Ph.D.) and is still in this field.

After finishing his master's degree and working in higher education for 15 years, Dave and his wife of one year decided Dave should enroll in a doctoral program. Dave considers himself lucky because his wife is also employed in higher education. He believes that because of this, their decision for Dave to return and earn his Ph.D. was made with the understanding of what was involved. Although he admited there was much that was new that took them by surprise,

> so there was a bit of a, of a conscious decision of um, I mean one of the reasons I moved to [the Midwest] was to pursue a degree and I looked into different options. My wife, obviously being in higher ed. more than understood it, and we had a discussion about who was going to do theirs first. And, and she sort of pushed and me being five years

> older and that it was it means that it was my turn. We still are in discussion in terms of when she is going to do hers, she wants to do it, she's intrigued to do it, but she also understands the difficulty of doing that with children, and young children. So, knowing what I know now would have been a whole lot easier for her to get it done before the children, but that would have also delayed having a family and everything else.

Life during the program. As Dave began the doctoral program, a new phase in his life began, not only academically, but he was a newlywed and, within the first few months of the program, he was going to be a father. Not only was he trying to adjust to the idea of him entering a doctoral program, the idea of this new adventure was also a challenge for his immediate family. As Dave reflected on this rapid succession of changes in his life, there was a bit of emotion in his voice:

> Because I think there is two completely different dynamics going on; one is the relationship, one with my family, and then you have the other prevailing relationships with in-laws and my mother and brother and all of that. Um, you know, when it, when we, when I started the program there was just the two of us.

Within a two-year time span, Dave had added to his life the roles of husband, student, and father. His newest role not only became a part of his family responsibility, but became a part of his role as student:

> I mean that was one thing, you know, through the course of the program and having the kids . . . I wasn't just the husband, I became the father, and trying to deal with and manage that conflict. And constant struggle of you never. . . you never doing anything well because you're never spending enough time in order to do the studying you need to get done, you're never really. . . you're putting in the hours at work, but you have the

> struggle of, "I've got a kid." And then you feel the extreme guilt of wanting to spend more time with the kids and helping your wife to fold the laundry and everything else. I can't even imagine, and doing any of that without the support of my spouse. Just, um . . . she understood, and knew what it took.

Throughout the transitions of roles, Dave tried to keep his focus balanced. Later he realized that this entire journey was not as clear as he thought. He is cognizant of the idea that his roles were changing and that his wife was more understanding of the changing family dynamic. Although Dave's wife is involved in higher education and they had had several conversations about the upcoming doctoral program, neither could fully grasp what was ahead, "Yes and that she knew, I don't think to what extent, but she knew and expected it and valued the degree and what was going on. So, I think that, that helped tremendously."

Dave explained that he was feeling guilty about not being able to help with everything around the house and the parenting duties. As he discussed this, he began to recollect times he considers he did his fair share of domestic work:

> You know, the reality was that I was there with the teething, I was there in the middle of the night, and I was still doing drop off in the morning, um, so, I was doing as much as I could and I still looking back have no clue I did what I did. Especially since my daughter was not a good sleeper. It was just, um, I don't know how we exactly got through it. And really what it was a strong support, and in terms of the program, you know, and in I think my wife . . . I don't think I was "unpresent" for her.

Life after the program. Dave's family has moved forward from the "learning experiences" gained during the program. Dave says his family relationship has become stronger and his children do not remember their "Daddy" being absent for long periods of time or that

daddy had academic obligations that took him away from the family. Dave is thankful that this is the case:

> Luckily, my kids were so young during the program that they don't have any memories of it. They don't remember all of the time that it took to study and to read, so, so that has allowed me being done and now to be Dad. And, every once in a while something comes up in terms of my five year old, three year old saying something about a doctor and we need to remind them that Daddy's a doctor also, and then they just sort of look like, "Well, not a real Dr." well, not a medical doctor, but, we have this conversation and it's sort of fun, and it's also sort of reminding them of that once in a while.

Dave realized that the relationship with his family, his in-laws, and some people, with whom he previously engaged, had changed since his completion of the doctoral program. Their views on higher education were already not very positive. Dave has since finished his Ph.D. which has led to increasing professional responsibilities. He is currently the vice president for student affairs at a private Ph.D.-granting institution in the Midwest. His professional journey and his academic journey have helped develop a new attitude that has undermined the cordial and familial dynamic:

> It's a different environment; it's a completely different environment. So, it's one of those things and one of those situations in terms that matches first-generation literature. That it . . . you don't always fit in, and you almost need to dumb-down and not be Dr. Dave. Because they know it and that it will also be played against you, and that sort of thing. So, I mean, it is what it is and um, and that's ok, you know. You learn to live with that, work through it, use your title when you go home. I have never, and this probably comes from first-generation, it took a long time to get used to the title.

Kathy's Story

Kathy has had an interesting journey from a first-generation college student to a dean of liberal arts at a Midwestern community college. Without a father, Kathy was otherwise raised in a caring home with attention from not only her mother but also the entire extended family. Although she had a loving relationship with her mother, "my Dad and my Mom divorced when I was probably in preschool and I don't have a very good relationship with him even though I would see him periodically."

During the interview, Kathy was very open about her current family relationship, her memories of the program, and her current status. She did not speak much of her childhood. Although we did not speak much of her upbringing, her strength and faith were well ingrained during her early years and were evident in Kathy's positive demeanor and self-assurance. As we spoke, she was confident and I could feel the empathy and the caring of a person who understood my role as student and who was very gracious and comforting to me.

Education is very important to Kathy and this was instilled by her mother and her family. Her mother was a high school graduate and she is not sure of her father's educational level, but she does not believe he graduated high school. Kathy has built her adult life on a strong educational foundation and is a devoted family member who derives strength from her family relationship:

> Family relationship means everything to me, everything I do. Every decision I make in my life. I have to keep my family in mind, I have to put them first, and before I make a decision. So it means a lot to me. They are everything.

Life before the program. Understanding that education was important for her future, Kathy entered her undergraduate program directly after high school. After she discovered a

fondness for accounting in high school, she thought the natural progression would be to major in accounting while in college. After a while of studying, she realized that this may not have been the right choice for a major:

> I went into that because of my love for accounting in high school; I had no idea that high school accounting and college accounting were very, very different. I realized early on that I didn't want to do accounting, but because I was first-generation college, I didn't realize that I could change my major so I stuck it out and I did it. Even though I knew I didn't want to do it.

After graduating with a bachelor's in accounting, Kathy soon married. Education became the center of Kathy's professional life, but at this point, both Kathy and her husband, who had a high school diploma and some college, believed that she was finished with higher education—she was mistaken', "Actually, when I finished my bachelor's I was convinced I would never ever go back to school because at that point I thought I was tired of that."

With a new husband, just finishing her bachelor's degree, and landing a new job as an admissions advisor, Kathy and her husband had their first child, a daughter. Although Kathy wanted children for a long time, she and her husband decided to intentionally wait two years before having a child. In regards to this planning of having children, Kathy said:

> Yes, it was like I said initially, we waited two years and that was because we wanted to build our relationship as husband and wife before having children. We knew we didn't want to have them too far out, but we wanted to have them close enough to each other where they could grow up together. So both of them were planned

With her family and her now-completed master's degree in liberal arts, Kathy and her husband decided that in order for her to "climb the higher education ladder," she would have to

pursue a doctoral degree. As she and her husband discussed the possible family ramifications, they included their children, their almost 10-year-old daughter and their six-year-old son because she believes in open communication is the best for a strong family relationship: "If your children are old enough to understand, make sure that you're communicating with them and not assuming that they want to understand; because they really, truly will understand if you take the time to explain it to them."

Life during the program. From the beginning of the program, the family dynamic was very cohesive. The strong family structure was able to adapt to all of Kathy's academic and professional needs. Kathy related that because of her husband's ability to understand the needs of school, based on his own limited college experiences, allowed him to maneuver through potentially rough times:

> Because my husband was on board with me from the very beginning, there weren't any challenges that we had. He had only a high school education; he did go back to take some college classes, but chose not to complete a degree, which is fine because I didn't marry him for that, I married him because I loved him, but it helped him to understand exactly what I was going through so I leaned on him a lot when I got close to the end and my stress levels started to go up and he understood that.

Kathy also believes that the early intervention of open communication with her family allowed for them to avoid potential negative issues that would affect the family dynamic:

> Primarily because I was very open and we discussed everything and when I felt like you know, "Okay, I need you all to give me a break and give me a couple of days and work on the dissertation." It wasn't anything I waited until it got to a major point of tension,

> but when I saw those times coming, we all sat down and said, "Look, I have things that I have to do, you have to give me time to do it."

As we spoke, Kathy was hard-pressed to find any real issues that occurred that negatively affected her family relationship during her time in the program. I asked Kathy why she believed her doctoral program experience was so relationally challenge free, to which she responded:

> I mean my husband knew when I needed to, when he needed to take the kids when I needed time to do work and things of that nature. He was very open and willing to do that. And so I never had any problems during the program.

However, Kathy did admit one issue that did affect the family dynamic was the required weekends and the summer internship that were held on campus. Kathy explained that it was being away from her family for extended times that caused the family and her any discomfort that comes with not being together. She would often immerse herself in her work to pass the time, and thanks to technology, she could continue to communicate with her family.

Overcoming all obstacles to finish her degree was paramount for Kathy. She considers herself a person who sets goals and does what she needs to accomplish them. She not only wanted to finish the degree to enhance her professional possibilities, to finish for herself, but mostly to complete for her family:

> I was determined to get it done because it was a goal that I had set in my life and I knew that when I did it for me, I did it for my family. So, there was no stopping. There was no quitting. I knew I had sacrificed a lot, I didn't know that I was going to get emotional [gets tissues], I had sacrificed a lot of my family time to even do the coursework. So there was no way I was going to quit and let my family down. So I was determined I was going to get it done, period, end of sentence.

Life after the program. Kathy has finished her degree and she and her husband continued to add to the family by adopting a baby boy. Kathy believes finishing her degree not only has helped her in her professional life but also has served as an inspiration to her children. She wants to raise the educational bar for her children and at the same time display to them that education is achievable.

Kathy stated that her greatest achievement was beyond the degree. The excitement of her family enjoying and sharing her success and that her family was able to understand what she was doing and what she had accomplished:

> Allowing them to celebrate your accomplishment instead of feeling like you're kind of doing this on your own; but when you accomplish something about the program it allowed them to be there. It meant the world to me to have my kids be able to see me during my defense because they were able to see, "Okay, this is what mommy has been doing for the last however many years." And I remember because my dissertation committee, they were not pushovers. I mean, they drilled me on that dissertation, and I remember looking at my kids, and my daughter was sitting in the back of the room like she was almost in tears, "Oh my gosh, why are they asking so many hard questions?" or whatever the case may be. But I think they walked out of the room appreciating what I have done and understanding that it wasn't just somebody giving me a piece of paper that says "Doctor" on it, but that I had to work for that at all stages. So, allow them to celebrate in the accomplishment was well.

Dutch's Story

Dutch is the vice president of student affairs at a small Midwestern liberal arts college. She has a unique background, both personally and academically. She is very matter-of-fact in

her discussion. She was very open with her all aspects of her life and the "Burma Road," as she described her life's journey. Dutch has worked hard all of her life to grow spiritually, relationally, and educationally and has taken all of her life's lessons and uses them to help focus on the future for her family and for her.

Dutch was born the fifth child of five children in an East coast, inner-city family to an African American father and a Japanese and White mother. She was the only girl of her siblings. Her father completed his high school equivalency exams and conversely her mother completed a law degree. Dutch's mother never utilized her law degree because of traditional Japanese beliefs; a woman is a mother first, and she chose to stay home and raise her children. Dutch explained her own connection with this traditional understanding of the women's role in the family:

> She [Dutch's mother] did not practice because of the cultural barriers that were self-imposed. The women of her generation were not supposed to be the primary breadwinners of the family. It was the wrong thing to do. I hold that position as well, but so be it. That is how we honor our spouses—by giving them the honorable position of being primary breadwinners. So there is a lot behind that, and it is what I was exposed to and what I have accepted.

We did not speak much of her childhood or earlier experiences, Dutch did indicate that her childhood environment was not one where she wished to stay:

> I took the first opportunity to get out of my environment as a kid. At that time the service academies had recently opened for women. So, I applied and was accepted, I had an option to all of the academies, but I selected the one with the most versatile opportunities, and that was Annapolis—the most opportunities for women.

Education was not explicitly encouraged by her parents. Of her siblings, only Dutch attended college at any level. Women's independence was also not a priority of Dutch's childhood and she decided to leave her home and enter the Navy. Here she began the road not only to a profession but also to the beginnings of a family.

Life before the program. While Dutch was in the Navy, she received her bachelor's degree in both general engineering and political science. Also during this time, she met her future husband. Although they were not romantic due to serving in the same unit, they did become friends. After her bachelor's degree, she moved to a new position with the Marines and she and her future husband were assigned different units, allowing them to be married. Now married, Dutch decided to study for her master's degree in international relations. Dutch was now ready to start her family. During her master's program, she gave birth to their first child, a girl. "I gave birth to our first child while completing the master's degree. I actually was nursing while doing my comps. That was tough, but I was accommodated so it worked out very well."

Dutch's husband also believed in the value of higher education, earning his bachelor's degree while in the Navy and then he earned his MBA. Between her master's degree and entering the program, Dutch and her husband completed their family, which consisted of four children; three girls and a boy loving referred to as the "Crown Prince." Dutch described that they had children; after she and her husband were married:

> Well, you know that both of our religious beliefs and our personal values were such that when you get married, you bring children into your family. So we were blessed with children almost immediately . . . a little over a year after we were married. By their ages, obviously [four years age difference from oldest to youngest], they came pretty quickly, although the fourth was adopted. I was not able to have children after the third one, so

> we began the adoption process immediately after the third one, and our fourth child we adopted as a three year old.

Dutch and her husband were establishing themselves in the professional world along with establishing a family. Dutch stated that because she and her husband have military backgrounds, there was order in the house. Even with Dutch's independent spirit, she described the pre-program family as

> very traditional, very healthy, very clear divisions of labor in the house. We have always had very traditional expectations in terms of our children's conduct and behavior. We would be considered relatively strict parents. We were a household with not a lot of electronics. We weren't rich by any means. The children grew up without television and then they had limited exposure to television when they were in high school. They were all musicians, so they had very disciplined regimens of practice, and they were all athletes, so of course they were all very busy with that. That was their lives: church, school, athletics, and music. We were very dedicated as parents to make sure that whatever they decided to commit to that we were going to help them stay committed to those things.

While enjoying family life, Dutch also found another passion: education. During graduate school, Dutch took a job teaching math at a local high school. There she discovered her love of teaching and her love of education, especially with teaching remedial students. With her newfound passion of teaching and her desire to help remedial students, she entered the world of remedial math in higher education at a college that would blend her passion for education with her passion for her religion. It was during this time she was being recognized by administrators

and her skills allowed her rise through the ranks. With encouragement from the president of the college, Dutch returned to graduate school to obtain a doctorate.

Life during the program. With her husband working full-time, her children in school—the two older children in high school and the two younger children in junior high school—Dutch entered the Ph.D. program. She remembered there really was not much of a change in the family dynamic while she was doing her coursework. She did acknowledge that the children may have had a different perspective of this memory; perhaps her school obligations and her husband's lower level of control helped stabilize the family during this time:

> During the program there was very little interruption, really, in the children's life structure. They appreciated the fact that Mom was too busy to ride their butts about things. Their Dad's parenting approach was a lot less directive than mine, so they really kind of liked the fact that Dad let things slide, like the cleanliness of their rooms and whether their clothes were ironed for school and that sort of thing that I was particular about. I didn't have the time to really do much about it. I had to discipline myself not to take the time and energy to deal with those issues that in the grand scheme of things were not that important. I learned that in the program—which I did not expect.

Dutch understood that the program not only helps develop the person academically, but the offshoots also help develop the person. As she relinquished more control of the family organization to her husband and that the family was learning and growing in new ways with less direct control of hers, she also realized that she was growing as a person:

> The program became a human development program for me, in that I learned how to deal with the kinds of issues that used to get me all upset, and to put them aside and realize that they weren't all that important. The little girl's hair bobs between the cushions of the

> couch would not hurt anybody, or the fries that were petrifying in the van were not going to hurt anybody. So, the compulsivity that I dealt with regarding cleanliness and neatness and order had to be dealt with, and that was essentially through the program because there were more important things to worry about.

The knowledge that her husband had family issues under control allowed Dutch to focus on the program. Because of this she finished the program in three years. She attributes this to a strong family dynamic. She had a huge smile of understanding as she told of a time when she realized that even if there was a little trouble, it would be all right, that her husband and children would live through this time:

> So, I would go down into my office in the basement of our house and I'd study or I'd write and shut the door and there would be what I considered bedlam upstairs, and I just had to discipline myself and say, "Daddy's got this under control." They were middle school, junior high school, and high school, but when they are that close in age, and there are three teenage girls in the house, it can get kind of volatile. My husband who is one of seven children (I'm one of five), dealt with it very, very well. The kids dealt with it well. In fact, I think it was healthy for them to get out from under "tiger mom."

Life after the program. After receiving her doctorate, Dutch's professional and personal lives have continued to grow. She loves her job as vice president and her 27-year marriage is "as strong as ever." The children are now in their 20s and the three older children each have bachelor's degrees. Education is still very important in the family; however, now that Dutch is finished with her degree, her children were not always glad she completed:

> In fact, about six months after I completed my dissertation phase I was running "rick-shot" over the kids and directing them to clean this, put this away, do this, my son said

this: “When are you going to write another one of those books? Cause you need to go back down in the basement, back down in your office.”

Dutch laughed as she told stories of her children and their newfound “freedom” when mom was busy with her Ph.D. She knows they are proud of her and her accomplishments:

> I don’t have any worries that I didn’t give the children enough attention. In fact, I think they needed less of my attention at that time, I was probably more intrusive than I needed to be and would have been had I not had the program.

She also understands that it was a great learning time for herself and for her own self-satisfaction. She is happy with her doctoral journey and her own self-efficacy. Dutch gave another smile as she reminisced,

> But, you know, all in all it was a healthy time for the family; it was actually a great time for me because I learned how to back off at a time in the lives of the children when it was important for me to back off. And I don’t know if I would’ve had this opportunity and self-discipline to do that if I weren’t tasked with the program. So, in hindsight it was a gift that our family made it in order for our teenager and preteen kids to have a little bit of room, because I was the particularly strict one of the parents.

Gabby’s Story

Gabby overcame personal and academic adversity to achieve her goal of earning a Ph.D. Gabby’s story began in a loving and deeply religious family. She was the eldest of six children. Although her parents were not formally educated, they worked hard to support their children and believed in education for their children. Gabby explained the background of her parents and told of her perceptions of her parents and their role in her early understanding of education:

> Beautiful, beautiful mother and father. Beautiful. I always had a mother and father in the house. So I thought everybody had a Mom and Dad, I really did. They were from Mississippi, West Mississippi. My father was a farmer, my mom stayed at home, she was a wife. He never wanted his wife out in the world. He always wanted his wife to stay in the house. And as far as the education is concerned, you would have thought my mom had a Ph.D. My Mom received a third-grade education and my Dad received a sixth-grade education. But yet they were able to produce three Ph.Ds. out of the family.

The inspiration of her parents and their devotion to their children helped Gabby and her siblings to enjoy the happiness of their childhood in a warm and loving environment. As Gabby spoke of her early childhood experiences, the conversation revolved around the solid family connection and the center of the family, her parents. She described this closeness of the family as being the motivation and the strength of the family unit: "When you think about family, it's just not my immediate family, but it's also the family that goes beyond that. My mother, my father, sisters and brothers; I'm from a very strong family."

The early experiences of Gabby's family life helped develop her into the academic she is currently. She works as a director of student support services and the Trio program, helping socioeconomically challenged students to succeed in college. She attributed her want to give back to those who need assistance to her deep religious faith and to her early days when even though financially they did not have much, the loving spirit made them wealthy:

> We thought we were rich, but in essence we were what they call "pawer," poor. We didn't have anything, in fact; we were the first family on the block to have a color television. And all the other kids would come over to visit our house and so we just always thought we were rich, but we were actually poor. But we were in a household

that was filled with love, we just loved each other and we still do today. As a matter of fact, we still go to my mom's house for Sunday dinner to just vent about our activities during the week. So, pure love there.

Life before the program. Gabby's early life was surrounded and grounded in the security of a loving family. Even with this healthy environment, life has many surprises and sometimes life's surprises happen early in life. Gabby described herself as an "inquisitive young woman" and at sixteen, she had a child. She raised the child in an environment of love and finished high school. Gabby thought that her new life with her new child would end her formal education future.

As we discussed Gabby's life before the program, she was very excited as she spoke of her children and of how earning her Ph.D. has been a lifelong dream of hers. However, when she spoke of her first marriage, cautious candor and an uneasy feeling entered the conversation and she did not go into great depth about that time. She was married to her first husband at the age of 23, seven years after the birth of her first child. As they raised their family, Gabby remained a stay-at-home mother with no inclination of any more education. Unfortunately, as they were about to have their third child, the marriage ended.

Tragically during this period, Gabby's first son was murdered. Gabby was devastated. She was now grieving the loss of her eldest son; her marriage had ended, and she had two sons relying on her. As usual in Gabby's life, she relied on her deep religious faith and her ever present family to see her through this most depressing of times. Soon after this low point in her life, Gabby met and married her second husband. Gabby's life began to prosper as she earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees and began to work for a branch campus of a large Midwestern university. As her career developed, she changed jobs and began working for a

technical college in the same state. As this technical college evolved into a state college, the demand for more Ph.Ds. began and Gabby was one of the first selected by her institution to enter a cohort at one of the state's research institutions. Gabby knew this was her calling from an early experience in her life:

> The educational path was clear to me early on. As a child I used to hear my pastor introduce his son who was a Ph.D. I was an itty-bitty girl at church and every time this Ph.D. person would come to church from overseas or wherever, my pastor introduced him and he would stand up and we would all applaud. And I used to wonder what about this Ph.D. person? So as a little girl I was inquisitive about it. So, a lot of times when my parents couldn't find me; I would be in the library, on the floor, reading these journals or whatever and would never understand what it meant, but I wanted to be like that Ph.D. person. So early on, I knew that I wanted this big degree. I just didn't know what it was; I didn't know what it was.

Life during the program. Relying on faith and family are two constants in Gabby's life, and she used both of them as she entered the doctoral program. Even though Gabby was both academically and emotionally strong, she often felt that she was not equal to her cohort members. This insecurity was perpetuated by being the only African American student in her cohort. Reaching deep into her soul and trusting her faith and her family, Gabby entered the doctoral program but occasionally needed the guidance and encouragement of her family to keep motivated:

> What would I have done without my sisters and my brothers and my mother? They were always . . . I can remember going to my mom's house before traveling to the university, on that lonely highway. And my mom would walk me to that door, I'm already feeling

> that I'm not as good enough, that I'm not as educated enough, like the other people in my cohort. My mom would stop me at the door before leaving, and sometimes she would kiss me on the forehead and she would tell me, "Baby, you're just as good as anybody else, you're just as smart, you just don't know it yet, but when you do find it out… you'll be more comfortable with what you're doing. So go do what you have to do and come back home." And that would really encourage me. So that was how my family was and is now.

