

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Brooke N. Lundquist for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Counseling presented on August 31, 2017.

Title: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experiences of Counselor Education Doctoral Student Mothers with Young Children

Abstract approved: _____

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The number of women in doctoral programs is increasing each year and women now comprise the majority of doctoral students in America (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Previous research has shown the high levels of complexities and stresses that female doctoral students face during their studies (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992) and this has found to be even more so for doctoral student mothers (Brown & Watson, 2010). Of the studies that have been done on counselor education doctoral student mothers, no studies were found to have specifically explored the experiences of counselor education doctoral student mothers who have young children. Being that young children have unique needs from their mothers or primary caregivers, and many doctoral students are of prime childbearing years (Hoffer et al., 2006), it is important to understand the experiences of these doctoral student mothers in order to better support this population during their doctoral studies. It is also important to give voice to these student mothers through research methods that value their lived experiences. Through two phenomenological studies, this dissertation is an exploration of (a) the mothering experience and (b) the student experience of counselor education doctoral student mothers with children under the age of five. There were 11 participants interviewed and the same 11 participated in both phenomenological research studies.

The first study is an exploration of the mothering experience of counselor education doctoral student mothers with a child or children under the age of five. The results of Study 1 identified six major common themes that described the experience of the 11 women who participated in the research study. These themes included: (a) ambivalence, where the priority of the mothering role meets that of the strong desire to be a successful doctoral student and professional in the counselor education field; (b) increasing and accepting give and take: negotiating expectations while increasing coping mechanisms; (c) the teeter-totter of mothering-student roles; (d) “Superwoman syndrome”; (e) indistinguishable roles (those of mother and student) combine together to create identity; and (f) the importance of leading by example.

The second study is an exploration of the student experience of counselor education doctoral student mothers with a child or children under five years of age. The findings from Study 2 resulted in five common themes that existed for the participants, including (a) experiencing ambivalence about being a doctoral student while mothering a young child/children; (b) experiencing constant pressures due to responsibilities that can be conflicting, complimentary, or both; (c) responding by increasing coping mechanisms to accommodate the doctoral student role; (d) believing in the importance of leading by example; and (e) acknowledging and accepting that they have a different experience than their doctoral student peers.

Despite findings in Study 1 and Study 2 that were similar or overlapped, there were differences found between the experiences of the participants in their different roles. These results provided insights into the experiences that counselor education doctoral student mothers with children under the age of five have during their doctoral programs.

It is hoped that this information will help doctoral program administrators, faculty, student peers, and even doctoral student mothers gain a better understanding of the unique experiences that these students face. It is important that doctoral program faculty and administration not only better understand this population of students, but also realize the importance of engaging with these students as “whole people” (Springer et al., 2009, p. 453) which includes who they are outside of their student roles. University departmental systems and programs should be evaluated, enhanced, or put into place for these students to help support them during their doctoral studies. This could include family-friendly policies, child care options, parental support groups, and further educating faculty and staff about the unique experiences that these students face while in their doctoral programs (Lester, 2013).

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A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experiences of Counselor Education Doctoral
Student Mothers with Young Children

By

Brooke N. Lundquist

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APPROVED:

Major Professor, representing Counseling

Dean of the College of Education

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Brooke N. Lundquist, Author

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Chapter 1: General Introduction

Dissertation Overview

Doctoral students are under a great deal of stress while they are also facing high levels of expectations and an abundance of work, often in multiple areas of their lives (Kurtz-Costes, Helme, & Ülkü-Steiner, 2006). Research has long indicated that this is especially true for females (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992), and in particular doctoral student mothers. Members of this group often experience multiple demands in their lives that can adversely affect their studies (Brown & Watson, 2010). These complexities are more prevalent today than they were for doctoral students in the past (Smith, Maroney, Nelson, Abel, & Abel, 2006). Hence, it is important for graduate programs, faculty, and even prospective students to understand these pressures and stressors in order to better support and accommodate doctoral students, as well as to help minimize attrition rates in doctoral programs (Lester, 2013; Smith et al., 2006; Trepal, Stinchfield, & Haiyasoso, 2014).

Though the number of women pursuing graduate studies is increasing and in 2016 women were projected to comprise 57% of all graduate students in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), “[t]he rise of attrition rates for graduate student mothers is one of the most serious problems in the American system of higher education today” (Lynch, 2008, p. 585). Higher education is not currently structured in a way that works well for many graduate students who are also mothers. Women, and even more so women with children, in doctoral programs often drop out due to the barriers that exist for them as graduate students (Brown & Watson, 2010). Therefore, there is an urgent need to understand the experiences of doctoral student mothers as the number of women

entering graduate school increases (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) and many of them enter graduate work during their main childbearing years (Hoffer et al., 2006).

According to a report done by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), almost three-quarters of the graduates from counselor education doctoral programs in 2011-2012 were females (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). It is no surprise that these female students who are also mothers face incredible demands in various areas of their lives (Brown & Watson, 2010). To date, there are less than five studies that have specifically looked at the experiences of mothers in counselor education doctoral programs (Lynch, 2008; Trepal et al., 2014).

The parenting experience is associated with many individual, parent-child dyadic, and environmental factors, including the age of the child. Of the existing studies, none have specifically explored the experiences of mothers in relation to the age of their children while the mothers are studying in a doctoral program. Children of different ages have varying needs of their parents, and especially of their mothers/primary caregivers. “In most cultures, it is the mother of the child who takes the most direct responsibility for meeting the physical needs of the children and providing the emotional security that is necessary for her children to develop normally” (Mrazek, 2013, p. 11). Developmentally, children under the age of five often require from their caregiver a great deal of physical, emotional, and mental energy as they are less able to be independent compared to older children. This may lead to different challenges for these parents than the challenges faced by the parents of older children.

What are the experiences of counselor education doctoral student mothers of children under the age of five? The purpose of this phenomenological study is to gain a

greater understanding of this phenomenon, and to study how simultaneously being a mother and a graduate student are experienced by these women. With this data, graduate programs may be able to better accommodate the needs of these students, faculty and academic advisors may have increased levels of sensitivity and understanding of the competing demands placed on these mothers, and the mothers themselves may feel heard and validated in their experiences. In turn, revisions in departmental policies, faculty expectations, and advising and mentoring practices might increase retention rates with this particular population.

Purpose of Dissertation

The purpose of this dual-manuscript style dissertation is to fulfill the requirements set forth by the Oregon State University Graduate School for successful completion and evidence of scholarly production for the Ph.D. in Counseling degree. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the topic that this dissertation will focus on, namely the experiences of counselor education doctoral student mothers with children under the age of five. Chapter 2 documents a qualitative research study exploring the experiences of mothering in counselor education doctoral students with children under the age of five, while Chapter 3 offers a qualitative study specifically exploring the student experience of mothers in counselor education doctoral programs. While the focuses in both studies are closely related, the studies are differentiated by the two specific roles of these women. The first study specifically explores the mothering experience of these women while the second purposely looks at their experiences as a student. The same participants were interviewed for both studies. Finally, Chapter 4 offers a synthesis and intersection of the two manuscripts and provides an overall conclusion for the research studies.

Mothering experience. The definition of a mother and the experience of mothering can vary from culture to culture and from person to person (Birns & Hay, 1988). In this particular study, the authors are exploring the multiple facets of the mothering experience as determined by each participant. The mothering experience includes but is not limited to, caretaking, the bond with children, competing priorities, professional ambitions, emotional components and aspects, and the ways that mothers interpret values and messages from society. This complex phenomenon is individually, socially, and culturally constructed and has many complex components (Birns & Hay, 1988) that will be explored through the interviews with participants.

Thematic Relevance

The two manuscripts offered in this dissertation are linked closely as they both study the same group of 11 individuals who are enrolled in a counselor education program, however they examine two distinctly different, but intersecting, experiences that female participants in the study have in common: the dual roles of mother and student. Manuscript 1 completes a phenomenological exploration of the experience of mothering for female counselor education doctoral students with children less than the age of five; whereas, Manuscript 2 explores the experience of being a student for these student mothers. It is important to gain a focused and deeper understanding of each of these experiences of these doctoral student mothers. Because of the lack of research that focuses on the experiences of this population, we, the researchers, contend that it is appropriate to use phenomenological research methods to develop the essence of these experiences. Additionally, the phenomenological approach would give a voice to these women.

Manuscript 1 Overview: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Mothering Experience of Counselor Education Doctoral Student Mothers with Young Children

Manuscript 1 – Chapter 2 of this document is a qualitative study that explored the experiences of 11 mothers in counselor education doctoral programs who have a child (or multiple children) under the age of five in the home. This study was focused on the aspect of motherhood and how these women experience mothering while concurrently enrolled in a doctoral program. A phenomenological approach was chosen for this study as the intention of this research was to understand the experiences of these women and to emerge with an understanding of the essence of this phenomenon.

There are few studies that have explored the experiences of counselor education doctoral students who are women and even fewer that have focused on those female students who are also mothers (Lynch, 2008; Trepal et al., 2014). As the number of women entering graduate school increases and being that there is such a high percentage of women in counselor education doctoral programs, it is becoming important to understand the experiences that doctoral student mothers have, especially those with children under the age of five due to the high level of care needed by this age group. This research study fills an important gap in the current literature. It also provides student-based information that counselor education programs can use for program evaluation and development. The central research question for this study was, “How do female counselor education doctoral students experience being a mother of a young child(ren) under the age of five?”

By utilizing a phenomenological approach, this researcher gained insights into individual perspectives and experiences of counselor education doctoral student mothers

of a child (or children) under the age of five. After gathering these different perspectives and information about the experiences of these women, this researcher found common meanings and themes and, as a result, developed an essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This researcher utilized purposeful sampling in this study that included participants who met particular characteristics in order to increase richness of answers given (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Several categories of their experiences emerged from the data in this study. All participants expressed multiple ambivalent feelings about being mothers of young children while enrolled as doctoral students. In addition, they expressed the essentiality of using and increasing their coping mechanisms in order to accommodate both their mother and student roles. Another commonality that existed for the participants in this study was the experience of striving for balance between their roles, as well as the experience of “Superwoman syndrome.” Participants discussed how their roles of mother of a young child/children and doctoral student could not be separated and that the roles often conflicted with each other. Lastly, the participants discussed their feelings about how important it was for them to lead by example for their young children.

Manuscript 2 Overview: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Student

Experience of Counselor Education Doctoral Student Mothers with Young Children

Manuscript 2 is a qualitative research study that looked at the experience of being a student for 11 counselor education doctoral students who are also mothers with a child (or multiple children) under the age of five in the home. This study focused on these mothers’ student experience and how they experience being a graduate student. A

phenomenological exploration of the student experience allowed the researcher to gain a perspective of their experience in order to develop the essence of this phenomenon.

There are few studies that have focused on students in counselor education doctoral students who are also mothers. And in these studies, none focused specifically on how the ages of the children of these students affected their student experience. Children under the age of five are too young to care for themselves and are less able to be independent. Therefore, these children typically have a higher level of needs from their primary caregivers. The central research question for this study was, "What is the student experience of counselor education doctoral students who are mothers of children under the age of five?"

Participants had several commonalities regarding their student experiences. These included multiple ambivalent thoughts and feelings about being a doctoral student while also being a mother of a young child/children, facing multiple pressures (sometimes conflicting, other times complimentary, or at times both) from various roles, as well as the need to increase their coping mechanisms to accommodate their doctoral student roles. Another common theme that participants expressed in this study was their belief that it was important for them to lead by example for their child/children. And lastly, participants acknowledged and accepted that, due to having a young child/children, their doctoral student experience was different from their cohort/peers.

Summary

The intention of these studies was to give a voice to counselor education doctoral student mothers with young children (specifically those with a child(ren) under the age of five), which is a gap in the current literature. These women often have multiple demands

placed on them due to the different roles that they play. It is hoped that, by hearing their stories and developing themes around their experiences, graduate programs and faculty will gain an understanding of the challenges that these women face and will therefore develop a learning environment that includes support systems to better assist this population.

**Chapter 2: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Mothering Experience of
Counselor Education Doctoral Student Mothers with Young Children**

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Abstract

The following article presents a phenomenological study exploring the mothering experiences of 11 counselor education doctoral student mothers who have a child or children under the age of five. As the number of mothers entering doctoral programs increases, it is becoming even more important to understand their unique experiences in order to better support them while also increasing retention rates. Six themes emerged from the data including ambivalent thoughts and feelings, increase of use of coping mechanisms, striving for balance, “Superwoman syndrome,” inseparable roles, and the importance of leading by example.

Doctoral students often face multiple stressors, high expectations, and competing demands among their personal, academic, and professional roles (Kurtz-Costes, Helmke, & Ülkü-Steiner, 2006). This is especially true for mothers in graduate programs who often need to attend to tasks in multiple areas of their lives (Brown & Watson, 2010). Since women comprise the majority of graduate students, and this number is increasing every year (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), it is important to understand the complexities of the lives of these students so that graduate programs, faculty, and even the students themselves can offer appropriate support and better accommodate their varying needs (Lester, 2013; Smith, Maroney, Nelson, Abel, & Abel, 2006; Trepal, Stinchfield, & Haiyasoso, 2014).

According to Lynch (2008), one of the greatest problems in higher education is the increase in attrition rates for graduate students who are also mothers. Higher education is not currently structured in a way that is particularly family friendly or encouraging to student mothers, which can lead to drop-outs, increased stress, and lower levels of satisfaction in female graduate students (Brown & Watson, 2010). Therefore, knowledge of the experiences of graduate students who are also mothers should contribute to improving graduate program retention rates among this student population.

The purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences of mothers who are also doctoral students in counselor education doctoral programs, and to address some gaps that exist in the current literature. The following paragraphs describe the role of mothers in current American culture. In addition, an exploration of the roles and responsibilities of mothers are provided, as well as an introduction to the experiences of mothers who are doctoral students and further explanation of the need for more research

in this area. The details of our phenomenological study focused on counselor education doctoral student mothers with young children under the age of five will be presented. The central research question for this study was, “How do counselor education doctoral students experience being a mother of a young child(ren) under the age of five?”

Subquestions include: What has been your experience as a mother of a young child while concurrently enrolled as a doctoral student? What does it mean to you to be a mother now that you are in a doctoral program? What changes in your experience as a mother have you noticed since becoming a doctoral student? What feelings are associated with the experience of being a mother of young children while in a doctoral program? What aspect of your mothering experience is associated with the age(s) of your child(ren)?

Motherhood

The role of a mother is one that is complex and demanding, yet rewarding: “Motherhood is cast as a primary route to physical and emotional fulfillment for women and an essential part of female identity” (Lynch, 2008, p. 586). Many women envision being mothers starting in early childhood, and may see this as a goal for their lives (Lynch, 2008). In addition, once they become mothers, women typically identify their role as mother before their other roles (e.g., spouse, worker) due to the investment in and commitment to the mother role (Medina & Magnuson, 2009). Current cultural ideologies seem to place a high value on what has been called intensive mothering, a term which refers to the expectation that mothers spend copious amounts of time, money, energy, and resources in order to nurture their children properly (Hays, 1996). From this cultural standard, mothers are to be self-sacrificing, putting the needs of their children and family before those of their own: “The ideology of intensive mothering and the extent to which

mothers attempt to live up to it are responsible for the cultural contradictions of motherhood” (Hays, 1996, p. 97). Mothers who are raising children must exert an incredible amount of emotional, physical, and cognitive energy to fulfill these expectations, which only seem to be increasing as time goes on (Springer, Parker, & Leviten-Reid, 2009).

The American experience of motherhood is a paradoxical one that reflects a basic contradiction in American society as a whole. On the one hand, American culture claims to be a child-centered culture, one that highly values motherhood. At the same time, American culture is fiercely individualistic and places a high value on independence, privacy, and personal initiative (Birns & Hay, 1988, p. 5).

Mothers are generally seen as the best person to be the primary caregiver for the children and are often expected to stay home with children if they are financially able to do so (Medina & Magnuson, 2009). Even if both parents are employed outside of the home, women are expected to take care of the majority of the childrearing and household duties (van Anders, 2004). A study done by Mason, Goulden, and Frasc (2009) surveyed over 8,000 University of California doctoral students from a variety of fields of study and found that doctoral students without children spent approximately 75 hours a week working (including employment, school work, housework, and caregiving). Doctoral students who were also fathers were found to spend 90 hours doing these activities, while doctoral student mothers spent over 100 hours weekly on the same tasks. That equals over 14 hours a day of work for those mothers, as compared to those who were not parents, who logged an average of 10 hours per day: “Female graduate students with a dual commitment to parenting and academic life often find themselves facing

pressures equivalent to holding down two full-time jobs” (Murphy & Cloutier-Fisher, 2002, p. 37).

Additionally, a qualitative study done by Kurtz-Costes, Helmke, and Ülkü-Steiner, (2006) explored the experiences of 20 male and female doctoral students from seven different graduate programs and found that female doctoral students in their participant group were more likely than male students to discuss family/personal issues; the women also experienced greater relationship strains during their graduate programs than the males. It is reasonable to assume that the experience of being a mother is varied and associated with many individual and environmental factors, because the mothering experience has been shown to differ based on socioeconomic status, age of the parents, gender of child and the parent, race/ethnicity, developmental needs of the children, and others (Birns & Hay, 1988; Glenn, Chang, & Forcey, 1994). Because children’s developmental needs differ by age, parenting experiences also differ by children’s age (Erikson, 1950; Faber & Mazlish, 1998).

During the first years of life – thought by many to be a unique period of human development – parents assume special importance. As parents guide their young children from complete infantile dependence into the beginning stages of autonomy, their styles of caregiving can have both immediate and lasting effects on children’s social functioning in areas from moral development to peer play to academic achievement (Bornstein & Bornstein, 2014, p. 1).

Competing Roles and Expectations

Because mothers experience such high levels of expectations and pressures, women who pursue graduate education may find it extremely difficult to balance the

demands of the multiple roles in their lives, especially the roles of mother and student (Lynch, 2008). These multiple roles are often competing and can come into in conflict with each other (Lester, 2013): “The addition of the graduate student role to other life roles of females is the most difficult for those who are parents” (Haynes et al., 2012, p. 3). Studies have shown that mothers who are also graduate students show a greater level of stress and lower levels of satisfaction, as they feel conflict between their roles (Brown & Watson, 2010).

Women often feel the need to hide or diminish their roles as mother when in academic settings (otherwise known as *maternal invisibility*), and to diminish their roles as students when outside of the classroom setting, in order to meet cultural expectations for the role that they are in at the time (Lynch, 2008, p. 596). Maintaining a sense of balance between the roles of mother and student can take a great deal of effort and work, especially as women can tend to overexert themselves and aim for perfectionism within each of their relationships and roles (Pierce, 2005). This over-commitment to multiple different areas of their lives can often lead to a lack of time to care for themselves (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006).

When attempting to juggle multiple roles, doctoral student mothers have been found to experience great levels of guilt (Brown & Watson, 2010; Trepal et al., 2014). The pull that these women feel between their roles as mother and student can be intense and quite conflicting. Again, the expectations that these women face from advisors, faculty, their families, society and even themselves, are so high that they are often unattainable and can cause overwhelming feelings of guilt (Trepal et al., 2014). Many women have ideas about what they “should” be in each of these roles, and when they are

not able to obtain these ideals, it can lead to distress and regret (Brown & Watson, 2010). Brown and Watson (2010) found that the participants who were mothers often discussed their feelings of guilt about the time taken away from their children and partners to focus on their studies. Many women who experience these stressors end up making significant sacrifices or taking a longer route to obtain their doctoral degrees in order to remain engaged with their children (Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009).

One major factor that has not been discussed frequently or studied specifically is the ages of the children of women who are enrolled in doctoral programs, and how having children of different ages may lead to different experiences for these students. A qualitative study done by Anderson and Mieztis (1999) explored the experiences of 10 mature females in graduate school and found that, “the addition of the graduate student role to the other life roles of mature females is most difficult for those who are parents, especially if the children are very young” (p. 40). All of the women interviewed for a study done by Brown and Watson (2010) discussed how important the ages of their children were when they began their doctoral work. These women stated that it was ideal for children to be in their teens before a mother started her graduate work. Thus far, to our knowledge, no studies have specifically examined the experiences of women in counselor education doctoral programs who pursue their further education while they have young children at home.

The Purpose of the Study

Developmentally, the needs of children and the tasks of parenting vary according to the age of the children (Erikson, 1950). These children are too young to be in school, they require a great deal of physical, emotional, and mental energy, and they are less able

to be independent. So, how do women with children under the age of five while they are pursuing counselor education doctoral studies experience their mothering role? This study intends to give a voice to counselor education doctoral student mothers with young children.

It is important for doctoral programs, faculty, staff, and even the graduate students themselves to gain an awareness and understanding of the experiences that these particular students face in order to address the high attrition rates among this student population, help provide a supportive environment for these students, and offer mentoring opportunities where graduate student mothers can feel understood and supported. In addition, it is important for doctoral student mothers, prospective students, and even spouses of these women to have an awareness of the ways in which graduate school may affect the mothering experience. The hope is that with a greater understanding of these pressures and competing priorities that programs can better assist these students and students themselves can come to see that they are not alone in their experiences as both a doctoral student and a mother of young children.