Gabby worked very hard and was successful for a time. Sadly, two family tragedies and an academic setback prolonged Gabby's achievement of finishing her doctorate in the same timeframe as her cohort. During the programs, was when her son passed: Gabby had to depend on her own strength, her family, and her faith because Gabby's oldest brother passed and she was now the eldest of the siblings. This was a transformative time for Gabby. She was not only working towards her Ph.D., but she had to again assume the eldest child role and lead the family in the healing process:

> I believe I was about to take my prelims and my, my beautiful chairperson at that time gave me permission to go home, bury my brother, and then come back. And so that left me being the eldest in the family, you know, and so, I am the stronger sibling, if you will, that's holding five brothers and sisters together. So, I think that's my position in the family and the doctoral program teaching us to be a leader had a lot to do with that.

With the burial of her brother, Gabby was now faced with the prospect of losing her marriage. Gabby nonchalantly answered a question about changes in the family by stating, "The only, um, being that changed in my family is my husband and I divorced. I think that had a detrimental effect of course on the children." Gabby explained that during the dissertation phase,

she and her husband divorced. Gabby discussed how he was a familiar face with the cohort and he understood Gabby's time commitment to the program, but she surmised the real reason for the divorce was her husband's pride and traditional value system.

> I think the stress of me not being at home and my husband finally see me become an independent person scared him. I think it scared him to the point that he became, if you will, intimidated by it and see, it's . . . it's different when women go on into the world to work even at home. Of course, when we go out into the world of work we carry the same values. What we do is for the family and for some reason men, men are challenged by that. So I had happened to have been married to one of those men that were challenged by it, you know, his wife going out into the work world because she was so used to me being at home doing my thing. So it did weaken my marriage.

After fulfilling family responsibilities and working through the grieving process of losing a brother and getting a divorce, Gabby returned to the program only to find she was academically ineligible to complete the program. Gabby had not passed a required statistics course and was informed that she would not be able to continue unless she completed the course. Once again faced with an obstacle, Gabby was not deterred. She asserted,

> The only problem I had with the university, and I don't know if you know this, and I probably did share it with you, in the first cohort, once I couldn't pass the statistics exam, back in our day, it was a two-part exam, multiple-choice, and it was a paper or essay. The essay part was the hardest part; I passed that with flying colors. But I could not get through the multiple-choice. That put me out of the program, right. I suffered. I started writing appeal letters for about a year and a half but I would never finish an appeal letter. It was this angel [the program chair] that came to the program that called me that day and

> says, "Hey, I know about your situation, but if you're interested in coming back; these are the things that you would have to do." And one of the things that he wanted me to do was to pass stats with a B. Man! Once they allowed me to come back I passed that with that in A, and I began to tutor other students in the cohort.

Although Gabby did not finish with her cohort, she did earn her Ph.D. the same year both of her sisters graduated with their Ph.Ds. from the same university.

Gabby's life during the program was full of challenges, but she did not let that stop her. With the help of her family and faith, she overcame the challenges and considers herself a stronger person. In regards to her children and the effect of the program on them, Gabby posited that was so stressful on them and affected their social, academic, and cultural values:

> When I think about my boys, you know, beautiful, beautiful African American men, gentlemen, if you will. No matter how many times I would put them in school or in college, they oftentimes failed or they didn't finish their degrees. So that was, that was a lot of stress on me and my family. Because everyone else was going to school, as a matter of fact, my little sister who is a stronger person than I, she even wrote her dissertation on African American boys, and kind of like, centered my boys in it because we couldn't understand how all of these women, strong, educated women could be around yet my children didn't pursue degrees, I don't know if it was rebellion or not having the mom at home, but it definitely did affect us in that regard.

Life after the program. Gabby's life after the program is still hard, but she is very happy and treasures the time she shares with her family. Family and faith are still Gabby's foundations and will always be: "Family relationships are very similar for me in my opinion, to religion; without a family relationship or family support or religion, how can you exist? So, it is

very important to me." She and her sisters not only use their doctorates in their professional lives but also promote education to the younger generations and work to instill the intrinsic values of education. Even with her immense love of education, Gabby does not impose education on everyone. Her eyes sparkled and a huge smile sprung on her face as she spoke of her boys and what they are doing now:

> And it's interesting, and now my children are doing well. The middle child who always loved music, raised up in the church, always played the drums, now he's making music and doing quite well. I hear today he's about to get married, and he hasn't told me that yet, but I've heard that from another family member. [Laughter]. And the baby always wanted to be a police officer, I always put them in different colleges or whatever, but he never went on. But it's interesting he's in the Army now and he has done quite well for himself. His duties now is actually working on a computer and shooting down missiles. So he is now in a position that will probably be security for the rest of his life. So people say we want our children to get college degrees, but sometimes a college degree is not for everybody. My oldest has done well, he did this stretch with the Navy and now he is home, you know, unfortunately, he is suffering from the service and, and they are taking care of him, but yet he is mentally unstable, so, I am pretty much his caretaker, if you will. But, you know, he's going to be fine. I have the faith that he is going to be fine.

Shelly's Story

The most acrimonious of the participants' stories belongs to Shelly. Shelly's doctoral pursuit is a mirror of her professional career in higher education. Shelly is an easy-going and fun-loving person, but where her family and her goals are concerned, she is focused and unyielding. During the interview, the conversation fluctuated from serious to jovial and back to

serious. There is much pain and resentment in Shelly's story along with deep feelings of outside abandonment and despondency.

Shelly was fourth of five children, four girls and one boy. Shelly's childhood was modest, but very loving and close relationships were a foundation. Education was prominent as Shelly is a second-generation college student. Her father received a bachelor's degree and her mother was ABD [as is Shelly] but cut short her education due to "family responsibilities." Shelly and her oldest sister each earned master's degrees, her brother and sister earned bachelor's degrees, and her youngest sister earned an associate's degree.

Even with a strong background in education, Shelly began her educational pursuits later in life. She worked a few different jobs and then at the age of 26, she decided to become an elementary education teacher. During her pursuit of a bachelor's degree, she met and married her future husband. She graduated four years later and began a teaching career. Shelly presumed that her educational pursuits were done, and with a new husband and a new career, the couple decided it was time to start a family. Shelly believed that her life was now in place and that was the way she would live her days. She stated with a sarcastic tone, "Now I would start my perfect life and all would be wonderful."

Life before the program. Shelly and her husband each soon began their individual careers. The family seemed to be very content, and they were soon blessed with a baby girl. As parents, Shelly and her husband were excited and only wanted the best for their girl. Each had been devoting time between career and family. Soon they were blessed with another girl, and the "perfect life" seemed to be coming true for Shelly and her family—but even the best laid plans and perfect lives sometimes have unforeseen twists.

After a few years of balancing and developing themselves in their respective careers and within their community, Shelly's husband was given the opportunity to advance in his career. Although this was a large monetary gain for the family, it meant that the perfect life was about to be shaken. The career opportunity was in another state and would mean the family would have to move and start again. Although Shelly understood the benefits for the family with this move, it meant she would have to restart her own career. During the time the family was developing as the girls were growing and beginning school, Shelly continued her own schooling and completed her master's degree. Completing this degree level helped her in her current position, but it became a detriment when looking for a new position in a new school district:

> I was really beginning to set my life where I wanted it. The girls were so happy with their school and were making friends, I was securing myself a future in the school district, and my husband was settling in for a nice career. Then we moved and although his career began to really shine, mine stopped, and the girls and I had to start over.

Although Shelly was a little resentful, she also understood that this could lead to an opportunity for herself and the girls. With the girls enrolled in a local school, Shelly began to teach at a local community college. She quickly began to enjoy teaching in higher education and, when a position for full-time faculty member presented itself, Shelly applied and was offered the position. She began her second career in education and with this new position; the opportunities seemed to come easier for her. Shelly described her family relationship before her higher education endeavors began:

> The children were everything for me. I knew that my husband's work would demand that he be out of town for extended periods, so I decided I would focus on the children. When my husband was in town, we devoted our time to the children. We were a very close-knit

> family where myself, as was my husband, were very, very wrapped up in our children and our children's activities. We followed everything that they did.

As time progressed and the opportunities for Shelly to ascend the administrative ladder arose, Shelly's focus shifted from her children to her career. As we were speaking, Shelly indicated she believed her goal at that time as to climb as high as she could, that her success was in direct correlation as her husband's professional aspirations. Before she started to climb the higher education ladder, which included her Ph.D. pursuit, Shelly realized that the girls were growing and were developing lives of their own both were beginning high school. They were still very important to her, but now her own development began to play a larger role in the family dynamic. Shelly reflected that

> it was time for me to continue my career. My supervisors were very impressed with my work and more opportunities were opening for me. It was a great time for me. My hard work was paying off, and I was able to make changes at the school that I thought were for the best. I was also becoming a role model for my girls. From then, I went into administration as an assistant dean and at that point, it was suggested to me that I should pursue my Ph.D. Obtaining my Ph.D. would open more doors, plus, I would be able to fulfill what my mother didn't. So, I entered the program. I was so excited and so ready.

Life during the program. As Shelly's academic and professional careers were beginning to blossom, her family life began to suffer. With her husband already frequently traveling for his job, Shelly was left with the raising of their two teenage daughters. As we spoke about the family life before the program to family life as Shelly began the program, her tone went from excited to very disillusioned as she described how she saw the family dynamic during this time:

> My family life became almost nonexistent. I had to put so much of my family life on hold to overextending myself with taking on a new job as well as entering the Ph.D. program. When I consider my role in my family, I am the mother. I am the one who provides all of the emotional nurturing and pretty much every type of close relationship with my children is with me. My husband is very supportive. But I am the one with the major support as far as buying the girls everything, taking the girls to where they needed to be, and just being there for emotional support, and during the program, I was not there. I was so overwhelmed with school work and my profession, I could not do it all. There was a huge rift in my family and it took me a while to see it.

Shelly continued to discuss how her own goals for her career often did not coincide with her family's goals and ideas of what Shelly should be prioritizing. This disconnect caused much anguish and fighting within all members of the family. Shelly discussed her family's fluctuating support at the beginning of the program,

> from the very beginning my family was very supportive but once they realized how much time this program is going to take they became a little less supportive and over time it got to the point where my children were no longer little girls but were now teenagers. They basically had an attitude where, "It doesn't matter; Mom's not around." So that hurt me personally because I was always the one that my children came to, when there were issues and that was changing.

As Shelly's role of confidant and family problem solver seemed to diminish in the eyes of her daughters, Shelly noticed her role of mother was being replaced:

The next thing I found was that my daughter's friends' mothers became surrogate mothers, which really, really hurt me. I did not want my children going to other mothers for help, guidance, assistance in any way, shape, or form. It was a very hard situation for me.

Shelly became emotional as we spoke of the dramatic change in her family relationship and that she believed she was losing control of her role in the family. More than once Shelly indicated she was hurt by what happened to her family relationship during the program and that she does not lay blame solely on the program, but acknowledges that she had been warned by her supervisors, two who had completed the same program, to be more prepared for the change in the family:

> I'm very angry about it because I think some of that could have been alleviated or never even come about if I weren't in the program. I was told several times by my boss, as well as my teachers, that I needed to put the Ph.D. program first. I was even told that I should, "Take photos of your children at this age; put them on the mantelpiece, because you won't get to see them for a few years until you are done with the program."

Shelly worked hard during the coursework part of the program and was successful in her studies. She was prepared to finish but with issues at work and within the program and her goal to reclaim a prominent role in her family, Shelly did not complete the dissertation phase of the program. In response to this, Shelly stated,

> I realized I prioritized incorrectly. That was unacceptable for me. I worked hard for the coursework, but I was losing my family and I could not allow that. Losing my family was not the only reason I did not finish, but it was surely the major and most important reason.

Life after the program. Along with not finishing the program, Shelly's work life changed dramatically at the conclusion of the coursework: "My school decided to restructure the administrative levels, and I soon found myself either going back to faculty or out of a job." She had some disagreements with her supervisors, which left her on the outside of the administrative clique, and she decided to return to faculty. Although this choice drastically cut her salary, it opened many hours of free time to spend with her children:

> After the program, after the two years of coursework, my older daughter was 17 and was getting ready for her senior year and leaving home for college, so my relationship with her was quite a bit different because of where she was in her life. With my younger daughter, we got back into the old rhythm of me being the support mechanism and being her person that would be there when she needed any help. It was depressing to have missed two years of my daughters' lives, but I am glad we have redeveloped our bonds.

Happily, Shelly was able to mend the rift between her daughters and herself. It took some work, but Shelly believes they are right back to preprogram relationship levels: "We are happy. I am always there for them and they know that. I will never leave them again." However, the rebuilding of the bond with her husband was not so easily mended:

> With my husband it was very difficult through the program, as well as after because while I was in the midst of the program, he took a new position where he traveled a lot so he was not home and I was the sole support for the children for a good year and a half while he was on the road during the program. This caused much animosity in me. I held him responsible for me having to hold the family together and I was in no position to do that. We have since worked out our issues and are rebuilding our relationship. It is hard, but worth doing, so we will do it.

As for Shelly's education attainments, the rebuilding of her education has not been as successful as the rebuilding of her family relationships. She had thought with her children in college, she would now focus on finishing her Ph.D., but as she stated, "I have tried to meet with the professors but they don't get back to me. If it's not important to them, it's not important to me. So, I am done."

Summary of Participants' Stories

The 10 married participants with children who shared their stories had similar yet unique aspects of their doctoral journeys. All of the participants, with the exception of Dave, had children before they entered the program. All but Shelly and Kurt finished the program. All of the participants were employed in higher education and were also employed full time while they were in the doctoral program. All but Kurt and Shelly enjoyed successful employment opportunities during their doctoral school experience.

Education is a major part of the participants' lives, but this has not always been the case. Seven of the 10 participants are first-generation college students. Although the majority of participants come from families with four or more siblings, only Dutch had four children; the rest of the participants had three or fewer children. Gabby and Kurt both started, stopped, and then restarted their doctoral pursuits. Whereas Kurt and Shelly attributed the friction and strain on of their relationships as a major reason for them not finishing the program but, Gabby was the only participant who divorced during her time in the program, and she was able to complete.

Pete's laid-back attitude and his ability to focus have served him well in his doctoral pursuit. He also credited his "amazing wife and wonderful children" for supporting him throughout the process. He believes that this experience has brought him closer to his family and that he is a role model not only to his children but to his students and colleagues as well.

Kurt keeps a positive attitude about his own unsuccessful doctoral education while motivating others about their educational paths. Kurt understands that his attempts at a doctorate were influenced by more than just his family issues but he indicated that "my family crisis was the main reason for me not completing." Kurt does not believe he will attempt to complete again. He said he is very happy where he is and looks forward to continuing to make his family happy.

Tim credited his strong family background and his years in the factory before college as his main strengths in his successful education career. He has used his strengths to continually climb the higher educational ladder and credited the knowledge learned from the program for his continued success. Tim believes that the program made his family stronger. His "la mas importante" view of family relationship was his guiding light during the program and his ability to adjust his schedule around the family limited the conflicts that lead to family troubles.

Shari began the program "because I felt like I was ready to do something different." And that is exactly what she got. Her attainment of her degree allowed her to continue to help students in need. Her leadership knowledge and her Ph.D. have led her to become the "founding director of the student achievement center" at her university. She admitted the program was not always a smooth road for her family relationship. She credited her husband's higher education experience and his understanding for her completion. Shari and her family are very happy, and Shari continues to support her own children and her students in their educational journeys.

Debbie has had a long and winding life journey, and through it all, she has persisted. Her family relationship was a bit strained while she worked for her doctorate. Her willingness to sacrifice family time for her goal did cause some issues in the family, but she did succeed in both obtaining her Ph.D. and keeping her family intact. Debbie is satisfied with her career for the

time being as she is now the director of her department. The support of her family helped motivate her through the program. She did admit her "leadership" of the family helped get the family through the program. Her family is and has been "somewhat matriarchal because that's just the way it's ended up." As she focuses on her family for now, Debbie sees her family relationship only getting stronger after her "survival" of the doctoral program.

Dave loves to talk about his family. It was with great emotion Dave relived his experiences of the doctoral program and the life-changing events that happened during that time. During the interview, Dave laughed and he cried. This was symbolic of the emotional roller coaster of his time during the program. Dave and his wife had children during the program. Of all of the interviews, he is the only one who did this. As he stated, "we didn't necessarily plan at that point of when we were having children, it was just the way it happened. It was little conscious, but it was sort of role of the dice kind of see what happens thing." Dave is very glad his children were young when he was in the program. He believes that because his wife had experience in higher education and his children did not remembering the struggles of the program, his family has remain strong and happy.

Kathy began her college career in accounting and never saw herself in the education field. With the support of her family and her finding her passion for education, she now spends her time as the dean of liberal arts at her college, working with students and staff to find their own passions. Kathy was happy to state that her family relationship is stronger after the program, but did admit there were times when the focus was more on school than on family. Her family supported her throughout the program, and she credited her husband with helping her cope with the physical detachment, "because he understood and understands the sacrifices that I

had to make in order to get where I am today." Kathy and her family are very happy now and recently adopted a one-year-old boy.

Dutch is a very strong woman who balances this strength with traditional women's roles. At work she is executive vice president of her college, and at home she is mom. While her self-proclaimed "Burma road" of her education has led her to her current position, she places her family and her family role as mother as her top priority. She and her husband's military backgrounds have helped them to balance their careers and family life. Their family life is often strict, but there is an abundance of love. She credited their understanding and her husband's ability to "take command" of the household during her studies for allowing her to focus on her degree and for keeping the family relationship strong. Although Dutch's children are grown and have lives of their own, she and her husband are still active in their lives.

Gabby overcame tragedy, divorce, and work unrest to fulfill her education goal of earning a doctorate. After losing her eldest boy to violence, Gabby turned her loss to love of her other sons and to helping others obtain their educational dreams. She is working as director of student support services at her college and constantly wears a smile. Although her doctoral journey was interrupted by divorce and lack of support at her work, Gabby did not let these issues stop her. Even as an "itty-bitty girl" in her church watching the pastor's Ph.D. son, Gabby knew she wanted to earn her own Ph.D. With hard work and the love and support of her sons and her immediate family, Gabby succeeded. She is very happy helping her grown sons as they accomplish their goals, but she understands that "life is tough." But with her family and her faith, Gabby works hard to keep moving forward.

Shelly is an intriguing person. She stated she is happy with her life and her career even though she did not finish her program. She still seems to hold a wish that she would have

finished. She admitted to the struggles of trying to hold together her family while she was in the program and her husband was traveling with his work. She spoke with anger in her voice when she discussed the strains on her family relationship as she was often "forced to put the program before her family, and that was just mean." Shelly decided to stop pursuing her degree and focus on her family after finishing her coursework. She did attempt to complete the process of readmitting to the program, but "It seemed like they didn't want me back. No one returned my calls and emails. So I just quit." Shelly says she is glad they did not answer because even though she had some setbacks at work, she can now just "do my job and then I go home." Her daughters are out of the house but she and her husband are very active in their children's lives.

Although each participant has a unique story, they shared much in common as married doctoral students with children. Finding the words to describe the unique challenges and successes was not always easy for the participants. The experiences of the participants elicited a range of emotions from happy to sad, from gratitude to resentment. It is important to remember that each participant is an individual with memories that seem forever set in stone but become very pliable with time.

The following section will analyze five themes found in the data: support—"can I do this alone?" the effect of a doctoral program on the marital relationship, walkin' the tightrope: balancing it all, filling the gender gap, and advice for present and future doctoral students who are married with children.

Themes

The purpose of this study was to understand more clearly the lived experiences of married doctoral students with families enrolled in a cohort-based education program. After transcribing the semi-structured interviews, field notes, and follow-up emails, analysis of the data elicited five themes: support—"can I do this alone?," the effect of the program on their

marriages, walkin' the tightrope: balancing it all, filling the gender gap, and advice for present and future doctoral students who are married with children. Subthemes were also generated from the data and will be discussed in Chapter 5. This chapter will reveal each emergent theme based on participants' voices and experiences.

Support— "Can I do this alone?"

The first theme to emerge was support. This theme discusses the role of support during the program including the support of family, spirituality, the institution (both where the married student was employed and the institution where the married student was enrolled), and the cohort.

Although Shelly and Kurt did not complete the dissertation phase, they did complete the coursework. They and all of the participants agreed without support from family members, they would not have been able to enter a doctoral program and progress through the coursework. When family support was supplemented with spirituality support, institutional support, or cohort support, their ability to persist during the course work component of the program was elevated. Institutional support includes both the doctoral school of attendance and the professional institution where the participant was employed. The level of support reported by the participants ranged from 0% to 100% support, depending on the subtheme.

Many times the participants relied on a mix of support systems. Support systems often varied in rank depending on the situation. For instance, Kurt relayed a story about when he was not sure if he could finish a paper, and "my wife was feeling good and she took our daughter to her mother's house while I finished the paper. I could not have done that without family support." Gabby remembered a time when she needed cohort support because her employment institution was not supporting her; "I wasn't sure how to finish this paper, I had no time to take

from work and a wonderful cohort member helped me through. She worked with me to finish. I was so thankful."

The first of the sources of support is family support. The decision to enter a doctoral program is a difficult one. When there is a family to consider, this choice becomes even more difficult. Each participant recognized the role of her or his partner and immediate and extended family in the student's ability to progress. Sharing the familial role and adding the student role is not always easy for the married student, but is also a process for the family. Dave underlined this sentiment:

> So the support structure of that partner is critical, absolutely critical from the beginning, throughout the process and carrying that burden, and being able to do that. It also needed a certain amount of understanding from some of those others, like the in-laws and close family and friends that you might not always be able to be present, and that [not being present] was okay. That also created the need for understanding though, that when you were done, the opportunity to be able to come back in to the family and back into the relationship.

As each participant described the decision to enroll and the uncertainty of what to expect, the need for family support emerged. The need to gather family support was paramount in the consideration of whether or not to enter the program for all of the participants. In discussing her decision to apply for the program, Shelly stated, "There was no way I was going to even apply for this program without my family agreeing. There was no way. I couldn't do this alone!" Although Pete agreed that family support was important for his success, and he and his family did discuss and agree that he should pursue his doctorate, Pete was the only participant who believed that even with lowered family support he would have finished the degree:

> You have to decide in your mind whether you're going to stick your toes in the pool or you're going to jump in the deep end of the pool. I chose to jump in the deep end of the pool because it was something I wanted to do, and sometimes it takes me a while to get to that point to say, "Yes, this is indeed what I want to do." I may flip-flop sometimes, but when I make the decision to do it, I'm all in.

Having the entire family's support is an integral part in student success; all participants agreed their partners' support was the most important. Shari discussed the importance of her husband's support and the significance of shared support between partners. As each of them continued their education, one spouse supported the other. Shari's husband had completed his master's degree when she enrolled in the doctoral program. She recalled,

> He had gone through that earlier, and I had kind of carried the load there. And so I think there was the sense of "Okay, I'll step up and do it to support you." So I think there was that sense together, and both of us really thinking this was about creating opportunities for our family. And whether it happened the way we envisioned or not, perhaps, but it was about us as a family, it wasn't just about us as individuals.