Methods

Phenomenology

A phenomenological approach to research explores the participants' lived experience of a phenomenon that the participants have in common. In a phenomenology, each "experience is perceived along a variety of dimensions" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 24). Through this approach, participants explore their individual experiences from their personal framework and from their responses, essential themes arise that give insight into what this common lived experience is like. The researcher approached this

study from a constructivist paradigm that views the reality of one's lived experience as individually and independently constructed (Ponterotto, 2005). This paradigm serves as the "primary foundation and anchor for qualitative research" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129).

"In phenomenological research, the question grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic" (Moustakas, 1994). The intent of this study was to explore the mothering experiences of counselor education doctoral student mothers who have children under the age of five. The researcher, who had one child under five at the time of the research (and had two children under five when beginning her doctoral work), attempted to bracket her personal experiences and perceptions as much as possible so as to avoid interacting with participants and perceiving their experiences and information through a biased lens, although this is "seldom perfectly achieved" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 80).

The researcher acknowledges her biases as she experienced high levels of stress and guilt while a student in her doctoral program. Much of this had to do with the multiple roles and high expectations she faced in multiple areas of her life. At times this was an isolating experience for her, as none of the other females in her cohort had children under the age of five during their studies. The researcher observed different experiences and views of both doctoral studies and motherhood and noticed a different experience for those student mothers with small children as compared to those who have older children or those with no children. As a result, the researcher was interested in knowing about the experiences of other counselor education doctoral students who were also mothers of young children. Though the researcher attempted to avoid letting her own experience in having young children while going through her doctoral studies impact her

research, such an experience likely helped her be empathic and sensitive to the experiences of the participants. It might have also resulted in her over-identifying with some of the stories shared by participants.

Participants

The researcher used a purposive sample strategy by recruiting participants through advertising in the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision NETwork Listserv (CESNET-L) and the counseling graduate student listserv (COUNSGRAD) to reach professionals and doctoral students in the field across the United States. In addition, recruitment emails were sent to Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Program (CACREP) program coordinators and directors who oversee counselor education and supervision doctoral programs, requesting them to pass the recruitment notice to potential participants in their programs.

Criteria for inclusion in the study were as follows: (a) current counselor education doctoral students who are a mother of at least one child under five years old, (b) the child or children are living in the mother's home at least 80% of the time, (c) the mother has substantial caregiving responsibilities (as determined by participant), (d) the mother has been in her counselor education doctoral program for at least one year continuously, and (e) the student was already a mother prior to entering her doctoral program. It was hoped that these inclusion parameters would allow the researcher to gather information from a diverse group of female doctoral students in terms of ethnicity, race, class, age, and geographic region, and so forth, who have a variety of experiences. Thirty-two individuals responded to the recruitment; however, only 11 met the criteria and responded to the request to set up an interview time. All 11 of these participants

completed the interview process and are included in our study data.

Based on information given by participants (10 of the 11 participants responded to the demographic information request), participants ranged in age from 31 to 41 years old, all were married, and nine of the 10 were in full-time counselor education doctoral programs (one was in a part-time program). Two were African American, one was African American and Korean, one was Middle Eastern, and six were Caucasian American. Of the 11 participants, nine lived in the Eastern Standard Time zone and the other two in Central Standard Time zone.

Researchers do not agree on exactly how many participants need to be included in a phenomenological research study; however, many suggest at least six participants and most mention that a study should include as many participants as necessary to reach saturation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Morse, 1994). For the purposes of this study, the researcher intended to select 6-12 respondents who meet the selection criteria, and ended up interviewing 11 participants. The participants were chosen if they were assessed as being able to provide answers to the research questions asked. Each participant was offered a \$20 Starbucks card upon completion of the study.

Procedures

Before starting the interviews, the researcher participated in Epoche. The Epoche process allows the researcher to set aside preconceived ideas and biases and, as a result, makes her better able to enter into the research process open-minded, as if he or she is learning information for the first time (Moustakas, 1994). “In the Epoche, no position whatsoever is taken; every quality has equal value” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 87).

The researcher contacted selected participants electronically to set up a time to go

over informed consent material and schedule an interview via an online meeting platform (Zoom). Research participants were provided a verbal informed consent via phone prior to scheduling a time for the initial interview. The initial interview was scheduled for an hour, though some took less than the time allotted and two interviews went over the hour mark. Each interview was recorded (video and audio) to facilitate transcription and re-visitation if necessary. After all data was analyzed and the researcher determined themes, she compiled them into a document that clearly identified the themes and offered direct interview quotations for each theme. These were then presented to participants via email and they were asked to provide feedback on the themes. Of those who responded after the initial request and reminder request (10 of the 11 participants), all participants agreed with the themes identified by the researcher.

Data Collection

The phenomenological interview process usually consists of interviews containing open-ended questions in a casual and collaborative environment (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher prepared the interview environment and built trust by introducing herself and the purpose of the study, explaining how the interview process would proceed, and answering any initial questions that the participants had.

The first research question asked participants what their experience was as a mother of a young child or children while concurrently enrolled as a doctoral student. The questions below were fine-tuned after the researcher conducted a pilot study. The pilot consisted of the researcher herself being interviewed by a faculty member (also a qualitative researcher) who played the role of methodologist for the study. This was done in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the research questions and further refine the

interview questions. In addition, the researcher interviewed two women who were doctoral students in psychology doctoral programs while they had young children to make sure the questions elicited useful answers around the phenomenon being studied.

Subsequent questions for the study included the following:

1. What does it mean to you to be a mother now that you are in a doctoral program?
2. What changes in your experience as a mother have you noticed since becoming a doctoral student?
3. What feelings are associated with the experience of being a mother of young children while in a doctoral program?
4. What aspect of your mothering experience is associated with the age(s) of your child(ren)?

Interviews utilized a semi-structured format, allowing for follow-up questions as deemed necessary by the researcher. After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher used several trustworthiness strategies (described later in this chapter) to make sure that participants and their perspectives were accurately represented.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process for this study followed the modification of the Van Kaam methods of analysis of phenomenological data recommended by Moustakas (1994). First, the researcher videotaped the interviews and hired a transcriber to transcribe the data word-for-word in its entirety. After transcription, the subsequent steps for data analysis were followed.

The first step of the data analysis process is called horizontalization, which included a listing of each statement that was made in the interviews that is applicable to

the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994). The next step is reduction and elimination; in this stage, the researcher determined the “invariant horizons” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 128), components of the experience being studied that are unique or stand out. In order to accomplish this, each statement that was made was evaluated to see if it comprised vital components that were necessary in order to understand the experience and/or if it was able to be labeled. If either of these was true, it was considered to be valuable to the phenomenon and was considered an “invariant constituent” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). Also during this step, any statements that were redundant or vague were either disregarded or were rephrased in more exact terms.

The next step was clustering and thematizing. The invariant constituents that were left from the previous analysis process were grouped and given labels and were considered to be the “core themes of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). Then the researcher moved on to the final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application-validation. This step in the analysis process included the invariant constituents, clusters, and themes being checked against the interview transcripts to confirm that the findings were in line with the participant’s responses (Moustakas, 1994). These were either overt or at least compatible with the statements made in the interviews. If not, then they were removed.

Next was the creation of individual textural descriptions. From the final invariant constituents and themes determined from the previous step in the analysis process, individual textural descriptions were composed. This included utilizing exact phrases from the transcripts for each individual participant. From there, the researcher created individual structural descriptions. Based on the above step of determining a textural

description, a structural description was also constructed for each participant. This analysis procedure included the “imaginative variation” of the researcher, which Moustakas (1994) describes as seeking “possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions” (pp. 97-98). Through this process, the main components of the phenomenon were discovered and presented.

The final step conducted for the analysis of the individual transcripts was to combine the findings from the above descriptions into a textural-structural description. Lastly, the descriptions of each individual participant were combined into a “unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is of the highest importance in qualitative research studies. The researcher took many steps to increase trustworthiness throughout the entire research process. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are four criteria for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

One way to establish credibility is through researcher reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which was utilized throughout the research process. The researcher continued to participate in the Epoche process throughout data collection and data analysis. Through reflective journaling, the researcher attempted to “set aside biases and prejudgments and return with a readiness to look again into my life, to enter with hope

and intention of seeing this person, or situation, or issue with new and receptive eyes” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 89).

Another way to increase credibility is through “peer scrutiny of the research project” (Shenton, 2004, p. 67). Through the research and data analysis process, the researcher received critique and feedback from an advisor (third author), a methodologist (second author), as well as a colleague to increase credibility. Member checking, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) see as the most important step to establishing credibility, took place after the researcher determined the final themes from the interview. Member checking included follow-ups with participants to ensure that the researcher formed accurate categories from the data analysis process and that the experiences of the participants were accurately represented. The researchers wrote up the findings in a narrative format, identified the main themes, gave an explanation of each theme, and provided several direct interview quotes from a variety of participants to support each theme. This document was emailed to participants. They were asked to respond within two weeks with their responses, to indicate if they agreed with the summaries, and/or note if they had any feedback on the themes presented. Of the 11 participants, 10 responded to the member-checking request and all agreed with the findings. Another step that was taken to ensure trustworthiness included keeping an audit trail throughout the research process.

Results

A thorough analysis of the participants’ descriptions of their experiences as mothers of children under the age of five while concurrently enrolled as counselor education doctoral students revealed a depth of feelings, thoughts, emotions, and tensions

that exist for these women at this time in their lives. This seems to be characterized by growth and often-competing tensions in their developmental identities as students, mothers of young children, and emerging professionals in the field of counselor education.

This is combined with the awareness that their children who are under the age of five are at critical stages in their development, striving for growth and developing identities in these various roles simultaneously, while trying to maintain family as their number one priority can create complex and often conflicting experiences for these women. Several commonalities were found between the experiences of the 11 participants in this study. These commonalities include: (a) ambivalence, where the priority of the mothering role meets that of the strong desire to be a successful doctoral student and professional in the counselor education field; (b) increasing and accepting give-and-take: negotiating expectations while increasing coping mechanisms; (c) the teeter-totter of mothering-student roles; (d) “Superwoman syndrome”; (e) indistinguishable roles create identity; and (f) the importance of leading by example.

The themes are presented below and each theme is described using context from participant interviews. In addition, participants’ (P) quotes are provided below each theme and participants are represented by their number in the coding system utilized by the researchers. Asterisks are utilized to represent portions of participant’s quotes that were unclear or not able to be accurately transcribed due to technological limitations.

Ambivalence

Ambivalence occurred where the priority of the mothering role meets that of the strong desire to be a successful doctoral student and professional in the counselor

education field. Each participant described the great depths of ambivalence that they felt in their experiences as doctoral student mothers of a young child/children. This ambivalence seems to exist due to the many pulls on the participants, as well as the various expectations and hopes that they had for themselves. The emotions that seemed to be the most impactful on the participants were the feelings of guilt, pride, and exhaustion, which all seemed to be present simultaneously much of the time. These feelings and thoughts often pulled the participants in opposing directions, sometimes causing internal questioning and uncertainty in their decisions to pursue their doctoral degrees. The participants in this study discussed how their role as mother is their first priority, so the pull towards the emotions and thoughts that were in conflict with this role were the heaviest and most impactful. This mix of emotions could cause great ambiguity for the participants.

Guilt.

Participants in this study discussed an awareness and understanding that their children were at critical places in their development (being that they were under the age of five at the time of the study). This appeared to be a significant factor in the feelings of guilt that the participants described as they felt that they were missing significant moments in their young child/children's lives as a result of taking on their student roles. These feelings of guilt are illustrated in the following quotes:

P-2: Being overwhelmed at times, but having moments of joy and clarity. I didn't use that word last time, but clarity in the sense of, as I stated previously about the whole guilt piece and all that and sometimes feeling like maybe I'm, I'm taking away from them, I'm not spending enough time with them.

P-10: There was a lot of guilt that went on with that to begin with, um, what have I signed my family up for? (laughs) I, I can handle the personal sacrifice. That's not a problem, but I was taking this whole group of people along with me? There was definitely some guilt with that.

P-11: There's always this mom guilt, and that's a little frustrating, but I think it's even, it's even, it weighs heavier when you know that, I don't know, the Ph.D. program sometimes feels a little, a little selfish, you know, in the now. For the future, it's not. But in the now it feels a little selfish, so that adds to the, you know, that adds to everything else.

Pride.

Pride was a strong feeling involved in the ambivalence experienced by the participants in this study. The participants expressed a great level of pride that they were able to juggle the demands of home, school, and sometimes work life. In addition, the pursuit of a doctoral degree seemed to be a great source of pride for the participants. Thus a common experience for these participants was a feeling of pride as they were able to spend time outside of the home, following their dreams, and “having it all,” as shown in the following statements:

P-4: Pride, for sure. Um, being able to balance it. Um, a little bit of insecurity

P-6: I feel incredibly, very rewarding to overcome the obstacles and I feel like it will be more rewarding again, than if I had waited until they were *** feeling very proud with each semester that I complete with the obstacles like sick babies and sleepless babies and teething babies and potty training babies. I'm feeling very, um, a lot of success.

P-7: I feel really proud. I feel really proud of myself and what I'm able to accomplish and the fact that, like, I'm a great mom. I really am a great mom. I'm a great employee and I'm a great doc student

P-11: Definitely being proud. And I'm a first-born, so, like, I'm always wanting to, like, make my parents proud and happy, you know, looking for that validation, and so I think everything I do is, you know, it's a lot like, I want that validation, I want that, but also I have to, you know, it's like giving, I have to, I'm doing this for me, too, so I'm giving that validation to myself by achieving my goals.

Exhaustion.

Another common feeling that seemed to exist for the participants in this study is the feeling of exhaustion, which seemed to be both physical and emotional. The exhaustion was backed by the sheer amount of pressure and expectations that the participants described during their interviews. Between competing expectations, deadlines, and caring for young children (who often have ongoing needs from their mothers), participants described juggling a lot while mothering a young child/children and fulfilling their doctoral student obligations, as described by the below statements:

P-1: You know, outside of exhaustion, I'm just like, you know. So there are some days people are like, "What's going on?" I'm like, "I don't know!"

P-4: So fatigue and being tired, um, which is understandable because, you know, she was, she was still very young in my first semester. And then I miss, I also miss putting her to bed at night if I had a late class. That was something that I noticeably missed.

P-5: Just being tired, 'cause little ones are demanding.

P-8: Is tired a feeling? 'Cause I'm tired! Um, um, you know, um, feelings, um, I mean, I feel challenged, but I feel accomplished. I feel overwhelmed. Um, I feel like a juggler, like I can do, I can multitask, like, way better than anyone else I know, um, 'cause I have to! Um, there's a lot of good feelings and then there's some bad feelings. Not bad feelings but, like, this isn't, I'm not normal compared to my other friends, so *** a little bit. Um, feeling, what other feelings? Um, you know, the one thing that comes to mind is that I'm tired. I'm tired as heck. Um, but, um, I don't know, motivated, I guess. Ambitious! (laughs) Ambitious, yeah.

Multiple mixed emotions.

These emotions and feelings frequently all lived simultaneously and were often unpredictable. The participants in this study shared their vulnerable feelings about the difficulties of the complexities of being doctoral student mothers of children under five years of age, and yet they also spoke of the beauty and the depth it added to their lives. The following statements illustrate this experience:

P-7: I always tell people that, um, our children really, um, really keep us human. Like, I experience every range of emotional and feeling and behavior related to my children and it's, um, it's deeply humbling and empowering to reflect on, on the person that I think they've helped me to become.

P-9: Be happy, be happy, very happy to, uh, spend time with here and there, so I feel I can, um, success, I can, um, put myself in a value, like I, I, like, I'm a good mom and same time, I'm a good student so this make me so happy. Yes.

P-11: So I think, um, there's a lot of affirmation, there's a lot of validation, um, a lot of recognition that, that kind of keeps it going, too, you know, and those are

the feelings. They're all good feelings, um, most of the time, because, while it is tough and it is difficult, I love it. It's so worthwhile.

Increasing and Accepting Give-And-Take: Negotiating Expectations While Increasing Coping Mechanisms

An integral part of the mothering experience for the participants in this study included their ability to increase and implement specific coping mechanisms in their roles as both a mother and a student. The experience of implementing these coping mechanisms was not always a natural experience or one that was comfortable for the participants; instead, participants described this as a necessary implementation in order for all of the parts to fit and work together. These coping mechanisms included asking for and/or accepting help from others, setting boundaries, saying “no,” implementing self-care, and/or utilizing resources available to the participants. By increasing or implementing some of these coping mechanisms, participants experienced that they were better able to manage being a mother of a young child/children while being a doctoral student. Here are some examples of how participants experienced implementing or increasing their coping mechanisms:

P-2: I've had a support system but I've had to 1. expand my support system in the doc program, so you don't burn people out, and, um, 2. use it.

P-3: I became very direct, um, with what I wanted, and, and that came with confidence, that came with, um, going through this program and reflecting on myself and who I was, um, working through stuff and, and finding myself, finding my center and being able to communicate my wants, um, in a non, like, def, aggressive way.

P-4: I really did rely on my cohort, um, for help with those in-between childcare things, especially in the beginning, um, just asking for, for free help, an hour here and there.

P-5: One thing was asking for help. Um, I've never really been one to ask for help. I've always just kind of been like, well, it was my choice to go to school, it was my choice to have kids, and it was my choice to do it all at the same time, so I shouldn't put it on anyone else. So, um, accepting help when it was offered to me and asking for help were really big.

P-11: I'm able to put school aside in special moments. And just even, like, going on these little vacations, like, here and there, you know, I'm, I'm able to say, I'm able, I'm able to place a boundary on that, and I think, again, that's good role modeling for my kids.

The Teeter-Totter of Mothering-Student Roles

Due to the often-conflictual pulls between the roles of mother of a young child/children and doctoral student, there was a constant striving for balance in the lives of the participants in this study. Each participant discussed their desires to have their families and children as their first priority, so the balance that they experienced was one of figuring out how to put their family first while fitting in the other responsibilities and expectations around their most important role of mother. This can be difficult when school deadlines are approaching or they need to attend classes or conferences that conflict with family schedules or young children who want/need their mom. The data from this study showed that the participants utilized scheduling and calendars, being intentional with their time, and prioritizing to strive towards balance, although many

mentioned that the balance was not something they ever thought that they could fully obtain. It was seen as an ongoing process and something that was always evolving.

Examples of this experience for participants are as follows:

P-1: You know, taking their little schedules into consideration, my husband's schedule into consideration, and then, like, our family schedule...into consideration and learning not to be, um, selfish. Um, because then it, you know, it breeds resentment. Because, you know, like, you're the mom, you set the tone. So if you're doing it, everybody's doing it. ...I had to learn to be okay with that, 'cause before it was, "Yeah, let me look at my calendar. If I shift this around, if I..." and then we were going crazy, and then you'd be mad at your kids 'cause they don't move as fast.

P-2: Even though everything is a priority and I think that's one of my challenges is realizing that maybe everything is not a priority.

P-3: That this age is extremely critical and so I'm constantly doing a self-check, um, or backpedaling on what I've done or said, um, so because I know and I recognize that this age is, is, is, well, being a student has taught me, well, and this program has taught me how critical it is for them right now, um, so it goes back to, um, for me, being intentional about what I do with my kids, even so, to the point where I have apologized for something that I've said to them or, um, yeah. It's made me, being a student has made me constantly watch myself as a mom especial, because, especially because of their age, 'cause they're so young and I know that.

P-4: So, it's something that I have to balance. I know that I need both, um, and I crave both, um, and I wouldn't be as good of a mother if I weren't working, but still that is the first thing that I want to do is the mothering. ...Um, so I have a completely different routine as a mother of a young child who gets up in the, early in the morning and who doesn't understand play by yourself, get yourself a bowl of cereal and watch TV. So maybe a parent who, um, has a child over the age of five can let that child be more independent and have a little bit more flexibility with sleep. Um, for me, I have to sleep between ten and five, 'cause that's when she sleeps.

P-5: Definitely with young kids, they're, um, more needy obviously, so I think the need to be present,

P-6: A lot of times I'm doing it by myself and trying to balance and I really do have to separate the little girls from it. My only time that a lot of my best work happens is from 9:00 at night on.

Superwoman Syndrome

Superwoman syndrome is “the expectation that a woman must perform well in all of her roles” (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992, p. 716). This is a strong experience described by the participants in this research study. Many of the participants used this exact term, while others explained the expectations that they felt in other words, but alluded to the superwoman syndrome (see below quotes). These expectations are not only those that these women feel from society, but also expectations that these women put on themselves. The responsibilities and obligations that the participants experienced were numerous and heavy. Participants described these experiences as:

P-1: I'm trying to, you know, be this superwoman, this supermom, you know, make sure that my cape stays blowing in the breeze, but, like, sometimes that cape gets really tattered, you know, and it's dirty, it's dusty, and I'm just standing there like, "Yeah, I've got it all together" like "no I don't!"

P-2: Yes, what it looks like, um, and just understanding that I don't have to do it all. The understanding of not having to do it all. Um, but at the same time, still wanting to do it all.

P-3: Sometimes I, I, I know that there have been moments where I feel like I've had to defend myself to other mothers. (laughs) You know, because, uh, they're like, "I don't know how you do it!" So on the one hand, I take that as a compliment. On the other, I'm speculating that they're thinking, "Whoa! When the hell are you with your kids?"

P-5: so there were times when, um, I felt like I was spreading myself very thin, where maybe I wasn't, you know, the best mom I could be or wasn't the best student I could be, um, but for me, what I found is because I'm such a perfectionist, I was like, I started something, I'm not gonna quit, and so essentially what ended up, you know, happening was I, you know, I've gotten to the point where I've finished now, I mean I just have my dissertation left, um, and I'm still a mom, um, but along the way, my hobbies or my interests or my needs kind of fell to the wayside. So, I was a working mom and a student and that's pretty much all I had time for in my life.