As most of the participants were first-generation college students and the first to seek a doctoral degree, the unknowns of this level of education were numerous. Entering the liminal stage of doctoral program can be worrisome to say the least: "I didn't know what to expect and I was a little concerned; no one in my family had ever been to college, let alone a doctoral program, but I knew I had my family there for me," stated Gabby. Shelly had a different higher educational exposure than Gabby, but concurred about the unknown and unprepared state of the student before entering the doctoral program. Shelly asserted:

> Even though I had a master's degree and had co-workers who went through this program, my family and I had no idea. I tried to explain to them what I had been told to expect and how we should prepare, but even with all of the discussion and explanations, we could not comprehend what was to come. I, we . . . were not prepared and I believe that was the beginning of me not making it.

Family support whether during the decision process of entering the program or family support during the program was viewed by the participants as extremely important. Dave explained that his wife was extremely supportive even during her two pregnancies while Dave was in the program. Dave acknowledged, "She sacrificed for me." Gabby stated her close family ties is the reason she finished, "So, family support during the doctoral days, especially among my sisters, was very important to me." As Kathy thought about family support and the program, she paused and summed up her recollection of the importance of the broader scope of the family support network by indicating how family members were

> very helpful. I referred to their [Kathy's children's] godmother taking them for a couple of weeks, my mom stepped up to the plate, my cousin stepped up to the plate. It seemed like there were a lot of people stepping up to the plate and supporting me to help me do the things that I could not do myself because I was gone, or having to work on papers or whatever the case may be so family support is key, it's crucial, especially when you have kids.

Tim discussed a concern of the family involvement in the decision to enter the program; the adjustment of the children to Dad having to focus more time to studies which could lead to less time with Dad. Tim responded to this concern in his discussions with his family prior to entering the program: "No. I think because they grew up around colleges and universities they

understood the environments and they understood what I was doing with all of it." He underlined this comment with his pride in his family's adjustment to the dramatic shift in time spent with Dad, "Pride in my wife, pride in my kids, the way they handled things while I spent less time with them."

Second in order of support was spiritual support. Kathy stated her understanding of the power of her faith and its direct influence in her ability to persist in the program. She often looks back and is thankful for the role her spirituality played in her completing the program:

> Prayer. Honestly, um, because I don't ever forget where my strength came from in order to do everything that I needed to do, and sometimes I do look back and say, "Boy, I don't know how you did it." So I know that it was the grace of God that I did it, and to get through this.

Although Shari did not specifically indicate the influence of spirituality during her interview, she indicated a strong religious upbringing. Shari related that her parents had Catholic upbringing through their [the parent's] schooling. In that same regard, Tim commented on his strong religious foundation by recalling that his father "took off on the Sabbath, the Sunday."

Gabby was not shy about expressing her devotion to her beliefs and the support they gave her, in perfect step with the support her family shared with her. She believes she persisted in this program for a higher purpose. Gabby understands that she is a very strong person, but credited her ability to persist, even with life and work's setbacks to her faith:

> It was never about me. It was about those people that I was going to help. It was about my faith. It was about my God, because I could not have done this without a belief in God. . . . So, I think that's the main reason for my persistence in the program and it's true, because now when people come my way I say, "Okay God, you're sending me

somebody else to show them what I had to go through to get my Ph.D.; and as a result of me getting my Ph.D., other people have followed in my footsteps."

Tim and Dutch recommend the necessity of finding a person or persons in the cohort with whom a more spiritual connection can be developed. This spiritual bonding helped them to maintain focus and find a shoulder of a friend with whom they could work out problems and celebrate their accomplishments. As Dutch previously stated, she relied heavily on her "prayer buddy" to make it. She also commented on the entire family praying for strength and wisdom before and during her time in the program. Tim concluded the necessity to connect spiritually with family and others in the cohort:

> I am talking about strong spiritual, so our spirituality is something we talked about all the time on the phone or via email. So we didn't just talk about the program, we were talking about our purpose or a calling; so when I said what's driving, what's motivating you? I remember having conversations with cohort members about why they were doing this? What they hoped to get out of life? How did they want to show up in the world with this degree? It was a lot of spiritual stuff that we talked about. Those were the connectors. So you have to find a peer that has similar values and drives, I think that helps you in a program like that.

Dutch intertwined her beliefs in most aspects of the program. She spoke of her faith impacting everything from the lives of her children, to getting through the program, to working at a Catholic college. Dutch explained how she truly admired and respected her cohort members, but she was more connected to those who had "congruent faith lives." Dutch discussed her love of her entire cohort, but it was her individual connection with her cohort prayer buddy that completed her support system:

> So, you know, it was sort of a synergism, support from your family, but as well from other parties in the program. And you do find people in the program, I'm sure you saw that, with whom you connect for various reasons. So he and I were the only ones who were at private institutions, faith-based institutions, who happened to have faith lives and who could rely upon each other, and we became quite good friends. And to this day we are still good friends.

Institutional support in regard to the institution of employment was appreciated by the majority of the participants. Although all participants commented on how important family support was to them and their progress during the program, there were mixed emotions on the satisfaction of their institutions of employment and their institution of study in relation to the student's success in the program. In the case of institution of employment, all but Gabby, Kurt, and Shelly were satisfied with the support offered. In the case of the institution of study, all were generally satisfied, but there were some issues that the participants believed could be addressed, specifically mentoring and more family inclusion. "Flexibility" was a common response to how participants' work institutions supported them during the program. The cohort program of this study was designed where the class met through a two-way video session on a prescribed day, Wednesday or Thursday. This is not always conducive to work schedules. Flexibility of a work institution is necessary for academic progress. As Debbie explained, not all work institutions were willing to acquiesce with their student-employee:

> But, you know, I think of institutional support, I think of my immediate supervisor. He allowed me to take Wednesday off and flex my schedule. There are some departments at the university that do not allow that kind of flexibility. When I was at another university I did not have that flexibility. If I took a class it had to be a night class and it could not

> interrupt in any way what I was doing in the office during business hours. They had no flexibility in any way.

This need for flexibility was especially true in relation to the participants' supervisor and coworkers. Shari recalls how her team helped to "pick up the slack" when she was either attending class or had to attend her cohort weekends:

> But I was getting time so that . . . that really, being able to take time and to be able to take it when I needed it really helped . . . . But I had the support of my coworkers. I mean we were really a tight group. You know . . . it was a student support services, and the Trio program. It was those groups, and I was the director. And we all came together. They cared, and they were all interested. They would pick up the slack when I wasn't here.

Recognizing "great institutional support," Tim recalls the overwhelming support of his supervisor and his staff. This support from all levels was motivation for Tim to be successful:

> Well, like I said, [the university] has great institutional support. My boss was vice chancellor of student affairs, who I reported to—awesome, awesome support, very encouraging guy; curious about what I was learning; curious about what the program was like, because we were the first cohort going through. So in terms of institutional support, it was both [the university] giving me the freedom to come and go and it was also my boss, part of the institution, who supported me greatly. Not only that, I think the staff in the career center were almost like cheerleaders wanting me to get the degree.

The combination of the overall backing of the university, the open involvement of his supervisor, and the continued encouragement of his staff provided a connection between these stakeholders and Tim:

> It was a huge staff, so it took me awhile to figure out what people were doing, but they were my cheerleaders, cheering me on. It was almost like they were living through me, vicariously; my success was their success. That was powerful.

With similar excitement about the common support of her supervisor and her staff, Kathy remembered how they were the impetus of her motivation to finish her degree:

> Well, from where I work standpoint. They were wonderful. I mean, they were really the ones who were pushing and supporting us to do and to get the degree done and they allowed us to take time off during work without, you know, having to take vacation time or whatever the case may be. I mean just wonderful, wonderful. It was pretty much free flow for the whole process, even the dissertation I mean, as long as I took care of my job I was allowed leave and [I could] make up the time. They knew that I needed to go into interviews and things like that and I never had a problem with that as long as I was open and I was an honest about what I was doing and when I was doing it. They never had any problems so it was great.

Dutch also has fond memories of the teamwork and understanding that her institution showed to her while she was pursing her degree. Her face showed she was very overwhelmed by the support of her institution from the president down to her staff:

> I would say priceless, between my president and our academic dean. I was VP for student affairs at the time, and my team was wonderful. They knew I had what we called dissertation Wednesday. I was gone every day on Wednesday, but I planned everything, such that life wouldn't come to an end if I didn't come in on that day. Faculty relationships were very strong. People were very proud; our institution was just starting to develop more faculty members with Ph.Ds. There were a lot of faculty members who

> were excited and were saying this is one more step in our evolution to legitimate four year institution status, so they were very excited about us growing our doctoral degree folks. The president had a big party and put a big banner out in front of school when I finished, so it was a big deal on this little campus.

Even though some had positive experiences with support from their work, Gabby, Shelly, and Kurt reported they did not. As stated in the previous chapter, Kurt was in the program twice and his reason for leaving the first time was an ultimatum from his boss: "You either take the promotion or finish school because you won't have time for both." This happened before Kurt was married and had a child. Kurt believes that if he had not had to make that choice, he would have finished the degree: "I know I would have finished. I was determined and I was ready. But it didn't work for me that time [pause] or the next time [laughter]."

As for Gabby and Shelly, they worked for the same school that had administrators who had previously completed the same program. Yet work institutional support was nonexistent for each of them. Gabby's situation was complex; she had the support of her chancellor, but she did not have the support of her supervisor or her coworkers:

> I had just got promoted and my job, right, the dean, or whatever you call that back in those days vice chancellor. My chancellor invited me to be part of the new cohort. I was so busy trying to impress him and do my work, but I had no time for the Ph.D. program. But he recommended that I be part of this program. So, I decided to go ahead and do that. He was very supportive. But the other people, some that I worked with, and my peers, but I thought would've had my back because I always had theirs. Unfortunately, they were not supportive. Even my immediate supervisor did and said some things very bewildering to me. I could never understand, how could people all of the sudden turn

> when they found out that you were trying to improve yourself? I mean, these are people that you thought cared for you and wanted you to improve yourself through education or whatever, but I found out different.

Gabby continued to work very hard in the program, often working late nights to keep up with her employment obligations. She did not quit. She credits her chancellor and some other administrators, along with her very supportive family, with her ultimate completion, but she said she learned a very hard lesson:

> Everybody does not want the same thing that you want. And so they react differently. And to this day, and it's very sad to say, and I even talked about it in my own dissertation that some very negative things were going on my campus during my doctorate days.

Shelly also experienced "negative things" on her campus, but her negative experiences were not from her coworkers. Rather, they arose from her supervisors. Shelly worked at a small campus of a large community college system where she had two supervisors, the vice chancellor of academic affairs (VCAA) and the campus vice chancellor/dean (VCD). She worked her way up from an adjunct instructor to assistant dean of academic affairs. Shelly explained her supervisory support dilemma:

> Well, as for work, when I first entered the program and I worked for a VCD who was very, very supportive. He would allow me to work [on program assignments] when I needed as long as it did not affect my work and that I was available if necessary. He would allow me to do some of my reading on campus, again, as long as I was available and I was forthcoming with what I needed. He was very accommodating. Ironically, when I was transferred to another campus, I had a new VCD who went through the same program and who forgot what the program was about. And even when I had my class

> time, she would interrupt me and asked me to meet with students or ask me to handle a situation while I was in class.

Shelly not only had a new VCD who completed the same program and seemed to forget the rigor of the program, her other supervisor, the VCAA, also completed the same program and seemed to forget the demands of the program:

> She [the VCAA] always told me, "Shelly, this is not that hard. You need to focus and put your work first." It helped that she only had one daughter when she went through the program, and the daughter was older. She forgot that she was always off work doing her schoolwork. We all knew it, and we all did what we could to help her. It seems like childbirth for them, they forgot the pain. The other [VCD] didn't have children during the program so she had no idea of the issues we had, and she didn't care. So maybe the first year it was good but the second year I did not have any institutional support from my work. Now they did support me financially, but when you are just supported financially without academic support, you go against the entire idea of higher education, which was very hypocritical of the administration we had.

Although Gabby did ultimately finish, she did take almost 10 years and had many rough patches with her employer, which she largely attributed to her extended studies. Both Shelly and Kurt did not finish and can directly connect a portion of their not completing to the uncooperativeness of their employers.

Support from the institution of study was much better according to the participants. In the case of faculty support, there were mostly positive statements. Only a few were negative. Faculty who had children was seen more as supportive and understanding compared to faculty without children. According to Shelly,

> I did have a couple of professors who were very positive and did work to keep me motivated with positive reinforcement. I had a couple others who, maybe because they didn't have children and were not married, did not understand the family unit well. Instead of going to them and receiving kindness, support, and helpfulness, you would instead receive what seems to be a punishment instead of the support you needed. Whereas instead of saying they could help, I would instead have to write a 20-page paper or do an additional PowerPoint for next class if I had to miss because of my family. So I felt as though I were being punished because of this. This became very difficult and forced me to choose between the program and my family.

Gabby indicated that she loved the entire faculty and they were very "caring and supportive" in most situations. However, she related similar situations where faculty who were married with children were accommodating to her familial needs:

> There were times that things were going on in my family, I had children, and my baby would get sick from time to time. And I couldn't make it one or two times. It was [a male professor], I'll never forget him. Sadly, he's not there any longer. He would tell me, "[Gabby], I understand family, just write me a paper telling me what was going on in your family, and I'm going to give you an additional assignment, and once you do that you will be okay. You know that we would never set you back or anything." He understood.

Dave partially agreed with the assessment that faculty with children better understand the unique perspective and needs of married students with children. "One of my cohort mates quickly acknowledged and knew that there were no role models for her to be a mother with young children in higher ed., especially within the faculty and within the program." Shari

witnessed positive faculty support for a cohort member who was pregnant during the program: "faculty was very kind and accommodating . . . They worked; they made it work for her." Debbie summed up her observation of faculty and institutional support in relation to married students with children, "I think the faculty at the university are awesome. I think there're strengths and weaknesses among any faculty, certain practices, instruction types I like better; I liked a little bit less. They were always helpful, generally."

The final aspect of support for this study was cohort support. "Cohort classmates and that group were priceless," stated Dutch about her "cohort family" during the program. The doctoral program of the university where the participants were enrolled was designed in the cohort format. Although the design of the program intends for the cohorts to be diverse, family and marital status is not involved in the selection process.

According to participants, the cohort often took the place of the student's family. When there were academic issues in which the family member could not assist or when there were psychological support issues that were incompressible to family and coworkers, the cohort took on the role as family in both aspects of support—mental and academic. Gabby stated, "Without the cohort, I couldn't have made it. They understood things others around me could not. We were not only students; we were colleagues, family, and friends—sometimes just a needed shoulder."

Debbie, Tim, Kathy, and Shari each experienced positive relationships with their cohorts. They were all able to form bonds with their cohorts based on similar experiences in life and at work. Many times the relationships were built on family similarities or, at a minimum, the overall family connection. Debbie related a story about her connection with her cohort members and the timeless helpfulness of the cohort:

> Tremendously helpful; especially the females. I think, there were a lot of good males in my cohort. We had an awesome cohort. We had a great cohort. We had the awesome cohort. I will say just because it's male/female, everybody's got spouses, there's always a little bit of "I'm not going to call some guy at night. He's not going to call me late at night," even though we are studying. If we were in a group setting that works. But, I mean, I could call [a female cohort member] at 2 o'clock in the morning or send her an email at 3 o'clock in the morning, and it would be all right. Literally she was quite a lifeline late at night because I knew she didn't sleep more than two hours a night, and she was watching her computer.

Kathy credited her cohort as the main reason for her completion of the program. This is a huge claim, but she stated that the cohort model, and especially her cohort, is designed for such a role:

> For me, it was probably the most important and significant piece of the whole degree. And I'm glad I chose where I attended because I have colleagues going through getting their doctorates at other universities, and they talk like they are out on an island because they don't have the cohort support. We were a family. I remember having numerous reading assignments and all of us saying, "How are we going to do this?" And we would divide the reading and then write summaries and share them. We would do whatever we could do to support each other through the process. We would work it out.

Kathy also remembers how her cohort family overcame academic and personal challenges by utilizing their cohort support mechanisms:

> Just all these different things and I think that if it were not for that support group, again, not saying I wouldn't have done it, I mean I would have done it; but I'm not sure it would've gone as well, as it did having a cohort.

Shari's recollection of her cohort is equally positive. The support of her cohort was especially comforting for her during a very challenging time between her and her husband. Although she and her husband maintained a very strong relationship and he was supportive during the program, Shari admitted there were times when she leaned more on her cohort family for academic, emotional, and motivational support:

> What helped a lot, I think, was that, because it was a cohort . . . I have this really strong support system among the cohort, so I wasn't looking to him [her husband] for the same emotional support around the stresses of the program, so that helped a lot. I think it took some of the burden off for him to have to carry me emotionally through the program because I had that. I had places to go for that. So, I don't think, I think if it hadn't been a cohort with the step process. I'm quite confident that… I don't say, I wouldn't have done that [completed the program], but it would have been a whole different dynamic.

Two participants relived specific cohort memories about developing close friendships with particular cohort members. During the program, both Dutch and Pete met cohort members who became lifelong friends. While other participants briefly discussed continuing friendships after the program, Dutch and Pete each focused on their continued friendships with an individual cohort member.

Dutch explained how she truly admired and respected her cohort members, but she was more connected to those who had "congruent faith lives." She described how some of her cohort members seemed to be less religiously focused and began to become lost and not as grounded in

their personal, vocational, and academic lives. Dutch was thankful to have found a prayer buddy who shared her mutual beliefs and helped her maintain her success:

> The two of us having a faith life really made the difference. I think his marriage really strengthened. He has older children. He is older than I and his children were a little bit older and so we kind of relied on each other a lot and talked a lot about our families' challenges during that time. And he is a guy a lot like my husband so I could understand; I would come and complain about something my husband wasn't doing in my absence in the basement [her office], and my friend would reassure me that the kids would live with wrinkled clothing.

Dutch discussed her love of her entire cohort, but it was her individual connection with her cohort prayer buddy that completed her support system:

> So, you know, it was sort of a synergism, support from your family, but as well from other parties in the program. And you do find people in the program, I'm sure you saw that, with whom you connect for various reasons. So he and I were the only ones who were at private institutions, faith-based institutions, who happened to have faith lives and who could rely upon each other, and we became quite good friends. And to this day we are still good friends.

Another close friendship emerged during Pete's time in the program. Pete recognizes this connection did not happen to all of his cohort mates, but the ability to bond with another student helped Pete to keep academic issues out of his family relationship. He is very thankful the bond with his friend happened to him. This time it was not faith that connected these two friends, it was age:

> There were two of us who were the oldest in the cohort. We kind of gravitated to each other right away. The old codger jokes. He's from the South, so that helped. So, can you imagine a Caucasian man from the South and a mixed-race guy from California, you'd think there is no way they would even like each other. We're the best of friends. I love that guy. I drove to the campus when he defended his proposal. I will do the same when he defends his dissertation. It's really weird; it's hard to say you will ever really find that chemistry. . . .We still communicate with each other.

Dave had the unique experience of starting a family during his time in the program. His wife and he experienced the joy of parenthood during this time, and Dave's cohort took this blessed event and made it a central connection for the entire cohort:

> The cohort basically adopted my daughter before she was born as theirs—she's almost of the symbol of our program, and of our cohort. They created a name for her that was after authors of readings, um, they, that they would never even consider. They referred to her as "cupcake," so there's so much that she is an . . . and there were other, other people in the cohort who had young kids also, but [the child] being born exactly when she was, they just, I mean, that was . . . we were a close group anyways. I think that was just something else that helped, so they understood. Even those who did not have kids, they adopted them and then understood what was going on, supportive.

Unfortunately, not all cohort experiences were as positive as the previous stories. Gabby, Shelly, and Kurt each experienced less than happy times and did not have the opportunities to enjoy lifelong relationships or experience the close camaraderie as other members of cohorts did. Shelly remembered, "I saw some cohort members become very close, some closer than others, and some very, very close. There always seemed to be groups and cliques. It wasn't for me."

Gabby saw both sides of her cohort—the good and the not so good. She gave permission for me to share an experience she has not told anyone except her family. She related a story that occurred in her summer semester when the cohort was divided into two groups for a project. At first, the cohort group in which Gabby belonged was great, until Gabby excelled on a paper:

> I'll never forget when they gave the papers back, and they saw my grade, and the four White women that I studied with, the one leader of the group looked at me and said, "You know, you got the highest score, I don't think you need our help anymore." So, they decided not to study with me for the rest of the three weeks of summer. So that was a very negative thing.

Fortunately for Gabby, she was able to experience the joy of a different caring and supportive group of cohort members. The members of the other group that summer became the support Gabby needed and now treasures:

> But the others in the cohort were very receptive and, Tony, we were a real family. We looked out for each other. And they saw this little Black woman, and they kind of nurtured me. In that regard, it was very helpful for me. It was a family, and we truly love each other.

For Shelly and Kurt, their experiences in their respective cohorts did not lead to a close-knit bonding of students aiming for the same goal, nor did it lead to lifelong friendships. Each admitted they did have some enjoyable memories of good times shared with their cohorts, but there were no specific examples, and there were no stories that evoked the excitement in their retelling as happened with other participants.

For Shelly, she stated the opportunity to become close to another member was not encouraged or presented. The projects and work were never scheduled to be done with the same

person or group, and Shelly saw this as a time not to encourage friendships. Shelly was adamant in her observation of the cohort:

> I never really felt close to anyone. I didn't want anyone, and I never really worked with anyone in person. On a whole, it seemed like every class we had we were always mixed up and working with someone different. Which I guess in reality is a good thing. You learn to work with others. But I never felt there was one person that I really commiserated with or was able to share or was able to get support when I needed. We all seemed to have the attitude of "don't bother me I have to get my work done."

Although Kurt did not have the same negative feelings about the cohort and the cohort program, he did share Shelly's feelings of isolation and downplayed the role of the cohort in his progression through the coursework. Many times Kurt stated he kept to himself but would have been receptive to more cohort support, if it were offered by others: "They seemed to ignore me sometimes." Kurt openly admitted that his lack of faith in the cohort support and his not connecting with other married students with children or any of the cohort members was his own belief:

> The cohort was good. They were helpful. I mean online, we kept in touch, but from a realistic standpoint, I would consider it more minimal, and maybe it was the cohort I was in, but I mean we got along well, but it wasn't one of those where we had team members calling or emailing asking, "How are you doing? Did you get that paper done? Good job." It was kind of, it was there if we needed it, but there was no initiative for us, well me at least.

The Effect of a Doctoral Program on the Marital Relationship

The second theme explores the views of the participants of how the program affected their marital relationships. The participants' responses to their beliefs on how being enrolled in a doctoral program affected their marriages were broken into three categories: positive, positive and negative, and negative. Pete, Tim, Dutch, and Dave all believed that their doctoral experiences had a positive effect on their marriages and, in some ways, even strengthened the relationship. Both Kathy and Debbie expressed mixed views of their experiences in the doctoral program in relation to their marriages. They both had experiences that they would classify as good and bad that either strengthened the marriage or hurt the marriage. Finally, Shari, Shelly, Kurt, and Gabby experienced issues that contributed to the negative feelings in the marriage that separated the couple for a length of time. Some were separated for short periods, such as just needing time away from each other. In Gabby's marriage and in Kurt's marriage, the separation was for good.

The concept of voluntarily including a major stressor into a relationship can have an effect on even the strongest marriages, and the data from this study indicate the addition of a rigorous doctoral program is just that: a major stressor. The span of divergent responses from spouses of doctoral candidates was immense. There were unprecedented amounts of stress on the relationships, and feelings ranged from pride to abandonment. Although all participants did admit to some conflict with their spouses during the program, each discovered ways of dealing with it. Yet through it all, only two of the participants divorced. Dave, while believing the program strengthened his marriage, understood the toll of the program on his wife and how she worked as hard as he did in this family endeavor:

> I think that our relationship, our individual and personal relationship . . . I don't want to say it was tested, it was just, there was always guilt on my end, guilt because I didn't feel like I was contributing and doing enough.

Gabby commented on the eventual disintegration of her marriage in relation from the time of her enrollment in the program:

> It is amazing. When I first enrolled the program, my husband was supportive and excited. He was active in my education and was involved in the cohort; as much as he could. But when I began to devote more time into my school work, I could tell we were drifting apart. It was sad, really sad.

Walkin' the Tightrope: Balancing it All

The third theme discusses the ways the participants attempted to balance a family and being enrolled in a doctoral program. Two subthemes of this are how the married student budgeted time between studying and family interaction and the ages of children: younger vs. older. Did the participants believe that the age of the child plays a role in affecting the family relationship during the married student's enrollment in the doctoral program? Time, already limited, must be allocated among family, work, and school. Finding balance among all of these demands is a constant struggle, and as Dave eloquently stated, "They don't balance. You just manage." Dave continued to explain that "it's completely understandable that you can't give 100% to everything. There is only so much of you to give, and you've got to be okay with that."

Dave explained it is very important to remember that there is only so much the student can give to each facet of the relationship and to expect more can be the difference between walking the tightrope and falling. Kathy discussed her strategy to achieve balance by attempting to keep work and family separate: "Because I value my family time, I value my family. When I

am work, I don't work with family stuff, so when I go home, I don't want to deal with work stuff." Within these confines, she attempted to squeeze the demands of the program. Along with Dave and Kathy, Shari viewed balancing the program, work, and family similarly: she understood that something had to give among the three forces stretching her relationship with her family. She also stated that her there were times when her family relationship suffered, but she worked diligently to keep her family first and admitted sometimes her school work was not at the highest standard and work was put to the side:

> Well, one thing is, you don't sleep as much and you really think about what's, what's most important. And sometimes school is sacrificed, and sometimes work is sacrificed. This was our theme in our cohort, "Done is good." So getting it done and sometimes having to just accept what I could do with course work. That was with group work; that was with family, with food, and with work. I wasn't going to drop the ball. If I couldn't meet expectations that I had, there were times I just couldn't. And that's not like me. That was hard. And then balancing, you know, I love my kids and I love my husband and my family. I am very family oriented. So I wasn't going to sacrifice family. And I would never sacrifice family for work. They made sacrifices with my school, but I was never going to sacrifice them or my commitment for that.

Her commitment to her family was admittedly stretched a few times during the program. Shari believed these times were opportunities to learn life lessons. The children learned independence and a realization that mom was not always going to be able to do things for them:

> They learned a lot of independence, and I believe that, that was important for them. If they had to wait, you know, 40 minutes after school for Mom to come pick them up, and that was the way it had to be. Not to be cold, but that was our reality. And that meant

> that things weren't always going to work with their schedule, and they weren't always working on my schedule.

Coinciding with Shari's and Dave's experiences in relation to how they rationalized their balancing of family, work, and school, Dutch's stated: "So, a sense of perspective, definitely; also, a sense of permission not to do things perfectly." Dutch firmly believed in her role as mother, and she was the person in charge of the household duties. Enrolling in the program would mean relinquishing some of that control and family time. While it was hard for her to sometimes let the program take away from her family, she was very conscientious not to let that happen very often. She recalls the conversation with her mother-in-law about the decision to enroll in the program:

> We talked for a long time, and I did not expect her to be as candid as she was with me in giving me advice. Well, had she not encouraged me to do this, I don't know that I would have done it. Although I knew she probably would have. She is much more progressive than my own mother was. She had progressive views culturally and politically. She pretty much said "[Dutch], You ought to do this, and your difficulties will be in letting things go at home, and I would recommend you look at bringing somebody in to maybe help out at the house." My initial response to that was to feel insulted. But my husband and I talked about it, and we did try.

Gabby and Kurt were a bit more philosophical about how they attempted to achieve a balance with work, school, and their families. Kurt recalls how he finally came to the realization that he had no control over the balancing act, and perhaps the idea of balance was not possible for him with all the "unknown variables of life":

> Well, I don't know if you can say balance because it's always changing. It's never like things are every always completely equal. It's like you give here, and then you take in another area and try not to take it away from family. You try . . . so, if I give up a day with family, I took a day from work because I had a lot of vacation; that was my way to balance, but I was lucky in that way, and unlucky in other ways.

Gabby admitted she did not always have the balance she wanted. In fact, lack of balance with her relationship with her husband was a major reason shared for divorce during the program. She emphatically stated, "You have to prioritize. Prioritize, but at the same time the doctoral degree has to be number one. How do you do that? How do you do that?"

Debbie and Shelly gave some perspective on how to best find the balance necessary to keep a family relationship positive and strong. Neither Shelly nor Debbie claimed she was constant in maintaining a balance of her work, school, and family lives. In fact, Shelly stated, "I didn't do a very good job of it."

Debbie also admitted to not being very good at maintaining a balance. She affirmed there were times when she needed to put her family first to help reestablish any resemblance of balance. She talked about how she believes she did:

> Sometimes not very well. But then there were months at a time I would say, "Forget it, I have to back away from my studies." Go to the beach with my kids. So certainly in that secure period there were spans of months, three months, four months I would say, "Forget it, I need to get my sanity back for a while."

Shelly told a similar story about how she maintained her balance. She said she started the program with it first on her list, she then reprioritized and

> my studies at first came first, and I put everything on the back burner for my studies. But halfway through the program I decided to reverse that and decided that my family came first and put my studies on hold. How do you balance it? I'd don't know. I did not do a very good job of balancing it.

Shelly acknowledged she was not very good at balancing, but she and her husband did rekindle their relationship, and she and her daughters are very happy. Shelly proposed the ideal that the only way to successfully balance a family, work, and the program is

> you need to have two people: you need to clone yourself. That is the only way you can successfully go through this program and still have a wonderful family life. Otherwise your family is going to suffer and there's no way around it, they will suffer. Yes, I firmly believe that my doctoral studies suffered because I felt I was not prepared every week because I did not have the amount of time that I needed to actually be prepared every week during my classwork, but again I decided to put my family first halfway through. I chose to change the priorities and put family first.

Shelly continued with her insight:

> You have to go into this knowing that you're going to forget who your family is; like my boss said, "Take a picture of your children, put it on the mantle, and then you'll see them in five years." No matter what you're going to have to put your family life on hold. You attempt to go at it 50-50. But all too often it is 100%, okay; we're going to leave and walk away from my family and pursue my degree.

While eight of the participants agreed the program and work stretched them from the family and keeping the balance was not always accomplished, Tim and Pete both stated they did not have any issues in keeping the balance. They stated they made it their missions to work

around all conflicts between work, school, and family. Pete believed it is his upbringing of putting the family first and to "put on your big boy or big girl pants" and be responsible. He and Tim both said their upbringing and previous employment were the scaffolds they used to help build and continue to maintain the balance necessary for strong family relationships during the program. Pete attributed the success of maintaining a strong relationship with his wife to that they both are in the health science field:

> Healthcare people think about prioritizing situations in their minds and ask that "Is this something I can do now, something I can do in two hours, or something I can do tomorrow? I think it's helped our relationship in terms in segmenting and separating time for schoolwork in my program versus time for family time. This perspective helps us deal with life in a more pragmatic and effective way.

Tim became more serious as he followed this line of thinking. He attributed his success in balancing to his previous employment and experiences that allowed him to balance family, work, and the program:

> Like I said, I can't see really many times when the program responsibilities trumped family relationships; I adjusted and figured out how to make them all work. You have to remember this: I was a factory worker for five years before I went to college. I got my undergraduate degree in two and a half years! Two and a half! Two and a half! And I had two majors. And the reason why, just like in my doctoral program, I slept less to accommodate things.

Filling the Gender Gap

The fourth theme is gender—filling the gender gap? A subtheme of this is the societal/cultural aspects. All but one participant acknowledged there is a disparity in gender

when it comes to married doctoral students with children. The observations of the participants who witnessed the disparity were from both internal family observations and that of their respective cohorts. Some of the participants who observed that mothers had more responsibilities thrust upon them during program than those of the fathers in their respective cohorts agreed that these roles were often self-imposed but were very apparent. Debbie was quick to concur with this idea: "I do think that society still puts a lot of expectations on women. Even if society's not putting on them women, women are putting them on women. I do it myself."

Unlike everyone else, Gabby was the only participant who did not believe that gender disparity was an issue in her experience. Shelly commented that this gender gap was not a societal/cultural disparity, but one that was more connected to the empathetic abilities of the faculty. Shelly indicated that the program's faculty members and their current family relationships had more of an impact on her cohort's married students with families than any other factor. She indicated that the faculty members who were men and married with children understood the plight of the married doctoral student with children better than the women faculty members who were single and without children:

> I think a lot of this depends on who your faculty member is. I truly do and I don't mean to say this in a negative way, but I truly do believe that. I tended to get along better with the male faculty members because they seem to understand the role of the family because they have families. The females were faculty members who were not married and did not have families. So I felt that I was . . . I don't think I was treated differently than anyone else, but it seemed like the faculty members that have families were more understanding

> and empathetic when we needed a little extra support. It was just too much pressure without any support or help from the faculty when we had family issues.

Dave concurred with Shelly in his observations that there were married men who were role models with children within the program's faculty, yet the women faculty comprised of all single women who were without children:

> One of my cohort mates quickly acknowledged and knew that there were no role models for her to be a mother with young children in higher ed., especially within the faculty and within the program. There wasn't anybody in order to look up to, and that was a different set of expectations than what there were for fathers. . . . The other women that were there as role models were single, and/or without children. I think that goes into a sort of a lingering gender disparity that we have, and that wasn't necessarily the case in terms of the male role.

Advice for Present and Future Doctoral Students Who Are Married With Children

The fifth theme is a collection of advice for future married students with children who are interested in a Ph.D. program. The decision to enter a doctoral program takes much thought and self-examination. Examining life structures leads to many questions: Do I have the support? Do I believe my family relationship can weather this? Are my children ready for this? Tim suggested married students with families thinking of entering a doctoral program should consider other "deep questions:" "Why is it that I want this doctorate? What is propelling you? And have a clear understanding of it." Most of the participants struggled with these questions before they entered the program and even during the program. However, for some, even knowing the questions did not always properly prepare them for the liminal phase of their doctoral program lives.

Two concepts were prevalent in the interviews with the participants: communication and celebration. The communication aspect included communication with spouse and family but also with cohort members and colleagues at work. The celebration aspect included celebrating with family. Both communication and celebration must include the children—from beginning to end.

Shari continued this thought by discussing the need for a strong foundation before attempting such a life-altering journey:

> Number one is make sure you have a strong foundation before you go in to the program, and that your partner supports you is critically important, but that your partner can't be the only place that you get support. You have to have . . . you have to build with the cohort. You have to build that with your colleagues, have to have other places to find support.

Shari expanded another aspect of building a strong foundation with the family before beginning the doctoral program is that it is not only about the student:

> And don't forget that your partner needs all that too. So it's about having that foundation, and that you have good communication. And you have to have faith in your kids. You don't have to do everything for them. They are very resourceful, and there are a lot of things that will help make it part of your and their life stories.

Shelly explained that it is vital to think about the family dynamic and the constraints that will be experienced by the student and the family:

> As with your family, there are so many unknowns that will happen and all need to be on board. Just like a work dynamic, the family dynamic will be different. It is way too, or extremely difficult of a program to go through and try to maintain a family life the way you want it to be. Try, try, try to prepare—but ready to change at any moment.

Gabby intertwined both concepts with the idea that this degree is not only for the student, for her or his work, for her or his spouse, but also for her or his children: "Grow through your program with your children. Do it with your children. They will never, never, never forget it. Let them experience every step with you." Kathy added that the communication aspect is not only communicating with a spouse but to include children in the discussions: "And if your children are old enough to understand, make sure that you're communicating with them, and not assuming that they won't be able to understand."

The idea of communication may at first seem a simple one: keep the family informed every step of the way. All of the participants agreed communications was the most important prerequisite for any family member beginning a doctoral program. Although it was listed as the most important by the participants, and all stated they tried to communicate throughout the program, the implementation was not always as easy as they wished.

Dave added some advice about the desire for completing the dissertation and the program. He discussed that although the goal for some may be to publish their work and their dissertation, the main goal should always be the family:

> At times there was, especially as I was writing the dissertation, I felt that I had this, even though we were told not to worry about this, but you still have this idea in your head that this has to be this grandiose piece of literature, and that you're creating this independent study that has to be perfect because that is what we set up and that is what our expectations of what is a doctorate degree. Instead of realizing that it just needs to get done, because it probably won't be published. But do a good job with it. It's that balance with getting done. The goal is to get done, but you need to remember it is done, and you can get back to the family.

Kurt and Shelly both stated the importance of communication with the family as the most important component of the program, but for each of them, this did not work as well as hoped. Kurt would continually ask if his wife understood the commitment Kurt would need to give to the program, and his wife would reply, "Yea, let's go for it. We're all behind you." Later, Kurt would find the answer to this same question had changed to, "Oh! I never signed up for this."

With this on his mind, Kurt's advice was to keep open communication from beginning to end and to continually reexamine the practicality of the program in conjunction with the health of the family relationship:

> Well, not to be redundant, but it's going back to communication and just the whole before you start the program, the whole "we" thing. Try to be realistic, because I think a lot of couples don't realize that the spouse, and the person in the program, doesn't realize the time commitment. Even though they have been told about the time commitment, and the financial commitment that goes into this, and obviously all of this can pull the relationship apart. Just be realistic about these things and make sure everyone is on board.

Kurt finalized his thoughts on advice by expressing the idea of being truthful to each other and to learn to ask questions such as, '"Is this working?' Not to just say, 'Ok, this isn't working.' And then abandon the program. If it is not working, ask, 'What can we do to make this work?"'

Shelly completely agreed about communication with family and the stresses that the lack of communication can have on the family. However, she added a different point of view; she also focused on the communication with work. Shelly and Gabby had a very negative work response to their participation in the program. This negative response, according to Gabby, was one reason she did not graduate with most of her cohort, but it did not prevent her from

graduating. Shelly stated that she was sad about the negative response and it played a major role in her not completing the program:

> Make sure you and your supervisor, and their supervisor, and their supervisor understand the commitment involved! Also, make sure your staff, if you have one, understands that you will need to rely on them even more. And save all of your vacation days now!

Debbie concluded the advice for future married doctoral students with children with her experiential words of wisdom:

> Hang in there, you can do it. When you think you can't, you can. Let me know how I can help, tell other people how they can help. And if you don't have a partner who supports you, ditch their ass! [Laughter] Because it's probably not going to work anyway.

Summary of Themes

Even though each participant had her or his unique story about being a married student with children under 18 years old, there were some themes that were established during this study. The participants were all thankful for the academic richness the program extended to their professional careers. In most cases, they were very excited about the lifelong friendships developed through their program experiences.

The participants' normal lives were stretched during their time in the doctoral program. All of the participants agreed that their experiences, positive and negative, helped them appreciate their children more and put the entire family relationship in a new light. Finding support from their families, their spirituality, their institutions, and their cohort was generally achieved for the majority of the participants; however, for a couple of the participants, the support, in one aspect or another, was not always available to them.

The effect of enrollment in a doctoral program on the participants' marriages was, again, a mix of positives and negatives. Many participants believed their marriages were enhanced by the experience, but the remaining participants were not so fortunate. Participants described the challenges of attempting to maintain a balance of family, work, and the demands of the program, including a strong study schedule. The participants commented on the impact of the age of the child or children during their parents' enrollment in a doctoral program and how that age affects the student's academic performance and the ability of the child/children to understand and support the parent—student's academic pursuit. Gender disparity was observed by the majority of participants. They recognized that mothers enrolled in the program were often charged with more parenting responsibilities than the fathers who were enrolled. Finally, participants shared some valuable advice for any person who is married with children and who is presently enrolled or contemplating whether a doctoral program is for them.

This study revealed five themes from the data, from which eight subthemes emerged. The following chapter provides an analysis and interpretation of the eight subthemes.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS II

Chapter 4 provided biographical and demographical information regarding the study's participants. The previous chapter also detailed participant's lives during their pre-liminal/pre-program phase, liminal/program phase, and finally their post-liminal/post-program phase. This information helped me to glean from the data the five emergent themes of the lived experiences of married doctoral students with children used in this study. This chapter highlights subthemes that emerged through the data analysis of the study.

Subthemes

Chapter 4 discussed the data's five emergent themes revealed from the analysis of the semi-structured interviews. The data analysis revealed eight subthemes that emerged from the themes in this study. The first subtheme to emerge was the role of "*previous cohort mentors who are married with children*." The second subtheme to emerge was the "*reoccurring liminality: the dissertation phase*." The third subtheme, entitled, "*what doesn't kill us . . .*," discusses some participants' belief the program made their marriages stronger. The fourth subtheme to emerge, "*on one hand . . .*" discusses how other participants related both the positive and detrimental effects of the program on their spousal relationships. The fifth subtheme, "*on the other hand: overstretched*," discusses the difficulties of maintaining a strong marital bond during the

program. The sixth subtheme, "*the time budget crunch*," brings to light the struggles and anxieties of attempting to balance family, work, and school for married doctoral students with children. The seventh subtheme to emerge was "*ages of the children—younger vs. older*." This subtheme exposes the divergent thoughts of the participants as to the ages of the children and the effects on the children and to the parents. The final subtheme is "*societal/cultural disparity*." This subtheme explores the participants' views on the role of gender for married doctoral students with children. Chapter 4 provided demographic information and background stories of the ten participants of this study and highlighted the main themes elicited from the data. In this chapter the subthemes that emerged from the main themes will be highlighted.

Previous Cohort Mentors Who Are Married With Children

One recurring idea in relation to institutional support was the incorporation of previous or current student mentors for married students with children. Whereas this particular program did not have dedicated mentors, the wish for someone, either faculty or previous cohort members, was overwhelmingly supported. The general understanding was that the faculty had enough extracurricular responsibilities that made faculty mentorship mostly rare or even unrealistic. Gabby, Tim, Shari, and Shelly specifically spoke of one married, male faculty member who did serve as a mentor to them. Gabby described how this professor would take into consideration the student's need for extra motivation because of unique family circumstances:

> And I think because of that mentor relationship and understanding of family that he and I had, you know, he saw me as a student with family obligations, Tony, he didn't see me as a student gone awry or whatever, he saw me as a student struggling like everybody else. And then when I would get overwhelmed with my family and not doing the right thing, he himself would call me or email me and say, "Hey young lady, this is what you need to

> do to get yourself together to get back in focus so you can finish this." It's because of the relationship he and I had that I believe I was able to get through that process.

In response to a proposition of recruiting former cohort members who were married with children to mentor current cohort members who were married with children, the participants were supportive and even disappointed they did not have that option. During the orientation of the program, there was a short meeting between the previous year's cohort and the new cohort. This brief encounter was usually not enough to encourage a connection worthy of mentorship opportunities.

Debbie recalled there was some interaction with the previous year's cohort in what seemed to be an attempt to connect consecutive cohorts, but these were more informal and not very conducive to a cooperative relationship:

> Outside of my cohort I don't know of anybody. I mean I met people from other cohorts at Christmas parties and events like that, but I never really felt connected to anybody who had a similar background. But, you know, who has four kids and tries to get a Ph.D.?

Debbie also recalled there were times when she could have used a "more experienced voice of reason" than her cohort mates:

> I think there were times I could have used any support I could get. Transient times maybe, but yeah, I think I might have said, "How do you deal with this? Do you feel this way? I think I'm pulling my hair out today." You know those kinds of things. So yeah, I think that might have been helpful.

Dave had a more specific view as to who should mentor. He liked the idea of having previous cohort members with children mentor current members, but he was adamant these mentors not be currently involved in the process:

> Even if you waited and you are in dissertation phase and then trying to mentor, you're still not connected. . . . I think it is a whole lot easier to see someone who is successfully completed, because that provides an additional layer of insight, and that's what somebody needs in order to know that they can do it, and they can get done. So somebody who has had children through the process, I would hope that the faculty would then be able to say, "You know, you might be able to touch base with . . . and it's a similar situation."

Shari concurred with Dave about the importance of not having mentors, who are not still in the process, and she added there was some informal mentoring from previous cohorts, but this mentoring was more academic than holistic mentoring:

> You know, they really didn't have that except the very first meeting when the cohort came for orientation there was a little panel. Other than that they really didn't do anything to relate our cohort with other cohorts and I think on many levels that could have been very valuable and maybe being a second year cohort, you're not really quite ready to give a lot of time to somebody else.

Shari realized that receiving mentoring from a current student would be helpful, but someone who graduated may be more beneficial in both academic and emotional assistance:

> But certainly to have had relationships with prior year cohorts . . . Other people did because I remember getting help from others who had friends who were in previous cohort when we were studying for final exams. But something like that would have really been very helpful.

Reoccurring Liminality: The Dissertation Phase

The majority of the participants also agreed that the structure of the course work—the class assignments, the strict due dates, and the constant scrutiny of the faculty—gave the

participants the framework needed to complete their work and persist. Many of the participants were taken by surprise about the dissertation and what was expected of them. Family support was seen to be crucial during the phase, but other methods of support were also utilized and suggested.

Gabby expressed excitement as she discussed the support of her family while she was completing her dissertation work. She remembered the time when her sisters, who were also working on their dissertations, created a study structure for their work: "We made a calendar and made sure that each of us followed our own deadlines. We really made work for each other. My boys even made sure I was on target with my work."

Pete believed during the coursework he had everything under control; he was fine working with his cohort and mentors would not be of much assistance, because "you know what to expect. You know what they expected, you know what time to expect it, you know when you need to be on campus, and you know what you will be doing during those times." Pete believes a better time for previous cohort mentors (for all doctoral students, but particularly for married students with children) should be matched with the students after coursework—during the dissertation phase:

> What is a "mystery" is what happens after that—the post coursework dissertation process. How do you know what to expect? What should you expect from your chair? What should you expect from your committee members? What's an effective methodology for your topic? What would have been helpful would have been a framework. Words on a page or in a policy are helpful, but people are looking for a sense of how the whole concept from A to Z in terms of post-coursework would have been helpful to me.

Many of the participants acknowledged the liminality of the dissertation phase. The leaving of the structure of the course work for the unstructured dissertation, Pete expounded on this:

> I have spoken to a couple of other doctoral students and they mirror that want for a framework and to take away the question. If it is something you have never done, and the transition from the structure to no structure, no real guidance. You want to hear, "This is what you need to do, this is what to expect." That is just the way it is. If I knew how the process worked after coursework, it would have given me a barometer.

Tim related that it was during the dissertation phase the often relied on his cohort members to help him with the writing and motivation to continue. It was this peer mentoring that helped him navigate through the liminal dissertation phase. Tim remembered:

> Especially in dissertation writing, because you no longer have the structure of a class, you no longer have the structure of a program; you have to create your own structure. So when you are writing, sometimes it was good to pick up the phone, call somebody who is going through it, and talk to them about it.