P-6: There are a lot of, the mommy wars and pop culture references are very real. They're these variables that we're judged by as women and mothers. You know,

"Oh, I would never leave my small children. You don't have to leave right now. Why would you want to?" And I, that, that's the social piece that I get from friends and people that are around.

P-8: This intensive mothering, I mean, you're a everything and doing everything and you're involved in everything, and, you know, there's that societal expectation, but I don't, I don't know how real it is. I think I'm pretty involved. My kids think I'm involved. I wanna be there because I want to be there, not because the Jones' are doing these things.

P-11: Especially with family members or just even my friends who are not in the Ph.D. program, they're like, "Wait, you're doing this, this, this and that? Like how are you, how are you doing everything?" you get that response and it's like, on one hand it's like, gee, I don't know, but on the other hand it feels kind of good, it feels very empowering to have people recognize that, holy cow, you're doing a lot! And so that, sometimes it makes you want to do a lot more. You're like, yes, I can do it! You, like, get this Superwoman effect. But then, again, it's all just keeping, keeping everything in check and managing expectations.

Indistinguishable Roles Create Identity

The experience of being a mother of young children while also being a doctoral student is not one of separate identities. The mothers interviewed for this study discussed the lack of separation between their roles and the inability to have those roles be distinctly different. Rather, based on the analysis of the data, the roles of mother and student are intertwined, combined, and unable to be completely separated. According to the analysis of the data, the ability to switch from one role to the other is seen as

necessary; much of who the woman is as a student is due to her role as mother, and vice versa. Participants described these roles as often in conflict with each other when there were competing responsibilities or deadlines or unpredictable situations arose. They also explained the pressure and push-pull from multiple roles as immense and overwhelming at times. But participants also described how their multiple roles could also be complimentary, offering the woman a greater appreciation for her responsibilities, and adding a level of depth to the roles she held. These multiple roles are described in the following quotes:

P-4: People ask me all the time, "How do you do what you do?" I, I don't engross myself in any one identity, I think.

P-5: Um, I feel like, you know, before where, on a Saturday afternoon, I might snuggle up on the couch with them and watch a movie with them, actually watch it, now I'm snuggling up on the couch with them while they watch a movie and I'm behind my computer. Um, so still trying to do the mom things, but, um, but definitely also be a student. So my kids have learned, you know, they've seen me at soccer practice with one earbud in and my phone and they're like "Are you in class at soccer practice?" and I'm like, "I'm in class right now." *** me walking around with my earbud in, giving them a bath and participating in class. Um, just definitely like, yeah, two people at one time essentially is what it is. ...So there really is like a mind shift that has to happen and sometimes it has to happen within five minutes or two minutes. Like it's, there's not like let's cleanse my brain and get it to, like, grad brain, you know? Like, it literally has, like, a light switch at times.

P-6: At times [the roles] are in conflict with one another and at times I figure out ways to make them complement each other

P-7: They're each, these identities are constantly feeding each other, um, enhancing the other, shaping, um, changing, challenging.

P-10: And so, to me, being a mother, like I said, it, in that academic world, those are pieces of my identity, um, but neither of them I feel like is the totality of who I am. It all fits. ...I feel like I never really, truly get recharged, because even, like, when I was off on break, which is wonderful, you know, I'm still on break, I'm not sleeping in, you know? I, I'm just, I'm trying to keep everything, all the balls in the air, getting up at 6am when my five year old is like, "Hi! Good morning!"

P-11: I'm being a good role model for positive self-care and trying to balance everything. I'm not completely one hundred percent a student or completely one hundred percent a mom or wife. I'm everything, you know, jumbled into one and so I try to do a good job of, (child talking in the background) of balancing that out.

Leading by Example

A significant experience of the mothers in this study was the awareness and importance of leading by example for their children. Not only does this include a hyperawareness of how their studies and schooling is affecting their children, but it also includes a keen sense of being a role model for hard work, dedication, following one's dreams, while still holding family as the central priority. Participants described a desire for their children to be proud of them as they obtain their doctoral degrees, while also acknowledging the levels of sacrifice and team effort that the family made as a result of

this significant academic pursuit. Participants discussed including their children in their studies (if age appropriate) by doing schoolwork together or taking them to meetings or classes when they could. This theme is illustrated in the following quotes from participants:

P-2: Which even the three year old participates in and, I mean, he may be putting together a puzzle or coloring a coloring book, but for him, you know, it's just structured time, um, it promotes how I feel about education, you know, um, it shows them how I feel about it, but it also allows opportunities for us to spend time together, too, when you think about it, 'cause we're all together.

P-3: I have my kids sometimes help me with what assignments they can, um, I don't know, um, uh, I've brought them to class before.

P-5: So they ask me a lot of times, you know, are you, are, are we gonna call you, like, doctor? And I'm like, no, no, no, you're gonna call me mom. I'm still your mom. So they're very aware, my, um, my daughter said to me, "Wow. My mom's gonna be a doctor!" and like, so they're very aware of, like, what that holds, what that means. Um, yeah, just kind of thinking about, like, what that means and, you know, how I still am their mom and being present and juggling it all.

P-7: I remember that I'd had a conversation with her, like, maybe a month prior to that where I was talking about, like, working really hard in school, like what I was doing and I was working really hard in school, um, and she sees that and she notices that and it was just, it was a powerful moment for me 'cause I was like, she does notice that.

P-8: I hope that they're proud of it because they made sacrifices

P-11: You know, and so, just also, so being a good role model I think for me encompasses pretty much everything I do as a mom and I'm, I'm a good role model for what it means to be a good husband and wife in a relationship, what it means to love your spouse, what it means to love your kids, your friends, what it means to, um, be satisfied in your career, what it means to be in conflict, what it means to talk about your feelings when you're frustrated instead of just yelling, so all of those things for me go into being a role model, which has definitely been highlighted since being a Ph.D. student.

Discussion

By utilizing phenomenological research methods, this study fills a gap in the literature and intends to communicate the shared experiences of 11 counselor education doctoral student mothers who have a child/children under the age of five. The lived experiences of these 11 participants were gathered through face-to-face interviews conducted via an online platform (Zoom) and through an extensive phenomenological data analysis process. Analysis of the data resulted in six common themes found among the 11 participants. These themes were presented to each participant to confirm the accuracy of the analysis. The nine participants who responded to the member-checking request agreed with the themes (two participants did not respond). The findings of this study indicate that each of the participants relate to the six common themes and that many, if not all, of these commonalities coincide and coexist.

As stated previously, “Motherhood is cast as a primary route to physical and emotional fulfillment for women and an essential part of female identity” (Lynch, 2008, p. 586). With the understanding of just how critical the mothering role is for many

women and looking at our study results, it would seem that our participants experienced a significant shift in their previously defined identities as they integrated doctoral studies into their lives. As all participants were mothers prior to entering their doctoral programs, it is likely that they had created or started to create their identities as mothers, which is a process. With the cultural expectations placed on mothers in today's society, as discussed previously, it would seem that this newer role of doctoral student might take away from or compromise some of their roles as mothers.

The results from our study seem to indicate that this transition or process of development causes participants to grapple with multiple mixed thoughts and feelings about their mothering experiences during their doctoral programs. The primary emotions and thoughts that were expressed by the participants in this study were guilt, pride, and exhaustion. Participants discussed their understandings of the importance of their presence, especially those with young children. However, the addition of their graduate studies often pulled them from that time with their children, causing them to feel significant levels of guilt. These significant feelings of guilt align with the findings from other research studies that have explored the experiences of mothers during their doctoral programs (Brown & Watson, 2010; Trepal et al., 2014). Some participants mentioned that this guilt led to questioning their decision to pursue further education due to the sacrifices that they saw their families making in order to accommodate their studies; a couple of participants labeled this choice as "selfish." This aligns with previous research done by Brown and Watson (2010) who found that "participants had a strong sense of what their role as wife and mother should entail and suffered feelings of remorse if they were failing in their perceived duty" (p. 399).

Another emotion that was present for participants was the feeling of being proud. The participants seemed to feel proud of all of their accomplishments and the continuous juggling that they were doing in order to make all of their roles work together for success. To our knowledge, such emotion was not highlighted in previous quality studies on mothers who were also students.

Participants in this study also expressed feeling exhausted. Many mentioned just how impactful having young children was on this feeling as they are very physically and emotionally dependent when they are under the age of five. In addition, the mothers felt that there was always something that needed to be done and there was little space for downtime, and this seemed to cause stress. This is consistent with the study done by Brown and Watson (2010) that found a “clear association between stress and doctoral study” for their participants, who were all doctoral student mothers (p. 396).

Being that the mothers identified their most important and priority role as that of mom, the emotions related to their mothering roles seemed to be the deepest feelings and those that were often uncomfortable to have when they coexisted. Trepal et al. (2014) found similar results in their study on doctoral student mothers in counselor education, citing “[The participants] held expectations about the type of mothers that they wanted to be and often felt a dissonance when they were not able to live up to those expectations” (p. 42). Although the participants discussed how these feelings and thoughts were often ambivalent and even conflicting at times, many also mentioned that at times, they complimented each other and often the multidimensional emotions and thoughts added depth to their experiences.

In order for participants to accommodate these new responsibilities and demands

that doctoral studies bring, they experienced the need for and implementation of increased coping mechanisms. This is consistent with what Haynes et al. (2012) found in their study that focused on the well-being of female doctoral students: “In order to gain the internal motivation to meet the fluctuations of intensity in their academic programs, female doctoral students need to develop effective coping strategies” (p. 13). This seemed to be a process and something that was constantly being adjusted or evaluated as the needs of the child/family changed and/or as the women adjusted to new semesters or school requirements. It seemed the participants already had some resources and coping mechanisms in place as mothers of young children, but that the addition of the doctoral student role required an increase in and greater utilization of their resources.

Participants also described an experience of striving for balance between the multiple roles that they were embodying, most importantly their roles as mother of a young child/children and counselor education doctoral student. This aligns with Haynes et al.’s (2012) study that explored different aspects of well-being in female doctoral students. The study found that their participants integrated techniques or utilized individualized approaches to try to achieve balance. This balance was not something that any of our participants claimed to have figured out, but rather the experience of striving for balance was described as a process that was regularly being assessed and adjusted. As this was explained by the participants, it seemed that although the doctoral student role was very important and fulfilled an important role in their lives, it paled in comparison to their mothering roles. Participants discussed their roles as mothers as their most important roles, so when conflicts did come up between family life and graduate school, the women had to negotiate being pulled in multiple directions at the same time, usually

with family taking the priority. This aligns with results from Brown and Watson's (2010) study that found that female doctoral students "would rather, it seemed, allow their studies to suffer than compromise their image and standing in the family" (p. 399). The women that were interviewed discussed the importance of intentionality and being present in whatever role they were in at the time. Again, this was something that seemed to be a process and something that they were striving towards; but it was an important aspect of who they wanted to be as a mother of a young child/children and as a student.