Debbie, while understanding her husband's lack of knowledge of the rigors of graduate school, pointed to the stresses of working and her husband's incapability to understand the writing process involved with a dissertation. Debbie explained,

> It was tough. As much as my husband has taken a backseat to what I want, what I do, just the time and energy and frustrations of the program; probably multiple times put us on the brink of breaking up. When I would stay and work on my dissertation for hours, sometimes until 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning then come home and he would ask, "How much did you get done?" I would burst into tears, or I would cuss him out, or I would

> say, "You don't need to know, don't worry about it. I got something done and that's all that matters." He didn't understand that; he thought I should have 10 pages done.

Because her husband was more accustomed to the strict organizational progression of the classwork portion of the program, the dissertation phase was especially challenging. During the dissertation process of this program, there is no set rule or organizational procedure; this compounded her husband's inability to understand. That led to power struggles and attempts by her husband to demand that Debbie achieve impossible or arbitrary goals:

> He would try to put these limitations on me, "Well, just promise me you're gonna get 10 pages done this week." That's not the way it works. I changed topics two or three times, I spent more than a year on a topic. Before I realized we [the university] didn't have the faculty expertise that I needed to support me on that endeavor, and I wasn't going to wing it. I wasn't gonna do it poorly, so I switched to something else that meant more to my job, IRB, interpretations to federal law. I made it very relevant to my job, that way I could make a connection.

Dave added some advice about the desire for completing the dissertation and the program. He discussed that although the goal for some may be to publish their work and their dissertation, the main goal should always be the family:

> At times there was, especially as I was writing the dissertation, I felt that I had this—even though we were told not to worry about this—but you still have this idea in your head that this has to be this grandiose piece of literature, and that you're creating this independent study that has to be perfect because that is what we set-up and that is what our expectations of what is a doctorate degree. Instead of realizing that it just needs to get done, because it probably won't be published. But do a good job with it. It's that

> balance with getting done. The goal is to get done, but you need to remember it is done, and you can get back to the family.

What doesn't Kill Us . . .

The participants entered the doctoral program knowing their lives would be disrupted by adding additional responsibilities to their marriages, they still pursued the credential. Pursuing this degree adds stress to any student's life, but more so to a student who is married with children. Stress in a marriage can often be overwhelming. The idea of willingly adding extra stress to a marriage may seem counterintuitive, however Tim, Dutch, Pete, and Dave all agreed this program added to their marriages and had a positive effect on their relationships with their spouses.

How could adding stress and responsibility to yourself and to your marriage be a positive? Tim related the academic pressure and sacrifice as homage to his wife. His appreciation of her grew as he witnessed her deal with the struggles and sacrifices added to her life. In Tim's eyes, this degree was for both of them. It was a testament to the strength of their future:

> I think it strengthened the marriage. I always appreciated my wife, but it made me appreciate her more, because all the time I was away, she had to pick up more responsibilities and time with the kids. It made me appreciate what she did to allow me to get this degree. I think that it strengthened her, on her part, because she knew my restless spirit and she saw what it was doing to help open doors for me, and the learning that came from it.

Just as Tim shared credit for his academic accomplishments with his wife, Dutch worked hard to share the experience of her schooling with her husband. Dutch's husband saw her

enrollment and her completion of this program as a "positive" to their marriage and her accomplishments as a "real point of pride." Dutch explained her husband was not only proud of her fulfilling her academic requirements and that "he was excited about the friends that I had made in the program. He was appreciative of the support I got from friends and I am still close with these friends."

Dutch also agreed the program strengthened her marriage. She does not believe the program had any weakening effect on her marriage. The support and trust shown by her husband and her family, made her want to work harder. She added the doctoral experience as another ingredient in the strengthening of her marriage. "Anything we experienced over the last 27 years has strengthened our marriage. At any time maybe who knows, but yes, that's how you stay married for a long time."

Dave and Pete also believe the program did not weaken their marriages. In fact, Pete responded with an emphatic, "Absolutely not!" to the notion the program could have negatively affected his marriage. Dave and Pete both credited their marriage resiliency on the personalities of themselves and their wives, their abilities to work out problems and "balance out" each other. Dave associates the program with the birth of his two children, and "in terms of the marriage, we definitely grew stronger, we grew as a family."

Pete stated he cannot directly measure how the program strengthened his marriage, but he did share that his wife is now less concerned about reviving her own doctoral career after witnessing Pete successfully complete his doctorate. Pete believes his wife's new initiative demonstrates a marriage can stay strong and even become stronger with a spouse in a doctoral program: "I think it helped her understand that this is indeed manageable and you can still

maintain your family. I think your effectiveness, or lack-thereof, depend on the people you are starting with."

On One Hand . . .

In a subtheme of how the program affected the marriage, four participants Debbie, Kathy, Tim, and Pete, believed the program only strengthened their marriage. Debbie and Kathy understood that view, but they also saw some aspects that were not so positive on their marriages. Although many of their marital struggles were temporary, Debbie and Kathy admit that the stress of the program may have strained what they perceived as strong relationships with their spouses. Kathy stated, "I think, I think it had the potential of having both good and bad and nothing. I experienced more of the good than the bad because my husband was on board with me going back to school." Debbie had a fear she might lose a connection with her husband, since she was changing, and he was not:

> I remember at one point, or maybe a couple of points, thinking, "Oh my gosh, I don't think I can stay with him if I continue to grow this much." There was such a difference between us. I think I have gotten past that. I don't feel that way anymore. There were certainly some points in the program where I thought, "Oh my gosh, we are not going to have anything in common anymore. The only thing we had in common was the kids."

Debbie recognized her marriage has always been about the children. The program was not only a source of reaffirmation of her independence but also proof of her determination to do what is best for her family and for herself:

> As I said, it hurt it and it helped it. So in the end I don't know if there was a net change. I've always been very independent, so I told my husband, "I will stay with you as long it is good for us to stay together. When it is not, we will be going our separate ways."

Kathy believes the strength of their marriage and understanding of each other was enough to help them through any rough time:

> Then when the times came that I needed for him to step up and take over, he did. I think if he had not been on board with me from the very beginning, then we probably would have run into more difficult troubles and problems.

Kathy also believes her husband's educational experiences helped him gain empathy for Kathy's plight. Although he did not have a college degree, Kathy's husband did take some college courses and understood the rigor involved, which "helped him to understand exactly what I was going through, so I leaned on him a lot when I got close to the end and my stress levels started to go up, and he understood that." Because of the understanding Kathy's husband showed during her enrollment in the program and his ability to step in as sole parent made Kathy realize "it really strengthened our relationship because he understood and had made the sacrifices that I had to make in order to get where I am today."

Both Debbie and Kathy were able to admit the program did have some ill effects on their marriages. Fortunately for both of them, their relationships were pliable enough to withstand the stresses and strains of a doctoral program. Both participants completed their degrees and kept their marriages intact, maybe even a little stronger.

On the Other Hand: Overstretched

"Oh yes! Very overstretched," admitted Shari about her attention to her husband at points during her time in the doctoral program. For Shari, Kurt, Shelly, and Gabby, the doctoral program proved to be very taxing on their marital relationships. For Kurt and Gabby, it proved to be too much to sustain their marriages.

Though Shari did receive strong support from her husband during her time in the program, she admitted that many times she knowingly gave more time to her children than to her husband:

> You know, he didn't get, he didn't get a lot of attention, you know, so when I did have energy, I would feel like I wanted to give it to the kids and then when I would be gone for school, it's not like I came back and gave him a break.

Shari related her husband's support never waned, even though she gathered from his communication that he was resentful in a small way. She felt the lack of time she devoted to him was hurting him. "I think I probably picked up on a lot of things that he was doing . . . I was like, 'I just need to get this done' and he was like, 'I know' and not always happy about it."

Shari understood the strain of the program on her marital relationship; however, she stated the impact is just part of the program dynamic and not a reflection of the program.

Shelly held an opposing view. When asked if the program strengthened her marriage, she obstinately responded, "Absolutely not!" Her answer to the question of whether the program weakened her marriage was "Yes! Of course!" Her animosity inflamed as she spoke of how she believes she was forced to choose between her husband and family or the program:

> As far as where my marriage is concerned, it was tough. When I got married, my family was the center of my universe. Work was put second. Suddenly, (even when I was going to my master's degree, my family was still priority), but when I entered this program, I got the impression from many people that my family could not be priority, that the doctoral program had to be priority, and that suddenly changed my relationship with my family. I found myself getting a little resentful toward the neediness of my family, and then I realized later on that they are just being kids or that it's just my husband being my

husband. This is a day to day action, but when you have to put someone on hold from time to time, it puts a strain on the marriage.

Like Shari and Shelly, Gabby admitted that there was an immense amount stress from the program, which affected her marriage. Unlike Shari and Shelly, Gabby's marriage did not overcome this stress. Gabby also believed it was not only the stress of the rigor of the program but something more internal. As Gabby learned more and became more self-sufficient, her husband became more afraid of abandonment and of not growing as fast as Gabby. Mostly, the fear of the unknown overtook him.

Gabby related that at first her husband truly felt "a part of the program." He would take Gabby to campus for the cohort weekend where he met Gabby's cohort-mates. Gabby recalled that when he would not be there for the weekend, the cohort members would ask, "Where is your hubby?" This acceptance into Gabby's cohort helped build a bond between Gabby and her husband. Sadly, the bond was not stronger than the fears produced by Gabby's growth:

> I think the stress of me not being at home and my husband finally see me become an independent person scared him. I think it scared him to the point that he became, if you will, intimidated by it and see, it's, it's different when women go into the world to work, even at home. Of course, when we go out into the world of work we carry the same values. What we do is for the family, and for some reason men, men are challenged by that. So I had happened to have been married to one of those men that were challenged by it. You know his wife going out into the work world because he was so used to me being at home doing my thing. So it did weaken my marriage.

Gabby revealed her husband's "old fashioned" mentality of a negative stereotype of a strong woman played a large part in the decline of the relationship. She admitted her husband's views

and her newfound independence combined to see the marriage end in divorce during the program. Gabby lamented on the effect of the program on her family relationship and her marital relationship:

> Of course, and anybody who has a spouse and a family and is in the doctoral program, it is truly tough because you are trying to juggle and balance all of that. So at the beginning it was real good, and I thought it would be the right thing to do, a thing that would last forever.

Although Kurt's marriage ended during the program, Kurt's situation was different. He admitted, "Would the marriage have ended up the same way without the doctoral program? Yes, it would have." Kurt believes a combination of his wife's mental issues and the demands of the doctoral program were taking both parents away from the children. Once Kurt realized the situation, he needed to drop out of the program so he could provide parenting to their daughter.

Unlike Kathy's husband whose memories of his own collegiate history helped him understand Kathy's doctoral plight, Kurt's wife could not sustain the stress of Kurt's doctoral program. "Even before the program I told her of the immense commitment. And knowing her background with her master's degree and more, she knew." Kurt repeated the fact that he and his wife continually stated that they were committed to him continuing with the program and at many intervals during the coursework they would ask, '"Is this something we will continue to do?' It wasn't that I will continue; it was that we will continue. It was always, 'Yes, we will continue to do this.'" Kurt reflected on what would have happened if things were different for him:

> I think, "If she didn't have that issue . . ." I really, really think I would have been much more successful. I probably would have my doctorate by now quite honestly. And I

> don't put the blame on her, I made those decisions throughout, but I think it made it increasingly challenging. At the zenith, the high point of all the marital trouble, it was just one of those things I had to make a decision, "What can I handle, what can't I handle?"

As Kurt found the words to help him describe his feelings about the effect of the program on his marriage, he also came to the conclusion that perhaps it was not his wife's or his fault but more of a convergence of circumstance and bad timing. "There was just too much on my plate at that point. There was definitely a major strain with the program." Kurt then paused and, as if he were replaying the entire experience, changed course and realized that perhaps it was not what should have happened, that sometimes you "play the cards." He concluded with the connection between his wife, his marriage, and the program:

> Would the marriage have ended up the same way without the doctoral program? Yes, it would have. But the doctoral program with a different spouse? Yes, I think would. It would not have ended the same way; I think I would have had the degree by now. It's the conscious decisions I made even going back to being with that partner, and everyone has to own those decisions and the outcomes of those decisions. You can't always control the person. You can control your reactions and how you respond, but you can't control the other person.

The Time Budget Crunch

The need to constantly study, read, and write was repeatedly discussed by all of the participants. How this was accomplished was a subtheme of balancing the family with work and school. The majority of the participants offset the need to constantly "hit the books" with the concept of or the word *guilt*. The duality of guilt was expressed: the guilt of studying and taking

time from the family, and the guilt of spending time with family and not studying. As Dave remembered, there is a "constant guilt, in every aspect, that you can't ignore, you can't get away from, until you are done [laugh]. You finish your dissertation, and all of the sudden the guilt is gone . . . and it was like rediscovering your wife." Dave followed his thought with the recollection of releasing this "burden" and trying to resume his family connection:

> Because all of the sudden this looming cloud that you forgot even existed, of guilt that was, "I should be reading, I should be doing this," that was there for all coursework, for all of the dissertation phase. All of the sudden was lifted, and you got your wife back. And, it took a while in order to figure out that again. Um, not necessarily a transition, but it was a burden that you didn't even know was completely there until it was lifted.

In that same manner, Debbie often would feel guilty when she would take time away from her studies to reconnect with her family. She understood this timely reconnection was necessary for her family relationship to stay strong, but there were times when "then I would start feeling guilty, 'I got to get back to work.' Then my husband would say, 'You got to get back to that.' And eventually I would get back on it."

Shelly and Kathy felt the most guilt when it came to their studies taking them away from their children. Shelly remembered how her daughters tried to be brave and understanding, but there was no way for them to hide the underlying feelings:

> I feel guilty! Extremely guilty that I had to put so much of my children's day-to-day activities on hold. I remember two years in a row my daughter was in a play, a school play, and on opening night I was on campus and not able to attend her opening night. That was two years in a row, and for some people it seems like it really doesn't matter.

> But for my daughter, and for me, it was devastating. She said she understood, but I could see in her eyes that it was devastating to her.

Kathy described trying to be a part of her children's lives but also trying to deal with the guilt of not studying by trying to do both. Unfortunately, her intended outcome was not reached:

> I think there was more guilt because there were things that I would have loved to be doing with them, with my children as they grew up. Like I mentioned, my son was playing flag football, and you know what, I did my best to stay engaged, but there were many days when I was on the sidelines with the book in my lap. I was there physically, but mentally I was not there all the time. And so I think it was more guilt on my behalf, but they understood, and they didn't make me feel bad about it. I just felt bad about it because I wish I could've been more engaged.

The way the participants used time to study played a major role in how successful or unsuccessful they were in balancing their family relationships with the doctoral program and work. As Kathy indicated, trying to be attentive of her children and study at the same time was not the most productive form of studying or of actively engaging in her children's interests. Other participants arranged their study times around their families' schedules. Again, Tim credits his previous work in the factory as to his ability to work long shifts with little or no sleep:

> These people are a bunch of wimps, these academic wimps. Because they are sitting in air-conditioned libraries reading books or taking notes. Why don't you go in a factory and stand for 12 hours and see what hard work is? So by the time I was in the doctoral program, I said, "I got to kick in the same thing." If I needed something done, I didn't sleep. My kids got the time. I think five years of factory time prepared me for higher ed.

> in terms of going to the library when it opens at 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning, and you stay there until it closes. That's easier work than standing on your feet for 12 hours.

Pete also believed his study time was to be scheduled around the family time, and the two should never meet. Pete found time before work, after work, or late night hours for his study time. He committed himself to a study regimen that would allow for maximum family time, and he knew the schedule would cost him physically and produce daily inconveniences:

> So there was never a, "Gosh, I need to study; gosh, I need to do this." I wouldn't be truthful if I didn't say that sometimes it didn't wear you down, because it did. But, I think the benefits far outweighed the inconvenience maybe I experienced during this time.

Kurt tried to apply a similar method by doing most of his studying either late at night or early morning, "I did most of it outside of family time. Like after both of them went to bed. Or I would get up early in the morning and study. Or I would go into work early and study." Kurt realized this method was physically exhausting, but it was worth it to avoid emotionally and mentally draining family conflicts. The avoidance of mental turmoil was also seen in how the need for studying preoccupied some of the participants. The studying, like Kathy and the guilt, became the main focus. For Gabby, she would also read a book while trying to spend time with her family:

> For me, I had to have a book in front of me; I had to be reading all the time. There was no slack time. When I slacked off, you know, five or 10 minutes, I would catch myself and say, Oh no. I can't be doing that. So, for me, it was an ongoing period of just studying and reading and thinking about it. Writing, and really writing. It never stopped.

> So I had a balance, you know, among my work, among my family, but that doctoral program was number one in my life. And everybody knew that about me.

As for the balance of the program—study, work, and family—the majority of participants similarly described a pattern or routine that was developed during the coursework portion of the program. Dave explained it in a structure that encompasses the majority's routines:

> So when I come home from work, it is family time. I have that family time until we get them in bed. After, when we get them in bed, that is when I get my other work done, that is when I finish my additional work. For those couple of hours between getting home and bedtime, that is their time. I really did start that when I was in the program, and I have been able to continue that. The balance that didn't exist [was created] then when I started making time, allowed some balance or structure—an operating protocol, so to speak. You are in this automaton mode for a couple of years; this is the only balance I had. We cannot be the perfect parents in the doctoral program; you learn you are not perfect in anything. You are not going to have balance life. That doesn't exist.

Ages of the Children—Younger vs. Older

The experiences of married doctoral student with children are often a struggle with family, work, and the program itself. As stated, balance of these three items is often difficult, if not impossible to achieve. As the interviews concluded, a subtheme emerged indicating that the participants had perspectives of how the ages of their children affected their progression, emotions, retention, attrition, and completion of the program.

The ages of the participants' children ranged from older teenagers to newborns. The discussion of the ages of the children and the effect on the married student was predicated on the distinction of the ages. The range for the older children category was approximately 12 to 18.

These children were seen to be more independent and more able to adapt to the married student's varying schedule and need of solitude for long periods of time. As for the children younger than 12, they were seen to be more adaptable in their ability to be distracted from the absence of the married student and to be more accepting to the reintroduction of the married student.

Among the participants' opinions, there was a clear division of which age range was best for the student, for the child(ren), and for the family. Of the participants, six undoubtedly had the perspective that enrolling in a doctoral program with older children was the most suitable plan for success. Two participants believed that having younger children would be better for the married student and the family, and two participants did not discuss the subject.

The majority of the participants agreed that raising a child or children during an intense doctoral program is taxing on the family in many ways, but the age factor of the children seemed to strike a chord in the participants. Kurt believed for his young daughter, who was an infant to two years old during the program, the stress of her parents fighting and struggling subsequently made she become needier. "I know she [the baby] knew there were problems. She could feel it." Kurt also believed because his daughter was an infant, she needed more attention than a teenager or older child. Many times his wife would leave the baby with Kurt:

> It could be, "Oh yea, you have a paper next week. Why don't I take our daughter this afternoon, and we'll go to my mom's to give you some time to do this." Or it could be, she is upset about whatever, "Oh, we haven't had enough family time. I am just going to leave the daughter with you." And she would explode and leave the baby with me and go off somewhere else. And what could I do? She is a baby, I had to stop everything and take care of my girl!

Kurt recognized in one sense it was good his daughter was too young to remember what was happening between her parents, but he wonders if she had been older if he could have sustained enrollment and graduation. He concluded his thoughts on this by explaining that the emotional toll from his wife's mental condition and the stress of having to "take over the parenting" played a large part not only in his leaving the program but also in the decision to divorce

Pete only saw positives that his children were older when he was in the program: "Bar none. I think it made it easier. I thing a smaller child would have caused me to question the effectiveness of pursuing this program at that time." He spoke of the milestones that would be missed and the inability of the child to understand why the parent was not around. Pete had both an older child and a younger child. His daughter was a sophomore in high school, and his son was in sixth grade. He spoke about how his son was transitioning from a younger child to an older child:

> So, he kind of had a work ethic already, and so the conversations I would have with him were not of the same magnitude, if you will, than with the conversations with my daughter, because conceptually she could grasp the concept of pursuing something a little better than he could. I whole-heartedly believe that having older child makes it easier. I believe that it makes it easier to explain, but it also helps the child to understand and better grasp what you are doing and why you are doing it.

Pete explained the how older children also can understand that when the parent is not available for periods of time, it is not personal, "They might not fully have the concept down, but they have a better sense of what you're doing and can understand why you're not hanging out at 1pm on Saturday afternoon than a sixth grader would."

Shari understood Pete's perspective of the older child being more capable of understanding the circumstances of why mom or dad is not able to attend a function or an event. Shari spoke of times she missed her children's events and the guilt that haunted her. Although she was saddened by missing time with her children, she was comforted by knowing that because they were older, they were better able to understand why she was unavailable for those times: "And they were old enough to get that. They were old enough to see, you know what I mean? To have experienced it, it was in, 'Oh, mommy is busy.' Because they knew what I was doing."

Shari spoke of how her children were becoming more independent and that not only helped them to grow, it helped ease the guilt of her not always being there. She also contended that because her children were older and very involved in school and extracurricular activities, they grew with her because of the adjustments, the understanding, and the sacrifices the entire family made during the program: "It was really good that way, I really appreciate it."

Gabby shared Pete and Shari's views of older children. Gabby had the luxury of having one child who was 24 years old and independent, yet still a part of the family support system. Her other two children were 16 and 12. Gabby noted that her "beautiful boys" were always independent. They were very supportive of her the entire time she was in the program. Gabby credited her family support system for her success and her ability to persist even with many personal and professional setbacks. Gabby agreed that because her boys were older and more able to understand the need for her to be gone, whether at campus or studying, that she still loved and appreciated them:

> My boys are everything to me. We all grew during that period I was in school. We became a tighter family. Even during and after the divorce, the kids and I grew closer, and so did our connection with my sisters and my mom.

Dutch and Kathy were amazed anyone would voluntarily enter a doctoral program with younger children. The idea of not having children who were self-reliant or at least could manage to occupy their own time while mom studied was unimaginable. Dutch could not fathom how anyone could be working full time and going to school and have a younger child? Although she did attend school and work full time, her children were older:

> So, I took on more responsibility as my children got older. They were home, yeah, I couldn't imagine, I couldn't imagine working and going to school and having a young preschooler or even younger or early elementary. I didn't have to dress anybody, wash anybody, or do any of that business.

Kathy, in the same vein as Dutch, could not comprehend how anyone could have a career, a family with young children, and be in a doctoral program:

> I think it was because I didn't have itty-bitty kids. My kids are old enough to understand, and so that made a huge difference. Right now I have a one year old, and if I were trying to do this with a one year old there is no compromising. He wants what he wants when he wants it! So it makes a difference what age your kids are.

Although Gabby, Shari, and Pete most definitely were glad their children were older during their experiences in the program, they were not as adamant about not understanding how a married student with children could continue a full-time career and be enrolled in a full-time doctoral program. This view was not shared by Shelly or Dave.