The desire to be able to maintain and balance their roles as mother of a young child/children as well as a doctoral student (and other roles that the participants may have had) seems to come with a level of pressure and expectations. "Superwoman syndrome" refers to this cultural expectation that a woman should be "all things to all people," (Eastman, 2007, p. 3). Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) define Superwoman syndrome as "the expectation that a woman must perform well in all of her roles" (p. 716). Participants discussed feeling these expectations from society, family/friends, and even themselves, which seemed to be expressed as a pressure that was constantly present. These expectations of being successful in all areas of their lives seemed to add significant pressure.

In their attempts to balance between their multiple roles and live up to expectations, there was a strong acknowledgement from the participants that their roles were inseparable. The roles of mother of a young child/children and doctoral student were not able to be completely separate or even fully differentiated from each other as these roles combine (along with others) in creating what seems to be a newly emerging identity for each participant. As Lynch (2008) states in her research study, "The symbolic

nature of both roles (mother and student) is often in conflict” (p. 595). These roles were frequently described as pulling the participant in different directions, creating tension between their roles. Brown and Watson (2010) found similar results in their study on the experiences of female doctoral students: “Role conflict emerged as an important theme in this study, as participants spoke extensively about being pulled between the role of doctoral student and that of wife and mother” (p. 399).

As the participants are engaging with and developing this emerging identity of mother of a young child/children and counselor education doctoral student, it is apparent how important it is for these women that they are able to lead by example for their children. This includes modeling hard work and dedication while also showing their children that they can hold multiple roles and be committed in several areas. Participants discussed the importance of involving their children in their studies (when age-appropriate), whether that included doing homework together while their children colored or even taking their kids to school or class. Many participants discussed obtaining their doctoral degrees as a family effort, acknowledging the sacrifices and efforts that were made by the entire family in order for the participant to be successful. This seems to be where the pride comes back around for the participants, when they are able to model for their children and include them in their academic pursuits. We were not able to find similar themes reported in other qualitative studies on doctoral student mothers. A study conducted by Trepal et al. (2014) discussed how their participants felt it was important to be role models for other doctoral students mothers, but we did not find this theme in our study.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First, the participants may represent those who have had more positive experiences or have implemented effective strategies to be able to juggle multiple roles well during their graduate studies. Being that the participants were in their doctoral programs for at least a year, it is possible that students in their first year of the program would have different experiences. In addition, some participants were involved in their dissertation processes, while others were doing coursework. This could elicit different experiences, as these program expectations require different things from the student.

Secondly, it is possible that the personal experiences of the researcher caused bias in the questions posed, the responses to interviewee answers, or the data analysis process. The researcher attempted to bracket her personal experiences and had a research team to lessen the biases present; however, being that she was the only interviewer, this could be seen as a limitation.

Participants were interviewed during a break from their doctoral studies, so it is possible that they might have had different responses to the questions had they been in the middle of a semester. During the break, most participants were able to spend more time with their children, so this might have affected their responses to the questions asked. In addition, participants were interviewed once and it was possible that the addition of further interviews might have revealed further themes.

All participants in this study reported being married and all were in full-time doctoral programs as well. Only two participants (of the nine who responded to the request for demographic information) were ethnically diverse (African American), while

the other six were Caucasian American. Participants reported a variety of work roles, with one not working outside of the home, four working part-time, and the other three working full-time (one reported working full-time plus two part-time jobs).

Implications for Counselor Education

The main aim of this study was to better understand the experiences of women in doctoral programs who have a young child/children under the age of five. We have done so by gathering data from 11 participants and analyzing the data to reveal six common themes. It is hoped that the findings from this study will affect counselor education program administration, faculty, students, and even mothers of young children themselves.

The first significant contribution of this research is a deeper understanding of the various thoughts and emotions that these women experience in their roles as mothers and doctoral students. This has implications for counselor education doctoral program faculty and cohort members as they engage with these students on a regular basis. Studies have found that women with children during their doctoral programs receive mixed messages about their mothering roles from their academic programs (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006; Springer et al., 2009). It is important that faculty and even peers understand the unique experiences that these women have during their studies and, as a result, “ideally, departments would not just tolerate graduate student parenting--but would value graduate students as whole people with a career, a life, a family, and so on” (Springer et al., 2009, p. 453).

This could also include taking on a mentorship role for those faculty members who are mothers themselves and might be able to identify with striving for balance and

inseparable roles that these participants expressed. Trepal et al. (2014) found that mentoring from faculty can be important for doctoral student mothers. “This person might become an involuntary role model for the student, because she might be observed negotiating the balance between her personal and professional lives” (p. 44). Springer et al. (2009) also discussed the importance of offering mentorship opportunities and providing care and assistance for graduate student parents.

It would be important for program administration to take into account the complexities that these women face and provide support for them within the department. This might be in the form of a parental support group, family-friendly policies, providing flexible teaching assistantships, as well as educating staff and faculty about the unique experiences that parents have during their doctoral studies (Lester, 2013). According to Springer et al. (2009), such an approach “can yield important rewards such as improved climate and enhanced retention and satisfaction of highly qualified graduate students” (p. 452).

As for counselor education doctoral students who are in similar stages of motherhood with those in this study, it is hoped that this study will shine light on the experiences that others have had and that it might provide some normalization for them. Ideally, these students would also question the narrative of the Superwoman syndrome, realizing that this is an unattainable, socially constructed ideal, and that they would work through their own personal expectations for themselves. Another potential outcome would be those in similar roles potentially seeking mentorship and/or support from others in similar stages in order to receive support through their doctoral studies. In addition, it is hoped that these women will advocate for themselves and what they could see as

helpful to them during their doctoral studies. Lynch (2008) suggested that graduate student mothers who receive peer support report higher levels of satisfaction in their relationships with their peers.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could be done to explore the experiences of women who had a child after becoming counselor education doctoral students as it is anticipated that they might have different experiences with a newborn/infant than those that have a toddler(s). Additional studies could include interviews of single mothers in doctoral programs, as all of the participants in this current study were partnered. In addition, further studies could explore the experiences of fathers who are doctoral students, doctoral student mothers who are in same-sex relationships, and master's-level students who are parents; these populations are likely to have different experiences from their peers who are not parents, but might be able to relate to some of the findings of the current study. In order to verify the extent of generalizability of some of these themes, quantitative studies could also be done with larger and more representative samples.

Conclusion

This study intended to explore the mothering experience of doctoral student mothers with children under the age of five years. Being that children under five have intense needs from their mothers, and that doctoral programs require a great deal of time and energy, the combination of these roles is likely to be a unique experience and one that is important to explore in order to better understand and support these women.

The results of this study found that six themes were shared mothering experiences of the participants in this study. These commonalities include: (a) ambivalence, where the

priority of the mothering role meets that of the strong desire to be a successful doctoral student and professional in the counselor education field; (b) increasing and accepting give-and-take: negotiating expectations while increasing coping mechanisms; (c) the teeter-totter of mothering-student roles; (d) “Superwoman syndrome”; (e) indistinguishable roles create identity; and (f) the importance of leading by example.

It is hoped that as a result of the findings of this study that doctoral program administration, faculty, and even students themselves would have a greater understanding of the complexities and unique experiences that these doctoral student mothers with young children face. In addition, it is important for these programs to evaluate their current policies and implement family-friendly support systems in order to better assist students in this demographic.

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**Chapter 3: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Student Experience of Counselor
Education Doctoral Student Mothers with Young Children**

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Abstract

The number of mothers in doctoral programs is increasing, while at the same time, they are also at a high risk for attrition during their academic programs (Lynch, 2008). As a result, it is important to understand and give voice to their experiences. This phenomenological study helps fill a gap in the literature by exploring the student experience of counselor education doctoral student mothers who have children under the age of five. Analysis of the data revealed five common experiences that these women shared including thoughts and feelings of ambivalence, experiencing constant pressures, increasing coping mechanisms to accommodate their doctoral student roles, the importance of leading by example, and the acknowledgement and acceptance that these participants have different doctoral student experiences than their peers without young children. Implications for the field of counselor education and directions for future research are also explored.

In our current culture, motherhood and academia are in conflict with each other as each requires a great deal of time, commitment, and dedication; and often, the requirements and expectations of the roles of mother and graduate student clash (Lynch, 2008). In addition, our current academic structure is not set up to support or encourage mothers who pursue graduate education (Brown & Watson, 2010). It is becoming even more important to understand the demands that these women are facing as greater number of women are enrolling in graduate programs and obtaining doctoral degrees and mothers are at the greatest risk for attrition as compared with other groups in graduate school (Haynes et al., 2012; Lynch, 2008). Efforts to address challenges faced by graduate students who are also mothers need to include listening and understanding their experiences.

One significant pressure that graduate student mothers face is “maternal invisibility” (Lynch, 2008, p. 596). This term refers to the attempts made by women to hide or lessen their role as a mother in the academic setting. This allows them to focus more on their experiences as students and be seen as a more serious and committed student (Lynch, 2008). Lynch’s (2008) qualitative study explored the experiences of 30 mothers who were also doctoral students in various academic programs. The majority of the participants in the study were concerned about being seen as focused and dedicated students and, therefore, felt it was important to downplay their roles as mothers. Several of these doctoral student mothers reported not discussing their children or bringing their families to any academic activity or environment. By downplaying their roles as mothers, women can be seen as successful and capable students while “avoiding cultural conflict” (Lynch, 2008, p. 595).

On the other hand, when these doctoral students are with their families, they often downplay the academic role and responsibilities so that they are viewed as active participants in their children's lives, otherwise known as *maternal visibility* (Lynch, 2008). This allows these mothers to be seen as "good mothers" who are fully devoted to their children (Lynch, 2008, p. 598). The often-competing roles of student and mother create higher levels of stress and lower levels of life satisfaction for these women who often find their roles and responsibilities in conflict (Brown & Watson, 2010).

Barriers for Graduate Students Who Are Mothers

In addition to the pressures that these women face, there are also obstacles and barriers in the way as they travel the road to their doctoral degree. Mothers in doctoral programs are challenged to find sufficient time to do research, and therefore are "much less likely to publish during their doctorates than male candidates" (Brown & Watson, 2010, p. 396). Mothers also have a more difficult time attending conferences due to family obligations, which can lead to these students feeling left out of the academic culture that they are striving to be a part of during their doctoral programs (Brown & Watson, 2010). In addition, these students tend to feel a significant lack of support from their faculty and graduate programs, which leads to a greater level of attrition for this population (Lynch, 2008).