Together Shelly and Dave were proponents of having young children while being enrolled in a doctoral program. Similar to Kurt's view, Shelly stated, "This program is for single people, married couples without children, or couples with very young children—so they don't remember the bad times." Shelly disagreed with Pete and the other *pro-older* participants in that

her two daughters, both in their middle teens during the program, were not the "proper age" to understand the reasons why their mother was not there for them:

> If I could do it again, I would either have waited for the children to be older or I would have wanted my children very young so they would not remember the stress the program put on my husband and me, on my work and me, and the stress of me not being a part of their lives. I have two very strong girls, but there were times when I just could not be there for them because of the program and that is too hard for anyone.

Dave recalled a time when he took a picture of his toddler daughter when she was crawling on the floor and became entangled in a pile of Dave's school books. Dave explained a conversation that his now older daughter and he had about that photograph:

> She saw the picture recently, and she said, "Look, it's me with my books." And I said, "No, it's Daddy, those are daddy's books. No, those are a little beyond your reading level." It is what it is, that was the way the kids grew up. They don't remember any of that, they were too young, and that is fine. Almost easier when they were younger and able to deal with it.

Societal/Cultural Disparity

The remaining participants all commented on the gender disparity of the program, but they focused more on societal and cultural reasons for this gender disparity. Different cultures and different societies have different expectations of each gender. Debbie postulated that gender disparity happens "because society lets it be true." Society and cultural gender disparity were highly visible to the participants, and 13 out of the 14 participants commented on it directly. In addition to gender discrimination Shari added that of age perhaps made the gender disparity issue even worse:

> Certainly if I had a stay-at-home wife it would have been a big help or a stay-at-home husband, but that was not an option. I think, I think maybe that's related to . . . Women in higher ed. in general there is still gender disrespect and age [disrespect]. Because there is an age issue too, I think.

Pete related the idea of the "glass ceiling" with traditional relationships where the mother is in school and the father is not. Pete views it as a major contributor to the gender disparity of married doctoral student mothers. He gave an example of a married woman and student with two younger children—the husband "who believes in the traditional structure of marriage, absolutely it could have an effect on the marriage itself and the roles. In this case the husband would be required and prompted to perform more of the caretaker role."

Tim and Dutch related their experiences of gender disparity in cultural backgrounds. Tim described how his wife took on the traditional role of the wife while Tim was in the program. He alluded to culture as the aspect that influenced gender disparity: "Maybe there are some cultures that have greater expectations with gender? With the women, [they] have to do more . . . that might have an impact, or an influence the ability of success, or easier, or less difficult to complete the program."

Dutch was more specific with the cultural reasons for the gender disparity for women in doctoral programs. She credited her traditional Asian background as the reason she and her husband divided the parental roles. She conceded that there were times when her husband had to take over "mother roles," but she explained:

> Well, my gender is female, and that means I have the burdens of the mother, but again we have a very traditional home. We had very traditional roles in our family and so I was successful in the program because my husband stepped up and took some of the

> traditional roles of mother. He didn't do things the way I would have done them, but he also asserted himself as the head of the household and said, "Look, you're just going to have to live with it. Because you decided to do it, and you're going to do it, are going to do great, and I'm going to see to it that I support you. I'm going to let the kids wear crinkled clothes. That's all."

Dutch also believes her cultural heritage, both her Asian ancestry and her African American ancestry, are possible reasons for her traditional acceptance of this gender disparity. Although she was proud of her traditional values in relation to gender, she was appreciative of her husband and his willingness to pursue nontraditional family roles:

> I don't know if it's race. It may be that the drive and type a personality may or may not be related to my Asian background. Many people say it is, but the idea that you are going to do it, not only do it right, but do it perfectly, and do things on time and well, pretty much that was what I was raised with. . . . So, I mean, the idea that your character is somehow tied to the quality of your work is, yeah, that's an Asian thing. [Laughter] Did that put a lot of pressure on me? Well, yeah. Both my parents were dead at the time I was in the program, but I can always hear my ancestors telling me, "Make sure I give honor to the name and to them by doing well," and that's how you show your gratitude to your ancestors… by doing well. So, again, that's a Japanese thing that probably did help me succeed in the program.

Kathy commented on gender, but not with as much conviction as other participants in the study. She was the only participant who was not positive that being a mother was an issue, but in agreement with Dutch, Kathy did indicate a disparity in gender when it came to race. She

explained that her cohort had more women than men and that the women completed earlier than the men:

> So, you know, as far as completion in our cohort, the women have completed their dissertations, and have gotten everything done at a faster rate than the men have. And so I'm not sure that gender is a factor. Cause you would think that the men would get done faster because of, you know, the traditional stereotypical role of men in the family, but the women have so far have exceeded the men in our cohort.

Kathy added to her view that the gender disparity is not necessarily a mother versus father issue, but could be more of an intra-gender issue due to race. Kathy was the only African American woman in her cohort. She stated she sometimes wished there were other African American women in her cohort. Having African American faculty helped in some ways, but not in a student aspect. Kathy was comfortable with her counterparts who were women—married with children and those who were married without children or who were single:

> There were other women and we could all identify on the level of being a woman and those who had kids, we could identify with that. But I didn't feel that I had that, that level of connection that I needed sometimes being an African American woman.

Although the participants addressed the general disparity that was observed in their cohorts between the mothers and the fathers, there was no excuse making from any of the participants as to the gender disparity preventing them from overcoming this disparity. The common agreement of the participants' comments was the mothers seemed to carry an extra burden during the program than the fathers. Of all of the participants, Gabby was the only participant who did not comment specifically of there being a gender disparity; she did allude to this by stating that "if you have the desire, this is something that you want, all you need is

someone to help you, showing you how to get it, and you focus; race, gender, sexual orientation have nothing to do with that."

Summary of Results II

The eight subthemes helped to dissect and express a richer understanding of the themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews. These subthemes add valuable assistance in appreciating the lived experiences of married doctoral students with children.

The first subtheme to be revealed was the idea of creating a mentoring program from "*previous cohort mentors who are married with children*." This would allow the new and inexperienced married doctoral student with children to build on their pre-program knowledge and help to understand the liminalness of the doctoral program. The ability to utilize the knowledge of previous cohort members with children would not only assist the married student during the program, but would also open the possibility of long-term relationships, networking possibilities, and future enrollment of these students in the mentorship program.

In conjunction with mentoring, the subtheme of "*reoccurring liminality in the dissertation phase developed*." For many of the participants, the structure of the coursework strengthened their persistence, while the unstructured and self-reliant design of the dissertation phase was a cause of stress, uncertainness, and even attrition. Participants did agree that a stronger dissertation chair involvement and a mentor during this phase of the program would be helpful in persistence and completion.

In the subtheme "w*hat doesn't kill us . . .*," four of the participants discussed their belief that the program affected the marriage in a positive manner. These participants developed strategies to maintain strong marital relationships and in turn maintained focus on academic progress. Participants observed that even with the stress of the program, this stress and the needs

of the program sometimes did pull them from their spouses, but this was only temporary. They also noticed they were able build stronger relationships after they successfully completed the program.

Subtheme 4, "o*n one hand . . .*," discussed being overstretched and the positive and negative views of the program on the marriage. In this subtheme, Kathy and Debbie noticed their marriages were stretched to the limits during the program, but they also believed that even with this stress, their marriages became stronger towards the end of the program and even stronger after they successfully completed the program. Although all of the participants admitted to both positive and negative times during the program, only Kathy and Debbie were more stabilized with their descriptions.

In contrast to subtheme 4, subtheme 5, "*on the other hand: overstretched*," exposed the three participants who related a large number of experiences that negatively affected their marriages during the program. Shelly, Gabby, and Kurt discussed how the stresses and requirements of the program often caused problems in their marriages and, in turn, caused problems for their academic progress. Shelly maintained her marriage but did not complete the program. Gabby completed her degree but divorced during the program. Kurt was not successful in his academic pursuits and his marriage ended during the program.

The sixth subtheme is "*the time budget crunch*." The participants described how they attempted to budget time between studying and family interaction. All of the participants discussed the sacrifices of attempting to achieve balance among work, school, and family. The majority of participants agreed that balance was impossible and that at certain times, one aspect must take precedence over the others. Often, school was the aspect that received the main focus,

thus putting family second. In all cases, participants agreed that work was the last of the aspects to receive the main focus.

The seventh subtheme, "*ages of the children—younger vs. older*," addresses the ages of the children of the married students, and the relation of age impacting the balancing act. The vast majority of participants agreed that having older children (12 to 18) during the program is preferential than having younger (12 to newborn) children. The thoughts behind this view are the mental flexibility and adaptability and the physical ability of older children to take care of themselves in relation to younger children. Dave and Shelly held opposing views to the other participants, highlighting that younger children are easier to placate and are less inclined to remember the stresses placed on the family by the enrollment of a parent in a doctoral program.

The eighth and final subtheme reveals the "*societal/cultural disparity*" observed by all of the participants pertaining to the role of gender in the program. It was unanimously agreed that women have more responsibilities during the program than the men in the program. The data of this study revealed that this disparity occurs because of social, cultural, or self-imposed acceptance of the women.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this study was to better understand the lived experiences of married doctoral students with children. Chapter 4 gave background stories of the participants of this study. This history facilitated better understanding of the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal stages of each participant's life in relation to her or his doctoral school experiences. Chapter 4 also described the five major themes revealed from the data: (a) Support, "can I do this alone?" This theme included aspects of support between the married student and the family, spirituality support, the support of the institution (both where the married student is employed and the institution where the married student was enrolled), and the support of the cohort; (b) The effect of a doctoral program on the marital relationship. The views of the participants of how the program affected their marital relationship; (c) Walkin' the tightrope: balancing it all. The ways the participants attempted to balance a family and enrollment in a doctoral program; (d) Filling the gender gap. This theme discusses the views of the program and its effects on the lives of the women and men in the program; (e) The final theme is a collection of advice for present and future married students with children who are interested in a Ph.D. program. Chapter 5 outlined eight subthemes that emerged from the data collection: (1) "*previous cohort mentors who are married with children*;" (2) "r*eoccurring liminality: the dissertation phase*;" (3) "*what doesn't kill us . . .*" How the program positively affected the marriages; (4) "o*n one hand . . .*" this

subtheme highlighted the positive and not-so-positive views of the program on the marriage; (5) "*on the other hand . . .*" how some participants had negative experiences; (6) "t*he time budget crunch.*" How the married student budgeted time between studying and family interaction; (7) "a*ges of the children—younger vs. older,* how the ages of children impacted the balancing act; (8) "*societal/cultural disparity*;" the role of gender in the program. This chapter analyzes the data that emerged from these themes.

Over the decades, research on married doctoral students with children has indicated this demographic has experiences other doctoral students cannot understand (Atkinson, 1939; Dyk, 1987; Feldman, 1973; Gardner, 2008a, 2009; Gold, 2006; Lovitts, 2001; Madrey, 1983; Mason, 2009; Moore, 2005; Nedleman, 1991; Scheinkman, 1988; Sori et al., 1996; Workman & Bodner, 1996). Although the vast majority of these studies have been quantitative and rarely qualitative, they all indicate that married doctoral students with children face distinctive challenges but also experience exceptional successes. Madrey (1983) ascertained from her study that a married student culture exists, and that married doctoral students still retain shared experience with all married couples (with and without children), "yet there remains some traits which are uniquely characteristic of married students. These confirm the notion of 'marginality,' and it is these students' marginality that sets them apart from the larger society" (p. 48).

The findings of this study support much of the findings of the past 30 years. For instance, there are many similarities between this study and Madrey's 1983 ethnography. As Madrey (1983) suggested there is a sense of marginality in married doctoral students which, when adding children to the equation, puts these students in an even more marginalized setting, mostly at their places of employment and in the program. The stories of married doctoral

students with children were often similar. The outcomes, the challenges, and the celebrations are what make this study and this story invaluable to future married doctoral students with children.

Gardner (2009) explained in her work the doctoral student is not typical and does not fit into the traditional definition of a student; in fact, doctoral students are at a special level of uniqueness:

> Doctoral students may come directly from a bachelor's degree program or may begin their program midway through a professional career, they may be twenty two or sixty two (or any age between), and they may have children or may even care for elderly parents. In other words, the absence of doctoral students in the developmental literature may owe greatly to the fact that doctoral students are anything but a homogeneous group. This lack of homogeneity can pose difficulties for theories that try to generalize to a larger population. (p. 5)

Similar to Madrey (1983) and Gardner's observations that not only doctoral students and married doctoral students are both marginalized and not in any traditional framework, this study classifies married doctoral students with children into a category by themselves with unique circumstances, needs, wants, and focuses.

Support, "Can I Do This Alone?"

In the vast majority of the previous scholarly literature ((Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2008a, 2009; Golde, 2000; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lawson & Fuehrer, 1989; Lovitts, 1996, 2000; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Middleton, 2001; Rovaris, 2004; Sigafus, 1998; Smith et al., 2006; Ülkü-Steiner et al., 2000; Workman & Bodner, 1996), support for the married doctoral students with children before and during their program has been a focus of study.

Primary support mechanisms in this study include (a) family support, (b) institutional support, and (c) classmates/cohort support.

The participants all agreed that family support, especially spousal support, was paramount for completion of a doctoral program (for Shelly and Kurt, the coursework) which further supports the findings of Madrey (1983), Gardner (2009), and Price (2006). This was the case 30 years ago as stated by Madrey: "The primary stabilizer for the doctoral student couple is the support received from the non-student spouse and parents, with that of the spouse being the most important" (p. 7).

Beyond the support that is needed and offered by the spouse, the need for family support was frequently repeated by all participants. Madrey (1983) stated the family relationship was considered the main support and was often proclaimed, as Gabby stated, "the main reason I am doing this." All participants agreed they were achieving this degree with their familes. This was not only the married student's degree, it was the family's degree.

For the married doctoral student with children, overall support, including aspects of support such as spousal, family, supervisor/coworker, and cohort is a combination of characteristics that are sometimes fleeting, but when found, makes the doctoral journey much easier. Gardner (2009) found that "family members, partners, children, and friends all serve vital roles in the doctoral student's experience" (p. 40). This study found that often spousal support is either strengthened or weakened. When spousal support is weakened in any manner, the married doctoral student often reaches out to children, extended family, and friends for support.

Through the semi-structured interviews, the family and the family relationship were constantly referred to as "the most important aspect" of the participants' lives and became internalized by the participants as more of a mental aspect of family support. Tim referred to his

family as “la mas importante.” Kurt stated, “I whole-heartedly tried to keep my family first.” As he stated this, he paused and took a deep breath, “I’d be lying if I told you that the family always won, but sometimes the program won—too many times. But the entire time I was doing schoolwork, I thought of my family and how much I love them.” All of the participants stated they attempted to keep their families in the forefront of their lives during the coursework, as well as during the dissertation phase. All admitted this was not always possible. The physical and mental demands of the program consistently interfered—to lesser and greater degrees – with their time with the family. However, each student’s intent was to put family first, but internally, the family came first.

Spirituality was a motivating and guiding force for the majority of students. The majority of participants specifically discussed the need, reliance, and thankfulness for the role spirituality played in their studies and in their ability to mentally maintain during the program. Many of the participants who cited spirituality as a support for them also discussed finding others in the cohort with similar beliefs that assisted them in fitting the mold. Similar to Gardner’s (2008a) discussion of “fitting the mold” (p. 1), the need for inclusion and feeling of companionship is a motivator for persistence. As Dutch described her prayer buddy and Tim discussed often contacting other cohort members and discussing spirituality, Gabby stated that it was her constant devotion:

> If I didn’t have my family and my beliefs, I wouldn’t have made it. I needed both to make it. Tony, God is the reason for my success and my family was there to help me when I needed it, but God was always there.

In this study, institutional support includes where the student was employed during her or his program and the institution where the student was enrolled. Views from the participants

about the institutions of employment were mixed. Gardner (2009) stated, "For those doctoral students who work full time outside their graduate programs, the relationships they have with existing colleagues and workplaces are also important components of the students" (p. 40). There appears from this study to be some relationship between having a positive and supportive work environment and a smooth academic experience for the participants. This was true for the participants of this study. The cooperation and support of supervisors and colleagues was seen as a main connection for a smoother progression in the program. Seven of the participants agreed it was the positive supervisor and colleague support that made their doctoral experiences less stressful and led to their ultimate success and graduation. This support was viewed as secondary to spousal and family support. Pete stated, "I can't complain. I was given the opportunity to pursue this degree by my supervisors. They understood when I needed time; as long as I did my job." Gabby, Kurt, and Shelly did not receive the support and cooperation from their supervisors and their colleagues. Gabby experienced negative, almost malicious responses from her supervisors and colleagues. This treatment led her to quit her current cohort and later join another. Despite many struggles, she did complete her degree. For Kurt and Shelly, supervisors, colleagues, and career ultimatums are the reasons they gave for not completing their degrees. Kurt stated, "I really wanted to complete. Would I have done it with a different job? With a job I liked and with bosses that understood, yes, no doubt."

In the case of the educational institution, the participants were satisfied with the design of the program and the support of the institution. The research of Brannock et al.(2000); Gardner (2008a), Lovitts (2001), Madrey (1983), and Smith et al. (2006) involving the role of the institution in the importance of mentoring (peer and faculty) and the role of faculty advisors in the retention of students was supported by this study. Gardner (2008a) posited, "From a

programmatic standpoint, a peer-mentoring program that matches students with those who have had similar experiences may assist students in understanding and successfully navigating their own experience" (p. 135). The idea of matching current and previous cohort members who are married with children with entering cohort members who are also married with children was overwhelmingly supported by the participants of this study. Tim agreed with the idea of peer mentors in a current cohort by stating,

> It's nice if they did match those people [new cohort members] with mentors, but I think peer-to-peer influence is so powerful, not only in undergraduate, but in our [doctoral] programs, in doctoral programs, peer-to-peer influence is so powerful to try to find a couple of people in your cohort that you connect with on a lot of levels. The people I connected with were intellectually curious, they were good family people.

Kathy agreed that a peer mentor would have been helpful. In fact, she was a peer mentor to a new cohort member and saw the benefit of her assisting:

> Just to get some words of advice from them, that probably would've been good. But I guess to bounce off questions from the very beginning to say, you know, "How did you do that? How did you make it work?" And as a matter of fact I remember doing that with a couple of, well at least one individual that came from a couple cohorts after me. I was paired up with her just to talk to her a couple of times, so I know that it's beneficial.

Pete stated that he would like to have more assistance after the coursework, not only from his chair, but perhaps from a previous cohort mentor:

> From my personal experience, post-coursework would have been the time to help me in terms of what I should have been doing, this is the next step. People who haven't defended their proposal or in various stages of writing a lit review, they think you know

something, but you feel like you don't know anything. You don't know how to swim and you are in the ocean. You have more questions than answers.

When a situation would arise where a student was unable to complete an assignment or had to miss a class, the professor would assign alternate work to fulfill the requirement. All of the participants acknowledged either witnessing this or having it happen to them. Gabby, Kathy, and Shelly each discussed this happening to them. Gabby stated, "I couldn't make it to class sometimes so I knew I needed to do extra work—make up work. I was okay with that." Kathy and Shelly also had to make up work but were not so accepting of the process. Kathy understood the necessity of being responsible for the work, but thought that sometimes the "punishment did not fit the crime." Shelly missed a class to be with her sick daughter; she stated, "I was punished for having a family and taking care of them." It is interesting to note that Gabby viewed the substitute assignments as being helpful and accommodating but Kathy and Shelly believed the substitute assignments as being a punishment.

In relation to Pete's concern of post-coursework liminality, Gardner (2009), Lovitts (2001), Madrey (1983), and Smith et al., (2006) agreed that the role of the dissertation chair/advisor is vital for the progression and the ultimate success of the student. "It is widely recognized that the relationship between the student and his or her adviser and chair, if someone other than the adviser, can spell the difference between completing and not completing a doctoral program" (Smith et al., 2006, p. 21). All participants agreed that the set structure of the coursework was helpful for the family in that it provided some sort of predictability, but none of the participants were ready for the largely self-guided and unstructured dissertation phase. Many participants agreed that as soon as they reached the dissertation phase and, as Dave stated, "life

took over" and the responsibilities of family and work took precedence over the needs of the dissertation.

Although all participants, save Kurt and Shelly, completed their dissertations, those who did complete agreed the encouragement, availability, and support of their dissertation chairs were instrumental in the completion of their dissertations, second only to spousal support. Shari recalled the importance of the support of the dissertation chair and how it is necessary to maintain some semblance of focus and structure in both the dissertation phase and the returning to life phase. The freedom from coursework often tested a participant's self-discipline and necessitated a temporary shift of priorities away from academics:

> I know they [faculty] want you to finish. So it's not only while you're in classes, but the biggest loss to me was when the courses were over it all went back to do the dissertation on your own. And depending on your chair, there usually is more follow-up, communication, and hopefully you get a good strong chair that contacts you and helps to motivate you. When we finished, we didn't even have our proposals defended after we finished our coursework. So we still have to go through the proposal defense so we were really not ready. Boy, you're really, you're really so much out there by yourself and you don't have the same structure with your family.

The data from this study indicated that cohort support was also a primary motivator for continuing the program for the participants and the participants agreed that the cohort has led to lifelong friendships and helped develop intrapersonal skills. This backs findings of the assistance of cohort support in graduate studies by Devenish et al., (2009), Gardner, (2009), Sigafus, (1998), and West et al., (2011). West et al., posited,

> Cohorts emphasize networking, support, ease in scheduling, and satisfaction after graduation. Faculty notice that cohort members are better prepared for leadership roles and experienced better student-to-faculty relationships than non-cohort members. They inferred that cohort participants gained knowledge not accessible to non-cohort programs. (p. 314)

This study also found that the relationships developed in a cohort are often life-long and are also seen as an extension of the student's nuclear family. The relationship of the student's cohort is tight, but the connection developed with other cohorts is similar to an exclusive club. As stated by Debbie:

> We had an awesome cohort. I appreciated their friendship and support. So, every time there's an email goes out that so and so defended their dissertation, please congratulate them. I am the first to go, "Congratulations." Even if they are not in your cohort, it's that experience, and it's the group of people you can meet through that experience that makes it so exciting.

Support systems were seen as a necessity by the participants of this study, which once again falls in line with the literature on this subject. Smith et al. (2006) stated, "These systems provide important environments of acceptance and understanding for students, which in turn allow them to have confidence in their abilities" (p. 23). The support systems were seen as stress relievers and allowed the student to focus more creative energy on their studies. This was especially true when the three aspects of support were simultaneously available to the participants. The culmination of the three aspects of support was seen by all of the participants, but the simultaneous occurrence was usually at the beginning of the program. Gabby summed up this finding:

> It wasn't only that my sisters were there for me, but I knew I was supported by my family. My cohort friends were always there for me and to have such caring faculty, I knew I was going to do it. Yes, it took me a while, but I did it.

Many times for the participants, having one aspect of support was enough to keep them moving forward. Tim, Pete, Dutch, and Dave often spoke of having more than enough support to continue without much hindrance to their studies and to their lives. These participants were fortunate to achieve this combination. This situation was not always the case. As the semesters passed, more pressure and stress began to mount, and many times one or more aspect of support was missing. Shelly remembered a time when she felt alone and without support, only to realize it was available. She acknowledged feeling unsupported is often stress related and imagined:

> I was at my desk crying. I kept thinking no one cared about me. My family was out having fun. No one [faculty or cohort] answered any of my emails asking for help. I couldn't figure out how I was going to do this. I would look back and look at a picture of my daughters and realize the support is there; sometimes I just need to be reminded.