Mason, Goulden, and Frasch (2009) conducted a survey study on over 8,000 doctoral students and found that more than 50% of their participants (a greater percentage of women than men) did not feel supported in maintaining a career-life balance or in placing self-care as a priority. This was likely even higher for those who were parents. The authors also found that the majority of doctoral students in this study did not believe

they could successfully pursue and complete their doctoral work if they had children. Again, more women than men believed this to be true.

Lack of support from faculty was found to be a barrier for female doctoral students in other studies as well (Moyer, Salovey, & Casey-Cannon, 1999). Trepal, Stinchfield, and Haiyasoso's (2014) explored in their phenomenological study the experiences of doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs and found that their participants received mixed messages about parenting from their graduate programs. Some found their academic departments and faculty to be encouraging of their doctoral work while parenting, and others reported receiving negative messages about the combination of roles. To further, a study conducted by Springer, Parker, and Levinten-Reid (2009) surveyed 63 sociology departments in the United States to see what kind of support systems they had in place for graduate student parents. The authors found that very few institutions had official supports in place for this population. In addition, generally, faculty were not aware of some of the ways that they could support graduate student parents. Overall, Springer et al. (2009) found that "although sometimes subtle, there are constant reminders in the social and physical environment of the university that graduate student parents and their children do not truly belong" (p. 439).

Mothers in doctoral programs can also feel socially isolated in their learning community (Eisenbach, 2013; Lynch, 2008). Being that not all students going through graduate programs have children, those who do can feel that they are not understood or that their experiences not validated. Eisenbach (2013) described these feelings in her autoethnography:

They (classmates without children) don't have to put off homework, projects, and reading assignments until the wee hours of the night, early hours of the morning, or weekends in order to spend time with their child and husband throughout the week. (p. 8)

This sense of isolation can lead to a decreased sense of belonging and a lessened level of connection with classmates (Lynch, 2008). It is important that doctoral programs are aware of these potential feelings of isolation so that they can assist in creating a supportive and more flexible learning environment to encourage and retain graduate student mothers.

Another barrier for mothers on the doctoral path is the financial burden that they face, which causes a great deal of stress (Lynch, 2008; Kurtz-Costes, Helmke, & Ulku-Steiner, 2006). Lynch's (2008) study revealed that many women students felt they had to choose between "loss of independence and financial security" (p. 592) in order to go to graduate school and begin a family. Even though some programs offer graduate assistantships or part-time work, it is not guaranteed for the duration of students' time in the program and the hours do not always align with those that are needed by students (Lynch, 2008). Additionally Lynch (2008) found that childcare and childcare costs were mentioned in every qualitative interview that was conducted for this research, which involved 30 doctoral students who were also mothers. These women did not feel that their childcare options were affordable or available during the hours that they really needed assistance. These participants agreed that the current higher education system is lacking in supporting its students who are also parents.

Multitudes of factors are associated with the mothering experience (Birns & Hay, 1988). Not only is mothering socially, culturally, and individually constructed, but there are many factors that affect the mothering experience, such as socioeconomic status, gender of parent and child, race, ethnicity, age of child, age of parent, developmental needs, and so forth (Birns & Hay, 1988; Glenn, Chang, & Forcey, 1994). And being that children of different ages have different needs from their mothers, the roles and experiences of mothers can change with a child's age (Leibowitz, Waite, & Witsberger, 1988). In addition, the mothering experience can refer to the emotional bond with children, caretaking, emotional aspects, societal expectations, religious values, educational and/or professional goals, conflicting priorities, and many other experiences.

It is clear that graduate students who are mothers face significant and unique challenges during their studies. What is not clear is how the ages of the children of these mothers affect their experience as a student. Therefore, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of how women with children under the age of five experience being a counselor education graduate student as the challenges they face and experiences that they have may be unique.

Impact of Graduate School on the Experience of Mothering

The responsibilities of being a student are incredibly substantial to women who enroll in a doctoral program. For those student mothers who are primary caregivers to their children, their experience of mothering is also significant. It is reasonable to expect that, for many of these mothers, being a mother is often more important than being a student. To date, only a few studies have explored how the student experience of mothers in graduate programs is affected by the mothering experience (Springer, Parker, &

Levinten-Reid, 2009). Among the existing studies, the influence of the age of the children at the time of a mother's doctoral work has not been specifically explored in an in-depth manner.

Children at different ages have different needs and require differing levels of parental involvement (Erikson, 1950; Faber & Mazlish, 1998). Children under the age of five are usually too young to be in school, are less able to be independent; therefore, they require a great deal of mental, physical, and emotional time and energy from their mothers or caregivers. In addition, the parenting responsibilities within the first several years of a child's life have been found to have a great effect on a child's social functioning later in life (Bornstein & Bornstein, 2014). So, how does having a child (or multiple children) under the age of five affect a mother's experience as a student?

By gaining an awareness of the challenges and barriers faced by counselor education doctoral student mothers who have children under the age of five, doctoral programs, faculty, administrators, and even current and potential students who are mothers can better understand ways to increase support and meet the varying needs of students in this stage of life while hopefully increasing retention rates for this population. In addition, it is hoped that other doctoral student mothers with young children might be able to relate and that these results might help normalize their experiences if they can relate to the findings of this study. The present study intends to explore this phenomenon and allow doctoral students who are also mothers of young children to give voice to their experiences.

The central research question for this study was, "What is the student experience of counselor education doctoral students who are mothers of children under the age of

five?” Subquestions included: What is the student experience of mothers in counselor education doctoral programs who have young children? How does mothering experience impact the graduate student experience? How does the participant’s cultural and familial background influence the student experience? How does the participant’s support system influence the student experience?

The Purpose of the Study

There is limited research on the experience of counselor education doctoral students who are also mothers. And of these few studies, none have specifically explored the experience of these students who have young children. Developmentally, children have varying needs at different ages and stages of life (Erikson, 1950), with those under the age of five requiring a great deal of time, energy, and investment from their mothers and primary caregivers. What is the student experience of counselor education doctoral students who are mothers of children under the age of five? This study seeks to explore these experiences.

It is hoped that with an increase in awareness of the experiences and potential challenges that these students face, counselor education programs and faculty will have increased sensitivity towards, and understanding of, doctoral student mothers with young children.

Methods

Phenomenology

A phenomenological qualitative research study seeks to find commonalities of a phenomenon among participants and describes the “essences” of that shared experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). As previously discussed, there has been very little research

done on counselor education doctoral student mothers and their experiences as students during their graduate work. Of these studies (Brown & Watson, 2010; Trepal et al., 2014), there was no research available whereby the authors of a study focused on mothers with children. As the intention of the current research study was to explore the student experiences of counselor education doctoral students who were also mothers of young children, a phenomenological approach was the best fit for this study. By exploring these experiences, common themes emerged between the participants, giving the researcher insights into the phenomenon being explored.

The researcher utilized a constructivist paradigm to guide the research study. The constructivist paradigm stresses the objective of gathering the lived experience from those who have experienced it (Ponterotto, 2005). This paradigm also acknowledges that these experiences are personally constructed; therefore, each participant has an individual perspective. For example, Ponterotto (2005) stated that the constructivist paradigm is the “primary foundation and anchor for qualitative research” (p. 129).

In this present study, the student experience of counselor education doctoral students with a child or multiple children under the age of five is specifically explored. The researcher identified her bias as she had one child under the age of five at the start of the study, and when she began her doctoral work both of her children were under the age of five. As a result, the researcher attempted to bracket her personal experiences as much as possible throughout the research process. The researcher acknowledges the difficulties that she faced during her doctoral studies due to the competing demands that she felt were related to being both a mother and a student. At times, this experience was isolating for her as there were no other mothers in her doctoral program who had children under

the age of five at the time. As a result, she was interested in how other mothers with small children experienced being a student during their doctoral studies.

The researcher acknowledges that she had immense support from her partner and realizes that factor, as well as her socioeconomic status, might have affected her parenting and perception of her role as a student as well as a mother. Women who are single parents, those who have less social support, or who find themselves in other socioeconomic circumstances might have different experiences. Although the researcher's personal experiences may be viewed as bias, they also led to a greater level of empathy, compassion, and understanding for those in graduate school with young children. The researcher attempted to use her experience-based empathy to positively help her in creating trust and connection between her and research participants, as well as to construct follow-up questions.

Although complete bracketing and removal of all personal bias is rare and difficult to achieve, the researcher did her best to explore each individual participant's experience from her own personal perspective (Moustakas, 1994). The first step in bracketing one's personal experiences and biases is to acknowledge them, which the researcher is attempting to do here. Secondly, Moustakas (1994) recommends citing relevant literature to show finding of previous research that has been done (see above introduction section for this bracketing step). Next, researchers should thoroughly analyze the data gathered from their interviews and conduct follow-up interviews to gather further information and clarify previous statements if needed (Moustakas, 1994). Strategies to promote trustworthiness of findings will be discussed further below.

Participants

Purposive sampling was utilized for this study to gather rich data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants needed to meet the selection criteria listed below and were selected if they seemed to have a depth of experience in the phenomenon being explored. Data saturation is reached when no new information is discovered in the data collection, otherwise known as “information redundancy” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 202). Eleven women participated in this research study and the researcher is confident that she gathered the information needed from these participants to saturate the phenomenon being studied.

The researcher found participants by sending out recruiting emails to doctoral students across the United States via the counseling graduate student listserv (COUNSGRAD) as well as the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision listserv (CESNET-L). The researcher also sent recruiting information to counselor education program directors and coordinators of Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP).

For this research study, participants must have been current counselor education doctoral students (either full or part-time students) who also fit the following criteria:

- Mother of at least one child under the age of five
- Child (children) are living in the mother’s home at least 80% of the time
- Mother has substantial caregiving responsibilities (as determined by participant)
- Mother has been in her counseling doctoral program for at least one year continuously, and

- Student was a mother prior to entering her doctoral program

The researcher hoped to gather a participant pool that was diverse (geographic region, age, ethnicity, race, etc.) in order to gather a variety of experiences from different women because, as discussed above, multi-factors are associated with parenting experience. There were 32 respondents but 11 of those who responded fit the inclusion criteria for our study and responded to the follow-up email asking to set-up an interview time. Those 11 participants were interviewed and included in the study data. Of the participants that responded to our request for demographic information (10 of the 11 participants), the ages of participants ranged from 31-41 years old, all participants were married, there were a variety of employment statuses (full-time work, part-time work, not currently working outside of the home), and the majority (six) of the participants were Caucasian American, while two were African-American, one was African-American and Korean, and one was Middle Eastern. Participants came from a variety of counselor education doctoral programs, with 9 of the 11 living in states on Eastern Standard Time zone, while two lived in states on Central Standard Time zone.