The need for support was vital for the participants in this study and overwhelmingly backed by the existing literature. Kurt summed up the necessity of support in his addressing that he did not finish the program, "I got as far as I could. I lasted as long as the support lasted. That includes my wife and my work. When they stopped supporting me, I couldn't continue."

The Effect of a Doctoral Program on the Marital Relationship

The participants of this study all agreed there were many times when family responsibility had to be put on life's *back-burner*, but this tendency was more evident with participants as it related to their spouses. Smith et al. (2006) stated, "Doctoral students who are involved in intimate relationships face a constant time problem. There is only a limited amount

of time to maintain a healthy relationship with another person during this period" (p. 23). The participants fully agreed with the finding of Smith et al.: "Complaints are often heard that the doctoral student does not seem to have enough time to meet someone else's needs" (pp. 22-23).

What Doesn't Kill Us . . .

Madrey (1983) found that having a spouse in a graduate program was not always harmful on the marriage. She found that the longer the couple had been married and the older the couple, the more capable the marriage was to survive the pressures and tolls of graduate school. Thirty years later, this study's outcome corresponds. Tim, Pete, Dutch, Dave, Kathy, and Debbie all agreed their marriages were stronger because of the program. All but Dave had been married for over 10 years and all were over 30 when they began the program. Pete attributed this strengthening to the personal commitment between him and his wife and their devotion to the family: "My family knew that this is what I was doing late at night and my wife knew that, and I gave my entire attention to family time while that time was there after work. I was exhausted, but I did it."

On the One Hand . . .

Smith et al. (2006) stated, "A major personal issue that challenges students while they are completing a doctorate involves balancing time for significant relationships with individuals both outside their family and within their family" (p. 23). Although Tim, Pete, Dutch, and Dave saw beneficial outcomes from the program on their marriages, Kathy and Debbie did acknowledge their relationships with their husbands were sometimes strained, but overall, the marriages were strengthened. Gold (2006), Gardner (2008a, 2008b, 2009), and Madrey (1983) researched the positive and negative effects of a doctoral program on a marriage. Gardner (2009) discussed the struggle of balancing a relationship with immediate family and outside relations: "Balancing

these relationships with graduate work is often tenuous, particularly for those students who are also parents of small children, are involved in serious relationships, and have family care responsibilities" (p. 40). Debbie added at one point of the interview, "There were times when I just didn't know what was happening. I was happy, but stressed, and sometimes I took it out on my husband. I love my family."

On the Other Hand: Overstretched

The fear of academically outgrowing their husbands caused internal conflict in some women students, which spread to the marriage. This academic growth and other strains on the marriages of doctoral students with children was also seen in other studies (Brannock et al., 2000; Gardner, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Lovik, 2004; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Mason et al., 2009; Middleton, 2001; Sori et al., 1996; Springer et al., 2009; Workman & Bodner, 1996).

This study concurs with the previous studies that there can be good and bad effects of a doctoral program on a doctoral student's marriage. Gabby and Debbie both cited a particular situation that affected their marriages in a negative way. Sheinkman (1988) described this situation as an "asymmetrical" (p. 1) marriage. This is when one partner is enrolled in school and the other is not. This scenario often creates feelings of abandonment, separation, and inadequacy. Sheinkman stated, "Asymmetrical relationships are prone to interactional confusion generated by this inherent incongruency within the individual [not enrolled]. Such a distinction can be distressing and, potentially, a major source of marital stress" (p. 3). This study agrees with Sheinkman that usually the nonstudent spouse feels the role confusion, but both Gabby and Debbie attributed stresses on their marriages because of their feelings of surpassing their spouses. Gabby stated, "I was outgrowing my husband."

Shelly and Kurt also believed the program had a negative effect on their marriages. Although Shelly's husband was not enrolled in higher education during Shelly's time, he was moving up the ranks at his work. This situation is similar to Sheinkman's (1988) "symmetrical" (p. 1) relationship in that they both were growing professionally and emotionally—just in different genres. Because of the differences in their professional and emotional growth, Shelly believes the program pulled her away from her husband and negatively impacted her marriage. Shelly stated, "Fortunately we were able to reconcile our differences and bring our growing in different areas together, but it sure took its toll on us."

Kurt and his wife were also affected by symmetrical growth. Kurt was attempting his second doctoral cohort and his wife was becoming more and more successful at her work. As they both grew professionally, they grew apart personally. Ultimately, there were many more personal issues involved in the changing of the relationship, but this symmetrical growth played a part. Kurt said the program was one of many issues that caused the demise of his marriage, but it was what he called, "a large and intruding piece of the puzzle that contributed a significant part that ended my marriage."

Walkin' The Tightrope: Balancing It All

Gardner (2008a) stated "Balancing of time and priorities is particularly relevant for students with children" (p. 134). Allen and Dory (2001) stated, "As a result, the modal time to complete the degree requirements is seven years. During this period, students must balance the demands of education with those of career and family" (p. 6). In a 2006 study of Ph.D. students at the University of California, Mason et al. reported the women and men who were married and had children were spending the largest blocks of time on caregiving and doctoral duties. This left little time for other responsibilities and for quality time with the family. Most participants in

this study agreed that was the case for them. Shari, Gabby, Kathy, Debbie, Kurt, and Shelly each stated that frequently their time was split between the needs of their children and the needs of the program. Although they tried to balance all responsibilities, the children or the program would eventually take the majority of their focus and time. In Dave's (and Tim's) case, the spouse absorbed the majority of caregiving. Dave's observation on the inability to balance school and family was, "there is no balance when you're in a program. There is absolutely no balance, and that's where it's completely unfair. So that imbalance is completely absorbed by the significant other." One note to Dave's observation is that the male participants agreed with this view; not all of the women agreed.

The Time Budget Crunch

No matter how much married doctoral students prepare, they will never be able to completely manage to allot time for all aspects of their lives (Gardner, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Lovitts, 1996, 2001; Madrey, 1983; Smith et al., 2006; Springer et al., 2009). Shelly commented, "Even though I had a 'calendar of events' that showed all of my projects and their due dates, and it also showed my family obligations, I never found enough time for both." This sentiment was common among the participants. Shari described the give and take of time and how often coordinating family schedules did not happen: "And that meant that things weren't always going to work with their schedule, and they weren't always working on my schedule."

Tweedie, Clark, Johnson, and Kay (2013) stated, "Being prepared for, and more quickly settling into, the seemingly endless grind of months of wake, write, sleep, and repeat, with some work for your employer mixed on weekdays, would have benefitted both author and family" (p. 387). The participants often resorted to the development of a routine to prepare for daily, family, and academic responsibilities. The participants had their own schedules for incorporating work,

school, and family. These schedules did not always allow for equal time budgets or more often than not, family time was budgeted the least amount of time. Dave recalls how he adjusted to the coursework and the structure of the program:

> I wasn't 100% able to be there [for his family] because I had the coursework; it really was the model of the program that allowed me to be present as much as I was. Of being able to have classes once a week and being able to have it as concentrated as it was and only limited amount of time of being on campus.

As Dave continued through the coursework and learned strategies to help coordinate his work, school and family times, he began to develop a routine:

> I think because I had the first year to set a routine that worked and I figured it out, that, and getting through summer having [the baby] when we did. I knew how already to be a student and really get the stuff done, and we had two semesters to get through and that was it. And that was the focus.

There seemed to be a similar routine for the majority of participants. This schedule included: waking around 6:00 a.m. and reading while getting ready for work, working for nine hours (faculty members had a slightly more flexible schedule), returning home and dedicating from five or six o'clock to eight or nine o'clock to family time, and then helping put the children to bed. From the time the children were in bed until two or three in the morning was schoolwork time. The weekends were dedicated school work time during the day and family time at night. This schedule remained throughout the course work, and then, as Gabby stated about her schedule, "It was all out of the window when it came time for the dissertation."

In relation to the dissertation phase, the importance of time management became more subjective to the married doctoral student. During the coursework, the rigid schedule and

impending due dates often forced the married doctoral student to sacrifice time with family for homework. Kathy related a story about the feeling of being torn between completing her dissertation and the needs of her children. Kathy explained that after her proposal defense she was academically lost; the shift from the structured coursework to the unstructured dissertation phase forced her to make a decision:

> When I got to the point where I needed to complete the dissertation, I had to put the program first. There were times when my kids wanted to do XYZ; I can't really give you examples but, you know, things that kids want to do. It was, "mommy, can you come and do this?" I had to say no because I wanted to get the dissertation done and I was right at the point where I was almost there. I just had to get it done.

Allen and Dory (2001) affirmed this liminal phase of most doctoral programs is because the dissertation phase requires the students to become more independent and more responsible for their own time: "Although faculty advisors may provide some direction and support, they usually expect doctoral students to independently develop and execute a significant research project by exercising initiative and managing time" (p. 1). However, independent learning is not always easy for the married doctoral student with children. Many times this causes stress in the student by forcing them to choose the program over their family.

Ages of the Children—Younger vs. Older

Gold (2006) suggested that further study be done on the impact of the age of the children on the married doctoral students with children. This study found the majority of participants believed the age of the child(ren) was a major influence in the ability to balance life and school. Six of the 10 participants agreed older children [12 to 18] made it easier for the married doctoral

student to balance parental duties and academic achievement. Debbie, one of the six, stated the general consensus opinion:

> There wasn't anybody in my cohort who had as many kids as I did. There were some guys in particular whose wives had newborns and who had children born during the program. I think that would have been even a more difficult thing in some ways to deal with because the child is so needy that first year. They change so quickly that I think my heart would have broken. I don't think I could have done it if my child were very young, let alone a newborn. At least my kids were up and going to the bathroom by themselves and all of that.

Kathy agreed with the majority that having younger children is better for married doctoral students, but added an alternate view by stating, "If I had to do it all over again I would have done it before having kids, okay."

Although Dave and his wife had both children during the program and Shelly had teenage daughters, they each believed having younger children may not necessarily make achieving balance between life and school easier for the parent, but a younger child would be better able to adapt to a "missing parent" and the eventual re-entry to the family. Dave explained that since his children were babies and toddlers during his time in the program, they do not remember his absence, and he had since re-entered their lives as a full-time parent. Shelly believed younger children would be easier to manage while attending the program. Shelly's teenage daughters had a hard time without their mother, and this conflict caused stress among the family.

Filling The Gender Gap

According to the Snyder and Dillow (2013), in 2011 there were more women doctoral students in education than men. In the academic year 2010-2011, 51.4% of the students who

earned a doctorate were women and that is expected to rise to 53.6% by the academic year 2020-2021 (Snyder & Dillow, 2013, Table 310). A count of the 12 cohorts used for extracting the sample for this study showed a 50/50 split between women and men. For this study, I chose an equal number of subjects from each gender. This study found there is a prevailing view by women and men participants, the married women doctoral students are not fulfilling their traditional domestic goddess role; that traditional roles of women, such as mother and nurturer, are being neglected in place of academic success. This outcome is substantiated by other studies (Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2008a, 2009; Golde, 2000; Lovitts, 2001; Madrey, 1983; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Rovaris, 2004; Scheinkman, 1988; Smith et al., 2006; Workman & Bodner, 1996). These studies highlighted that married women doctoral students are often portrayed by spouses and family members, and themselves, as not fulfilling their role as mother and domestic provider in exchange for the role of student.

Many studies (Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2008a, 2009; Golde, 2000; Lovitts, 2001; Madrey, 1983; Miller & Stone; 2011; Nedleman, 1991; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Price, 2006; Rovaris, 2004; Sallee, 2011; Scheinkman, 1988; Sigafus, 1998; Smith et al., 2006; Ülkü-Steiner et al., 2000) have examined how gender plays a role in academic retention, persistence, and attrition of graduate students.

Societal/Cultural Disparity

The data from this study indicate a disparity in gender regarding the students' roles at home and work. This is in conjunction with previous outcomes in the literature (Feldman, 1973; Gilbert, 1982; Madrey, 1983; Mason et al., 2009). All participants agreed that women married doctoral students have more of a burden because of the social and self-imposed view of a women's role in the family. Shari exclaimed, "Women in higher ed. in general, there is still

gender disrespect, and age disrespect." While Shari stated the age disrespect is for both genders, the gender disrespect is focused on women. Dave agreed and said there is a sense of guilt that is added for doctoral students who are women that is not present for students who are men, "It was a little bit more socially acceptable, and I think that's a lingering gender disparity that's still there, it exists and it's not fair at all. It all comes down to guilt."

Debbie examined her life and postulated that many times this societal view transcends education. Both educated and less educated people often believe women have no place in higher education. Debbie related a story about how some men perceive women who pursue graduate degrees often neglect their spousal and nurturing roles and are threatened by this:

> I had a lot of friends who had husbands who told them if they go back to get their master's they would leave them. They said, "Fine," and their marriage split up because the woman wanted to go to school. I wouldn't put up with that, and they wouldn't either. To you and to me it may seem there are not a lot of people like that in the world, but there are a lot of people like that who think that school is not a place for a woman.

Sallee (2011) observed women faculty and students were marginalized for reasons such as social perceptions of domestic roles, sexism, and being in traditional "female-dominated" (p. 212) programs such as nursing and education. This study revealed the belief of marginalization of women for this program mainly arises from the women's self-perceived lack of fulfilling traditional domestic roles. This view was firmly maintained by the women participants of this study. The men in this study agreed women were marginalized because women believed the lack of fulfilling the domestic roles is what society believed, *not* that their spouses or cohort-mates were labeling the women in the program. Many times all participants discussed the importance of attempting to share domestic roles, but not all participants believed this happened.

Advice for Present and Future Doctoral Students Who Are Married With Children

In his two models of relationship entitled Escalation and Termination, Knapp (1984) posited that open communication is the most important aspect of the beginning of a relationship and the lack of communication is the most detrimental aspect in the termination of a relationship. The importance of communication between students and their families was also highlighted in other studies (Dyk, 1987; Floyd, 2011; Gold, 2006; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992 Rovaris, 2004; Sheinkman, 1988; Smith et al., 2006; Sigafus, 1998; Sori, et al., 1996; Ülkü-Steiner et al., 2000; Workman & Bodner, 1996).

Price (2006) explained that women students believe the lack of communication by the spouse was a major problem in the relationship. The students also attributed a rise in aggression of the spouse to the lack of communication. This study agreed with Price in that the main piece of advice the participants gave to future, married doctoral students with children was communication. Kathy's words were "communication, communication, communication. I can't say that enough." Although Kathy and the other participants who completed their degrees attributed much of their relationship and academic successes to the ability to maintain open communication, the amount of open communication was not always as much as they wished. Kathy completed her thought on the importance of communication and family relationships: "But communication is probably the most important thing; and then allowing them to celebrate your accomplishment instead of feeling like you're kind of doing this on your own."

Shelly and Kurt each affirmed the flip side of the communication coin, as they cited lack of communication was crucial in weakening their relationships. Shelly stated, "Communication, communication, communication! Not only with your spouse, but your entire family! I wish I would have done more." Kurt was a bit more optimistic at first because he had previously

started the program and had background knowledge of the responsibilities: “Going into it, I was a big advocate of communication and making sure that she knew everything going in and there was constant communication throughout the program as in time commitment.” Kurt’s optimism was short-lived: “We stopped talking. I was consumed with work and school, and she was not interested in anything I was doing. If it weren’t for our daughter, my wife and I probably wouldn’t have ever spoken; those were some dark days.”

Sometimes, when students are witnessing their worlds collapsing, and even with a strong flow of communication, there are times when it must be recognized that something must give in order to achieve a semblance of balance. Sacrifices of every manner were made, tears have been shed, and still something must be forsaken (Madrey, 1983; Mason et al., 2009; Wendler et al., 2010). For Gabby and Shelly, they each had to abandon one aspect of their lives to help gain back their forward momentum. For Gabby, her pursuit of the doctorate and her newly found independence was too much for her marriage. It took extra persistence for Gabby to complete, but as she stated, “It was worth the work and hard effort.” For Shelly, she decided it was best for her family and her marriage to cease the pursuit of a doctorate. Sadly for Kurt, his marriage ended and he could not find the motivation or persistence to complete his degree. Kurt stated he did not want to stop his pursuit of the degree, but he believed forces were against him, “There were times it felt like the world was conspiring against me. I tried the program twice and each time something got in my way. But I am happy now; sometimes second place is not that bad.”

Summary of Analysis and Interpretation

The lived experiences of married doctoral students with children are unique in their challenges and rewards. Over thirty years ago, Madrey’s (1983) ethnographic study of married graduate students stated the married doctoral student with children are often marginalized but

have proven resilient and adaptable. This study indicated the extreme importance of support from family, cohort, and institutions of school and work for student/life success. The data revealed there was not one source of support seen as continuously more important, but the desired source for support often switched, depending on the student's immediate needs. Although the alternating of immediate support needs varied, this study revealed that although the family and other responsibilities are from time to time put on the backburner, the family unit is the main focus for the student and the majority of participants found as the main support source during the program.

Madrey's work from 1983 and studies throughout the decades (Feldman, 1973; Gilbert, 1982; Gardner, 2009; Lovitts, 2001; Nedleman, 1991) have documented many of the same stressors this study has found: the need for support, marital issues, time constraints, and the unavailability of mentoring. Many doctoral students have full-time careers and are full-time students, which is an achievement at any level. The added responsibility of a family can further complicate the pursuit of the higher degree. Sometimes in an attempt to balance life, family, work, and school, one aspect must give; in two cases in this study, school was the aspect that was abandoned. The attempt at balance and the ability to move forward, juggling the responsibilities without damaging the family, career, and education is a major achievement for this group of students.

This chapter analyzed the data and collected from the literature and the participants' interviews. The subsequent and final chapter will provide a conclusion for the dissertation. Chapter 7 will review the importance and value of this study and its limitations. The chapter will suggest recommendations for both the institutions affiliated with the students and for future

married doctoral students with children. Finally, recommendations for future research will be listed.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of married doctoral students with children. There has been an ebb and flow of research on this topic, appearing every five or so years since the early 1970s. Although research has been sporadic, what remains constant is that the research demonstrates that married doctoral students with children have proven to be a marginalized yet persevering group (Gardner, 2009; Madry, 1983). With a little more than half of doctoral students completing their degrees in 10 years or less, potentially half of all doctoral students are not finishing (King, 2010; Wendler et al., 2010). This study has postulated that the married doctoral students with children are even more at risk of not finishing their degrees because of the added familial responsibilities. Yet despite being at risk, this study has indicated that this group of devoted students, who are connected through common traits of their family status, more often than not achieve academic success.

This study applied the qualitative method of research, or more precisely, the phenomenological approach. Ten participants were purposefully chosen from 12 years of cohorts from an educational leadership program at a mid-size research university in the Midwest. Participants had to be married at the beginning of the program and had to have children under the age of 18 at any time during the program. Participants did not have to have completed the program. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with all 10 participants. The

demographics of the participants varied in gender, race, age, cohort year, family size, and years of marriage.

In this final chapter, items addressed include the importance of the study and the recognition of limitations of the study. Recommendations are offered for future, married doctoral students with children and for both the institutions where the students attend their program and where the participants are employed. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

The Importance of this Study

Since the first married doctoral students entered U.S. higher education (Geiger, 2005; Rudolph, 1990; Skolnick & Skolnick, 2007; Stubblefield, 1988; Stubblefield & Keane, 1994; Thelin, 2004), the attempt to balance family life, work life, and academic life has been studied (Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2009; Lovitts, 2001; Madrey, 1983; Moore, 2005; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Sori et al., 1996). Even with an abundance of research, mostly quantitative and rarely qualitative, there is still much to learn about the unique lived experiences of married doctoral students with children. The previous literature recorded throughout this study indicates there are many challenges for married doctoral students with children. This study concurs there are many unique challenges; however, this study also uncovered and highlighted the many unique opportunities for married doctoral students with children.

The extracted data from the, 10 semi-structured interviews of purposefully selected participants allows the voices of these married doctoral students with children to tell their stories in their own way. Although I have lived through the program, in keeping with Creswell (2009), McMillan and Schumacher (2001), Merriam (2009), and Patton (2002), I have kept my experiences out of the study or have bracketed these experiences. Although many times the

participants shared very similar stories and experiences as I have experienced, it was surprising to hear different accounts of similar situations. My similar position enabled me to empathize with the participants' positive and negative experiences and incited a thoughtful introspection of the participants' stories. The cohort camaraderie is a deep-rooted connection that can only be understood by someone who has gone through a doctoral program. An even deeper connection is formed by those cohort members who are married doctoral students with children.

The data from this study brought to light the need for a more in-depth, qualitative understanding of married doctoral students with children and of their experiences. Many times the participants were exposed to myriad of emotions that not only affected them but, because of their interactions with others, affected their families, friends, and colleagues.

The data concluded the support function was a main survival mechanism for the family relationship and the academic success of the student. The support came from four sources; 1) family, including spouse, children, and extended immediate family members, 2) their spirituality and the role of faith in their persistence, 3) institutions, including their places of employment and their education and finally, 4) the cohort members of their program. The data for four of the participants indicated they experienced all four of these support systems during the program. The remaining participants did not have this experience. The participants who believed all four aspects were simultaneously present agreed it took extra effort to maintain the support through sacrifices of their own, including lack of sleep, extra hours working on their jobs and class assignments, and degrading their standard of quality of work to "good enough."

Those participants who did not believe they had the full support of the four systems related they often were clinging to one system to help continue their academic pursuits. For the majority of these participants, it was the support of the cohort that kept them moving forward

academically. Family and spousal support were invaluable for the participants, and the data indicated that many times the inability of the family to relate to the student's program and her or his academic stressors created rifts between the student and the family. This inability to understand the experiences of the student arose from the spousal relationship more than other the family relationships.

The data from the study in relation to the effects on the marriage imply that constant communication is the key factor in keeping the marital relationship strong. The participants stated that without the ability and focused effort on open communication, misunderstanding is inevitable. The participants stated that even after discussions with previous program students about the importance of communication between student and spouse, it was not always possible or at the forefront of the student's priority list. Although all the participants indicated they continually tried to keep open the lines of communications, for Kurt and Gabby, the lack of open communication was one major cause of the demise of each of their marriages during the program.

This study also revealed the inability of some spouses to relate to the academic experience, even when the spouse had a higher education history. This study found the stressors and the demands of the doctoral program often took precedence over the needs of the spouse. This was not always a conscious effort, but even with discussion about impending deadlines and due dates, the majority of participants stated instances when spouses were unable to understand why the student allowed the program to take, what was seen in the spouses mind, preference over them or over the family.

Spousal support and attention is vital for the student to be motivated and even successful in their academic pursuits, but it is a shared responsibility for the student to understand the needs

of their non-student spouse. The stress of the program is not only demanding on the relationship, but the feelings of uncontrolled change, fears of the unknown, and the worries of abandonment weigh on the spouse who is not directly benefiting from the degree.

As for institutional support, the data suggested that when it came to work support, those participants who had average to high support from supervisors and colleagues were better able to complete the program. Two of the three participants who received minimal support or resistance from supervisors or colleagues cited this situation as a major factor for their failure to finish their program. The two participants, Kurt and Shelly, were unable to seek alternate support from their family and from the institution of the program. In addition, both Kurt and Shelly did not believe they were connected to their cohorts and therefore felt alone and secluded. Gabby, the third participant who did not receive support from work, did persevere and complete the degree; however, she needed eight years and she relied on the support systems offered by her family and the faculty of the program.

The study revealed there were many times when married students with children found others who were also married with children outside their cohort. A derivative of the cohort model accorded for the bonding of students and often created an *in loco familia.* This substitute family paradigm was parental or sibling in nature depending on the age of the students. It could also be peer-based, and sometimes all three relationships were represented.

The majority of participants regaled in happy stories of cohort memories and camaraderie that neither family members nor their coworkers could or would understand. In a familiar pattern, all but Gabby, Shelly, and Kurt had positive experiences with their cohorts. Possibly this lack of connection on all three fronts could be why it took Gabby so long to graduate and why Shelly and Kurt did not complete their degrees.

Balancing family life is hard enough with the internal challenges of maintaining family unity, the emotional and financial struggles of supporting the family, and the overall uncertainties that come with raising a family. Now add the stress of a spouse entering a doctoral program, and the tightrope of life becomes even thinner. The heightened rigor of a doctoral program prompts the emotional stress of time away from family and the liminality of a new dynamic in the household. The data from this study revealed one of the most complicated aspects of a doctoral program for married students with children is the balancing of school, work, and family responsibilities. The limit of time in the day often caused the student to choose one responsibility over the others. The participants related stories of working a full day, then spending a few hours with the family, then reading and studying until the early hours of the morning, only to repeat the same pattern continuously throughout the coursework. The development of a work/family/school schedule did help in creating a semblance of balance for the students and the families of this study. The data also revealed the more the student attempted to involve the family in understanding the academic structure and process, the easier it was for the family to appreciate what the student was experiencing and allowed for more flexibility in balancing the aspects of the program and the student's family and work lives. Open communication was cited by the participants as a way to include the family in the academic process.

The data from this study denoted the participants believed there was gender disparity against married doctoral women with children. The participants overwhelmingly agreed that whether intrinsically, culturally, or socially perceived, women have more domestic responsibilities than men in the same academic situation. Many of the women participants related stories of their own need to be the leader of the household and child nurturing duties. Of

these women participants, all stated they believed this was one area where they had a sense of obligation to their families. The family leadership role gave them a sense of control and family role identification. The women participants concluded this gender disparity was mostly due to social and cultural expectations. Three of the six women participants openly admitted they believed they were not only obligated to lead the domestic role, but their gender predisposed them to take control of the daily responsibilities of the family. The data from this study showed the male participants agreed with the gender disparity in this particular program and other doctoral programs.

Recommendations for Families

This study was predicated on understanding the lived experiences of married doctoral students with children. This focus included the attempt of balancing a career, a full-time academic schedule, and a family. The participants all described their experiences, good and not so good, with family relations during the program. They described family relations both in terms of the entire family unit and in specific relationship with the spouse.

The unanimous recommendation from this study was for open communication among the family members throughout the entire program—from applying to the program to the day of graduation. The participants indicated the necessity of this approach to aid in family unity, but some participants admitted it is not the easiest approach nor guaranteed to solve all family issues concerning the family and the program. The participants stated the need for the student to continuously and consciously attempt to include the family in the academic and social activities of the program. Nevertheless, the data of this survey indicated this is not a straightforward course of action. Many times the ability to relate the academic and social happenings is not possible due to the inability or the unreceptiveness of the family to completely understand the

perspective of the student. This situation usually results in a "you had to be there" scenario, which often creates a divide between the student and the family. Ultimately, the participants agreed the effort to "keep the family first at all costs"—which included late night studying, studying while at family functions, developing a program/family schedule and communicating constantly—will aid in developing and maintaining an approximate balance and stronger family bond.

Recommendations for Institutions

Doctoral Institutions

The data from this study concluded the institution of education where the married doctoral student with children attends the program would be prudent in engaging some practices designed especially for the married student with children. Developing more family-focused connections to the program and learning more about married students' experiences could also impact the understanding of other students and faculty about this group.

During the interviews with the participants of this study, a consensus was reached supporting special question and answer sessions between the new students and former, married doctoral students with children should be available during orientation. If possible, students who did not complete the program should be represented. This interchange will allow candidate married students with children to gain first-hand knowledge about the challenges and rewards of the upcoming program. This process of sharing experiences will benefit all students and faculty as the institution gains an understanding of this often forgotten group of students with unique needs and a unique array of perspectives, choices, and decisions that help to delineate and high light the responsibilities of family, work, and academics.

The data also revealed the need for extending the orientation exposure mentioned above to a full-scale mentoring program for cohort-based programs. Although a multitude of previous research indicates the benefits of mentoring programs at all levels of education, in relation to this study, it was found that a mentoring program designed for all students of the cohort, with the special focus of connecting previous married doctoral students with children with current married doctoral students with children, should be implemented before the first semester and continue through graduation. The data indicated that a mentor with the knowledge and understanding of a mentee's liminality during the program provides, at a minimum, a motivation for persistence, a connection to understanding emotions, and a soundboard to discuss academic issues. The majority of the participants of this study stated they would be willing to mentor future cohorts.

The final recommendation for the institution of the program revealed from this study is to attempt to include the married student's family as much as possible in the scholastic experience. Some ideas from the participants were to have on-campus activities such as family weekends, where the family could be involved. Perhaps these activities could be offered at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester. Also, the institution could create a social media site devoted to the cohort where families could learn about each other and possibly connect for support.

Institutions of Employment

This study indicated the place of employment of the married doctoral student with children plays a crucial role in the stress level, the ability to persist, and the success rate of the student. Of the three participants who indicated they did not receive support from their colleagues and supervisors, only one persevered to graduation. Two recommendations for the

institutions of employment were generated from this study to benefit both the married doctoral student with children and the institution of employment.

The major reason stated by the participants who did not receive support from their colleagues and supervisors was the lack of flexibility of the employer in the student's work schedule. The remaining participants indicated they had supervisors and colleagues who encouraged them by allowing the students flex-time with their work schedules or vacation time for study. This cooperation benefits both the student and the employer because the student is able to better balance the work/study relationship, thereby devoting the proper amount of time to work responsibilities and to academic responsibilities. Achieving a balance ultimately reduces stress levels of the student, which enhances their health and enables them to carry their varied responsibilities.

The second recommendation uncovered from this study is directed to the employer of the married student on the benefits of supporting the student's pursuit of higher education. This benefit is providing the employer a source of newly gained knowledge that can be incorporated into the institution to build new academic schema and institutional policy. By supporting the student through education and promotion, the employer encourages loyalty from the student.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study explored the lived experiences of married students with children during their time as students in a cohort-based doctoral program at a Midwest research university. Noting previous research on this topic, this study delved into multiple aspects of the lives of married doctoral students with children. The study briefly explored the students' lives before and after the program. This study examined the students' academic journeys in connection to their

relationships with their immediate family, their extended family, their cohorts, their program faculty relations, and their relations with their colleagues and supervisors.

Much of the scholarly research on married graduate students is quantitative in nature. This previous research explored the demographics of students rather than the subjective qualitative nature of the students' experiences. Although these demographic data have been available since the late 1950s, the more in-depth qualitative research began to emerge in the early 1980s and reemerges in popularity every five years or so including the present. While this study delved into the lived experiences of previous doctoral students with children and discovered some new views and information, there is still room for more research in assisting this marginalized group.

This study and the previous scholarly studies on married doctoral students with children focused on the student and the effect of their studies on the family from the student's perspective. It is recommended that a qualitative follow-up study be conducted on the spouses of this study to compare and contrast the views of the student and the spouse. This new study would highlight similar and corroborating views and experiences as well as bring to light possible different perspectives of similar scenarios.

This study discussed the students' perspective of the family and their relationship with the family. It is recommended, with proper guidance, more focus be placed on how the children of the married doctoral students are affected by the enrollment of the parent—student. This research could bring valuable information about how children of married doctoral students are affected by the parent's involvement in the program. Possible data to be gathered could be the children's age(s) on their adaptability, assessment of the child's previous relationships with the

parent—student, future relationships with the parent—student, and the overall family relationship.

This study focused on 10 participants who were married doctoral students with children from 12 cohorts from a Midwestern research university. Although this gives a good sample for research, it is recommended that future studies be done on married doctoral students with children from other cohort-based research universities. This would bring more information about how different universities prepare, teach, and support their married doctoral students with children.

Four of the participants emphatically stated that the support of their supervisors and colleagues were a major reason for their completion of the program. These participants had mid to high level positions at their institutions. Three of the participants stated that the lack of support from their supervisors and colleagues was a major reason for their struggles throughout the program. For two of the three, the lack of support was a major reason for them not completing the program. These three participants were lower- to mid-level administrators. It is recommended that future research be conducted on how the employment position of the married doctoral student with children affects the student's persistence or attrition.

Two of the 10 participants did not complete the program. A future study could explore reasons for a student's failure to complete the degree. Discovering at what phase a student discontinues the program, what support mechanisms were available or unavailable, status of spousal and family relationships, and identify any situations that could be controlled or that were uncontrollable by the student would allow for understanding the attrition and possibly reveal mechanisms to prevent attrition and encourage persistence.

The final recommendation for further study on married doctoral students is to research the outcomes of the reconnecting, or post-liminal phase, of the family relationship after the program is concluded either by the termination of the program by the student or the graduation of the student. This research would give valuable information on how students successfully or unsuccessfully re-entered the family relationship after the academic experience and stressors of this experience were no longer in the family relationship equation.

Limitations

The first limitation of this study was the lack of time. Due to the busy schedules of many of the participants, the interviews were limited to one hour to one and a half hours. Although much information was gleaned from these interviews, more time would have allowed for more in-depth information gathering. Follow-up emails were also utilized, but the "essence" (Patton, 2002. p. 106) and the inability to discern non-verbal cues are precluded by such use of information gathering. During the interviews, personal information was shared, such as photographs of family members, notes and cards from spouses, and anecdotes inspired by the semi-structured interview. If time allowed, many more questions would have been asked and an unlimited amount of time would have been allowed for the answer. Also, more time would have allowed me to perhaps follow the participant at work and at home, thus giving opportunities to gather more detailed information and valuable insight to the whole lived experiences of a married doctoral student, albeit after the program experience.

Another limitation of this study is the *human censoring element*. This is the internal censor that the participant may intentionally or unintentionally fabricate to repaint a memory for the aesthetic, moral, and social quality the participant believes represents her or him. In a quantitative or more anonymous study, participants may feel more at ease to expose more inner-

truth about themselves. Qualitative interviews are more conducive to the human censoring element, and the word of the participant must be taken at face value. Besides the possibility the participants were trying to *polish* their histories, a related possibility could be the knowledge that the interviewer was also a product of a doctoral program could influence the stories told by the participants. Because of this knowledge the participants may have left out certain aspects or situations assuming that because of my knowledge of the program, that information was not necessary to include.

This study attempted to gain as much practical knowledge about the lived experiences of married doctoral students with children. In qualitative studies, the participant selection, the data collection, and the data analysis are dependent on the researcher, who in this case has also lived through the experiences being studied. Although steps suggested by Creswell (2009), Merriam (2009), and Patton (2002) to ensure validity—such as bracketing my personal views, member-checking, and using a peer-debriefer—were used, there are still limitations to this study. Also suggested by Creswell and Merriam and utilized in this study because the researcher has a biased perspective was the inclusion of a personal statement and a personal value statement.

Conclusion

In the mathematical theory of chaos, in what appears to be confused randomness, patterns and beauty often emerge (http://fractalfoundation.org/resources/what-is-chaos-theory/). There is a natural chaos in a family relationship that is impelled by the addition of work and academics. This can also be said about the lived experiences of married doctoral students with children. In Van Gennep's (1909/1960) rites of passage, he listed the three phases taken during a life changing phenomenon. The phases can be related to this study: the pre-liminal phase or the pre-program phase, the liminal phase or the unknown phase during the program, and the post-liminal

phase or the post-program phase. In the interviews of the participants of this study, the description of these phases were highlighted and discussed.

This study explored the first two phases of the married doctoral student with children and briefly discussed the post-liminal phase. In the discussions of the pre-liminal and the liminal phases, the data brought to light the challenges and rewards that are unique to this marginalized group of students. There is a great need for open, receptive, and adaptive communication throughout the entire process, with all family members, with cohort members, with faculty and faculty advisors, and with colleagues and supervisors. This journey is a road of uncertainty that explores the present, the future, and the self. The journey should not be not traveled alone. Feelings of uncertainty, loneliness, and self-deprecation often result in pushing away the people whose support is needed the most. The data revealed the necessity for the inclusion of the spouse, the family, friends, faculty, colleagues, and mentors to assist the married student on this journey through their own doctoral rites of passage.

The semi-structured interviews from this study extracted abundant data. The data described the daily struggles, the bonds of the family relationships, and the academic rigor for married doctoral students with children. There were also some aspects of this group's story that is still open for research. This study listed some possible areas of future research. It is my hope this capable and adaptable group continues to be studied and their stories continue to be told and understood.

The lived experiences of married doctoral students are fraught with challenges. Time constraints and the constant attempt to balance personal obligations, relational obligations, family obligations, academic obligations, and employment obligations are a burden for the student/spouse/parent/employee. This study showed that there is a positive outcome of the

challenges of these students. The participants of this study expressed the joy and satisfaction of sharing positive connections and lifelong relationships with cohort members, successfully completing the coursework and passing the preliminary exams, and celebrating the completion of the degree with the family. Unfortunately, not all of the participants were able to complete the program, and a couple participants did not finish the program with their marriage intact, but each participant worked hard to keep the family strong and to attempt to balance their lives. The multiple daily and long-term life focuses of this unique group of students is extraordinary, and this must not be forgotten. The story of the married doctoral student with children must be expressed, researched, and appreciated. The experiences of married doctoral students with children are not only unique, they are also inspirational. It is vital more research occur and results are discovered to allow for this talented group to persist in their educational endeavors and allow for their family relationships to remain strong and thrive. It is vital more research on this topic should occur and subsequent findings are discovered to resolve some of the impediments to the success of this talented group and to allow similar students to persist toward their educational endeavors and mostly to allow for their family relationships to remain strong and thrive.

EPILOGUE

This epilogue is a personal review of the data in connection with my advice to present and future married doctoral students with children. Using Nash and Bradley's (2011) concept of introspection in research writing, in my sense of the scholarly personal narrative, I am prompted to express my thoughts and offer my advice to potential and current married doctoral students with children. The advice I give is a collection of thoughts about aspects that affected me the most during my enrollment in Indiana State University's Educational Leadership doctoral program. Some of what I share will relate directly to the advice from this study, other information will be overall advice for a doctoral program. I will be sharing some of my triumphs in the program to help inspire as well as sharing some let downs of the program to encourage.

From the moment I decided to apply to the program, I was asking questions of colleagues who had previously attended this program about my possible academic journey. Even with all of their assurances of my success, their warnings of getting lost in the academics, their advice to discuss this decision with my family, I went blindly into this adventure. I had a myriad of pre-liminal experiences that I believed would prepare and secure me through this journey. Little did I know . . .

One piece of advice I would like to impart was told to me from a previous cohort member. I took it to heart and discovered that it was great advice. She told me to always get your work done early; this was for independent work as well as for group work. She added to this last part that I never want to be the person that does not get the work done; therefore I

become a burden to myself and to the group. That was solid advice. This advice became very important when developing bonds with my cohort-mates. I was very serious when it came to our work and wanted only doctorate quality work for the group and for me. I wanted my cohort to know I supported them academically and personally.

Some advice I offer in relation to the marriage and the family relationship. The study's results are correct: communication is the most important element of keeping a strong bond between the spouse and the married student. Unless the spouse already has a doctorate, the student is not only the one who is experiencing liminality during the program. As connections are made between cohort members, video introductions between the family and the new friend should be conducted. This is one way the spouse and the family can become connected with the program. When names are used in stories, a face can be placed with the story. In the academic sense, when doing projects, discuss the project and your thoughts on it with the family. Again, they may not fully understand, but if they have an idea of what you are doing, they have a greater sense of acceptance. Remember, as this study stated, your spouse and your family is going through the program with you, share all you can with them, celebrate even minor triumphs, and remember to regularly talk to each other.

No matter the family responsibility division before the program, it will change. Although this study indicates that the women will absorb the main familial responsibilities because of social, cultural, or self-imposed, it was agreed by all participants that most often it is the women who carry the familial weight. I advise there will be a shift in responsibilities to the non-student spouse. This may be difficult for some, but knowing and understanding that the student spouse will have the responsibilities of school, the need for work-time will be necessary. This is a discussion that must happen before the program. Even with the discussion, the necessity of the

student spouse to discuss what school work is expected and what is the plan for its completion with the family is vital for understanding and the prevention of jealousy and resentment.

Finally, I offer advice to the children. Congratulations to each of you. The time your student parent has been in school has been a challenge for you, but your student parent has worked very hard over the past few years to earn a degree that will help the family. Over the past few years you may have had some struggles, you may have not seen your student parent or your parents because of the extra work they have had to do to make life a little more secure. My hope is that your struggles have been few and you can now take time to celebrate the hard work of your parents, your patience and understanding, and be glad for your parents. Now is the time to be proud of your parents and celebrate the end of this round of education (because education never ends) and celebrate the reuniting of the family. For those children whose parents may have had more struggles than others, and for those parents who could not stay together, I say to the children, it was not your fault! I am sure your parents love you.

It is with great hope that the family is strong before the decision to enter this mysterious world of doctoral studies. My own marriage was, as the analogy I use; started as steel chains, but at one point during the program was hanging by a tread. Through open communication, hard work, and letting my wife into what I was doing, we are back to solid chains. Fortunately, as I speak with my children about the time during the program, they do not have many negative views of education. Their main memories are not the greatest – mostly of me having work all day on the weekends and not playing Beatles Rock Band or other family games. They, along with my wife, have celebrated milestones with me: passing preliminary exams, proposal defense, dissertation defense, and now the completion of the dissertation revisions and graduation. I hope this section helps any prospective or current doctoral student with children better understand

what is to come in their future, and that there will be highs, there will be lows, but there are some thoughts to remember:

Celebrate the joys, overcome the struggles, but always move forward together.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTIOCOL

Interview Protocol

1. What is the composition of your family?
    - At what age did you get married?
    - At what point in life did you decide to have children?
    - Did you hold professional positions outside of higher education earlier in your life?
    - Are you currently working? Is your spouse working?
2. What educational path has led you to this point in your career?
    - What fields did you study for your bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D. degrees?
    - At what point during your education did you (if applicable) get married or find your partner? Give birth to or adopt your first child?
    - Was the timing of the birth/adoption of your children "planned"? Why or why not?
3. What does family relationship mean to you?
    - How would you describe your family relationship before entering the program?
    - How would you describe your family relationship during the program?
    - What do you consider your role in the family?
4. How would you describe your family relationship after the program?
    - If your family relationship changed, why do you think they changed? How do you feel about those changes?

- If your family relationship did not change, how do you think that you were able to maintain the same relationship?

5. From your personal experience, what effect did the doctoral program have on your marriage?
   - Do you believe the program strengthened your marriage?
   - Do you believe the program weakened your marriage?
   - What emotions come to mind when you think of raising children during your time in the program?
   - How did parenthood and being in the program affect your marriage?
6. What has been the most helpful support mechanism(s)?
   - To what extent has family support been helpful – if any?
   - To what extent has institutional support been helpful – if any?
     - Faculty relationships
   - To what extent has cohort/classmate support been helpful – if any?
     - Cohort relationships
   - What financial support have you used during the program?
7. What could the institution do/provide that would improve your experience as a married doctoral student with children?
   - Are mentors readily available for you, particularly mentors who are married with children?
8. Do you believe your gender, race, and/or sexual orientation affects your ability to be successful in the program in relation to your family role?

- Do you believe one gender, race, and/or sexual orientation has an easier or more difficult time in the program? Who and why?

9. What would you list as the main reasons for your persistence or for your attrition?
10. What is essential to managing a family while pursuing a doctoral degree?
    - How do you balance your family life, your work life, and your studies?
11. What does parenthood mean to you?
    - Is there a line where the family relationship outweighs the responsibilities of the program? If so, do you have any examples from your experiences of where that line is and if you did or did not cross it?
12. What advice would you give to a prospective married doctoral student with children?

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Daddy, Can We Play Beatles Rock Band?
The Lived Experiences of a Married Student with Children in a Cohort-based Education Doctoral Program

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Tony J. Thomas, who is a doctoral student from the Department of Educational Leadership at Indiana State University. Mr. Thomas is conducting this study for his doctoral dissertation. Dr. Kandace Hinton is his faculty sponsor for this project.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are either a graduate of, working towards graduation, or participated in a higher education educational leadership program between the years 1998 and 2009, and the parents of a child or children under the age of 18 during your enrolment in the program. Eight to twelve women and men (total) will be participating in this study.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to understand the personal, academic, and professional experiences of married doctoral students in a cohort-based who have children under eighteen. This study will add a voice to the married doctoral student with children and the experiences and challenges that each person confronts as well as add more qualitative literature about the topic.

- **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

1. You will be asked to participate in a face to face interview with the researcher. The interview will last 60 to 120 minutes.
2. The interview will be digitally recorded by the researcher.
3. You will be asked to review a transcript of your interview and clarify understanding of your experiences.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this study other than what is normally associated with telling someone you do not know about your experiences during your time in a doctoral program while attempting to balance your academics with your family roles.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

The benefit you may receive from this study is minimal, although the knowledge gained from this study may contribute to a better understanding of the experiences and needs of doctoral students who have families and other duties and responsibilities.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information obtained that is identifiable with any participant will remain confidential and be disclosed only with the permission of the participant or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by assigning a pseudonym to each participant. Each pseudonym may be chosen by the participant; if participants prefer, the researcher will select a pseudonym for them. Pseudonyms are used to identify participants throughout the transcripts, the thematic coding of the transcripts, and the dissertation.

The researcher will use a digital audio recorder to record each interview. The recordings will be transcribed and then uploaded onto the researcher's personal computer. The researcher and his faculty sponsor will have access to the recordings on the digital voice recorder. The researcher, his faculty sponsor, and a peer debriefer will have access to the interview transcripts. Additionally, each participant will be provided with a copy of her own transcript for member checking. As required by the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board, the computer file of interview transcripts will be retained for three years following the completion of the dissertation. After three years, paper records will be shredded and electronic records will be erased.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you wish not to answer.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Mr. Tony J. Thomas
Principal Investigator

Office of Student Affairs
Ivy Tech Community College
3714 Franklin Street
Michigan City, IN 46360
(219) 879-9137
tthomas@ivytech.edu

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____
Printed Name of Subject

_____ _____
Signature of Subject Date

APPENDIX C: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Daddy, Can We Play Beatles Rock Band?
The Lived Experiences of a Married Student with Children in a Cohort-based Education Doctoral Program

Dear Former or Current Cohort-based Education Doctoral Student,

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Tony J. Thomas, who is a doctoral student from the Department of Educational Leadership at Indiana State University. Mr. Thomas is conducting this study for his doctoral dissertation.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are either a graduate of, working towards graduation, or participated in a higher education educational leadership program between the years 1998 and 2009. The other criterion for this study is that you are/were married (domestic partners are welcome) and are/were the parent of a child or children under the age of 18 during your enrolment in the program. Eight to twelve women and men (total) will be participating in this study.

If you fit the criteria of this study, I hope you will consider volunteering to share your experiences and add to the understanding of married doctoral students with children in a cohort-based educational program.

Thank you for your support,

Tony J. Thomas
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