Procedures

Prior to beginning the research interviews, the researcher participated in *Epoche*. This process invited the researcher to evaluate her own biases and preconceived ideas about the phenomenon and set them aside to allow for a more open position where she could hear participant experiences without the clouding of her own biases (Moustakas, 1994). The initial correspondence between the researcher and potential participants took place via email, where a time was set up for the researcher and participant to talk via phone. During the appointed phone conversation, the researcher read an informed consent

document to the participant and asked the participants to verbally consent to participate in the study. The researcher also provided an overview of the study, what the process would be like, and answered any questions that the participant had at that time. The initial interview was scheduled for an hour with the potential for a second follow-up interview, if necessary, to gather further data to fully develop the essence of the participant's lived experience. Video recording was used for the interviews to allow for accurate transcription and re-visitation if needed. The final themes were sent to participants to member check and ask for their feedback, making sure that the themes accurately represented their experiences.

Data Collection

In phenomenological research, data is collected through interviews. These interviews are done with open-ended questions that allow for participant elaboration and encourage follow-up questions from the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological interview process often consists of interviews containing open-ended questions in a casual and collaborative environment (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher prepared the interview environment and began to build trust by introducing herself and the purpose of the study, explaining how the interview process would go, and answering any initial questions that the participants had.

The first research question asked the participants to describe what their experience has been as a counselor education doctoral student while also being a mother of a young child/children? Subsequent questions included the following:

1. What does it mean to you to be a graduate student who is also a mother?

2. How does being a mother of a child (or children) under the age of five affect you being a student?
3. What changes or adjustments to being a student, if any, have you had to make due to being a parent of a young child?
4. What feelings are associated with experience of being a graduate student while mothering a young child/children?
5. What aspect of your student experience is associated with the age of your child(ren)?

The questions above were intended to gain a well-rounded perspective of the graduate student experience for these women. The researcher ran a pilot study prior to starting the actual research interviews. The pilot consisted of the researcher herself being interviewed by a faculty member, the third author of this article, who is also a qualitative researcher, in addition to the researcher interviewing two women who had young children during their psychology doctoral program. As a result of the pilot studies, the researcher assessed the interview questions and revised the questions.

Data Analysis

The researcher followed the method of phenomenological data analysis provided in Moustakas (1994), which is a modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis. All interviews were video and audio recorded and a transcriber was hired to fully transcribe the interviews.

To begin the data analysis process, Moustakas (1994) suggested that the process begin with horizontalization. The researcher created a list of statements that were made in the interview that are pertinent to the phenomenon that is being explored in the study.

Next, the researcher conducted reduction and elimination processes, which is defining the “invariant horizons,” or the components that were distinctive and unique to the phenomenon being explored (Moustakas, 1994, p. 128). This was done by evaluating each statement found in the horizontalization process to see if the statement could be labeled and/or if the statement contained parts that were vital to understanding the phenomenon. If either of these were found to be true in the statements made, the invariant horizons were then considered to be invariant constituents (Moustakas, 1994).

The next step in the data analysis process suggested by Moustakas (1994) is called clustering and thematizing. This is when the previously established invariant constituents are categorized into clusters, given labels, and are then seen as the central themes of the phenomenon being explored. After these clusters and themes have been created, the researcher crosschecked them with the actual interview transcripts to confirm the accuracy of the evaluations that were made. If the themes were not clearly well matched with the participant’s responses, they were removed (Moustakas, 1994).

After determining the final invariant constituents and themes, verbatim statements from each individual participant were utilized to create individual textural descriptions. Next, a structural description was also created for each participant. Moustakas (1994) explains this task by stating that one will seek “possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions” (p. 97-98). After this process, the central themes of the phenomenon were discovered and presented. After combining the above components into a textural-structural description, the final step of the data analysis process was to create an

integrated description of the complete phenomenon as constructed from the combination of the participant responses.

Trustworthiness

It is important that trustworthiness is considered and implemented into phenomenological research studies. The researcher followed several of the recommendations made by Lincoln and Guba (1985) on how to increase trustworthiness in qualitative research. These criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The suggested steps that the researcher took for this phenomenological research study include implementing prolonged engagement, conducting peer debriefing, performing member checking, keeping an audit trail, and engaging in reflexivity.

In addition to the researcher's advisor who oversaw the research process, the researcher also consulted with a qualitative research methodologist, who is the third author for this study, as well as a peer reviewer who has qualitative research experience. Lincoln and Guba (1985) view member checking as the most important technique in ensuring credibility. Member checking was conducted for this study to ensure that the researcher established categories and subcategories accurately based on the information gained from the participants. Participants were given two weeks to respond to the documents that listed and explained the central themes, also offering direct participant quotes for each theme. 10 of the 11 participants responded to the request and all participants that responded to the request for member checking agreed with the findings. An audit trail was also kept throughout the data gathering and analysis process and

reflexivity was integrated into several components of the research, as previously discussed.

Results

The data analysis completed for this research study revealed a number of common experiences for the 11 counselor education doctoral student mothers with children less than five years of age. Although many discussed how their roles of student and mother overlapped and were inseparable, there were distinct themes related to their student experience that emerged from the data that were very complex due to their multiple roles as doctoral student and mother of young child/child.

Participants described the student experience as difficult, challenging, and sometimes isolating, while also acknowledging the added value and depth that they felt due to their various roles. So, while these responsibilities often conflict, they also seem to enrich their student experience. The 11 participants in this study had five thematic common experiences in their student roles: (a) experiencing ambivalence about being a doctoral student while mothering a young child/children; (b) experiencing constant pressures due to responsibilities that can be conflicting, complimentary, or both; (c) responding by increasing coping mechanisms to accommodate the doctoral student role; (d) believing in the importance of leading by example; and (e) acknowledging and accepting that they have a different experience than their doctoral student peers.

These five common themes are described in the section below. Direct quotes from participants are offered to illustrate each of these themes. Participants (P) are represented with a number that corresponds to the coding system utilized by the researchers during the analysis process. If a portion of a participant's quote was unable to be accurately

transcribed due to technological limitations, asterisks are inserted in the quotes in that place.

Experiencing Ambivalence About Being a Doctoral Student While Mothering a Young Child/Children

Participants described numerous thoughts and feelings, but there were many that the participants had in common. Not only were there many commonalities, there was also the acknowledgement that these thoughts and emotions often existed simultaneously and that they were not always complimentary but often conflicting. Most of these emotions/thoughts were mentioned multiple times and with great depth, showing just how deep and heavily these existed for the participants.

Participants described the large dichotomy that was experienced by these emotions. Some emotions were explained as incredibly painful, strong, and difficult (guilt, exhaustion, feelings of being drained) while others were described as beautiful, encouraging, and life giving (the strong sense of pride, feelings of fulfillment). This dichotomy seemed to be difficult to hold at times, especially when the thoughts/feelings were competing or present at the same time for the participants. The common thoughts and feelings between the participants included exhaustion/feeling drained, pride, guilt, and fulfillment as explained in the below quotes from participants from our study.

Simultaneous and often conflicting thoughts and feelings.

P-2: No sleep (laughs), or limited sleep. Mostly no sleep (laughs). Um, it means sacrifice. Definitely means a lot of sacrifice, um, but it's still rewarding at the same time. It's still rewarding and it feels good, yet again, for my kids to be able

to see this side and know, like, at the end of the day, no matter what obstacles come your way, ain't nothing can stop you.

P-8: Um, feelings, um, I mean, I feel challenged, but I feel accomplished. I feel overwhelmed. Um, I feel like a juggler, like I can do, I can multitask, like, way better than anyone else I know, um, 'cause I have to! Um, there's a lot of good feelings and then there's some bad feelings. Not bad feelings but, like, this isn't, I'm not normal compared to my other friends, so *** a little bit. Um, feeling, what other feelings? Um, you know, the one thing that comes to mind is that I'm tired. I'm tired as heck. Um, but, um, I don't know, motivated, I guess. Ambitious! (laughs) Ambitious, yeah.

P-11: The tough feelings are a lot of, a lot of guilt, a lot of sh, not shame, um, anxiety, like, overwhelmingness, um, just like, I mean, and there is that imposter feeling, like, that self-doubt that creeps in. No matter how much validation you get, there's so much that we're learning right now and it's like, oh, my gosh, can I really do this? You know, just feeling like I'm not good enough. Those comes up, those feelings come up, too. Um, and then the good feelings are just, I mean, just that we're in, in, going to be influencing, inspiring generations of counselors in training, the future generations of counselors in training. Um, that we're contributing professionally to our, you know, to the mental health profession, um, and just, I guess, it's just a really, and probably, the majority of the feelings is just, um, self-worth.

Exhaustion/feeling drained.

P-2: No sleep (laughs), or limited sleep. Mostly no sleep (laughs). Um, it means sacrifice. Definitely means a lot of sacrifice, um, but it's still rewarding at the same time. It's still rewarding and it feels good, yet again, for my kids to be able to see this side and know, like, at the end of the day, no matter what obstacles come your way, ain't nothing can stop you.

P-4: That I was more tired than my classmates and, um, I would think well, shit! I got up twice last night at 2am and 5am and maybe slept for half an hour after that, so, yeah, I'm going to be more tired.

P-5: I think it can definitely be draining, just energy level, you know, for me working full-time and having kids, most of my schoolwork was done either on the weekends or after 8:00 at night, which, we all know, is not your best time, after 8:00 at night. I've been up since 6:00 getting kids ready for school, um, and so I found that it actually took me longer to complete assignments because, you know, if you think about it, if you're able to write or really like, review literature and do your assignments when your mind is really sharp versus 9/9:30 at night when you're exhausted. Like, it took me longer to write because, I, my brain is just just not there. Like, I don't want to drink caffeine and be up all night but I really, like, it's just not there. So, yeah, like, that was definitely a huge part of it, just being tired, 'cause little ones are demanding.

P-10: I, that's another part of it is I feel like I never really, truly get recharged, because even, like, when I was off on break, which is wonderful, you know, I'm still on break, I'm not sleeping in, you know? I, I'm just, I'm trying to keep

everything, all the balls in the air, getting up at 6am when my five year old is like, "Hi! Good morning!"

Pride.

P-3: I've always wanted my Ph.D. so that's one piece and pride in believing that my kids would be proud of me, um, uh, you know, they, they, they came to the graduation for the master's program, um, they will come to my graduation for the Ph.D., stuff like, you know, so that's where the pride comes from.

P-4: I've been really proud of being able to balance all of that and do all of that with efficiency, while still producing at a high level. I'm graduating my doctoral program with 6 publications and 17 national presentations and 27 regional state presentations, um, just high levels of producing, but I've also been able to be there for my child, um, most days throughout the entire process.

P-6: I feel proud, um, for the most part that would be the primary feeling. I, I shared every time, it, it's not just turning in a paper, it's a huge accomplishment because I'm juggling and my husband is not always here to help and especially when he's gone more for his work, um, I don't have a huge, I mean, I have some support, but, so each thing, each event feels like a victory and I do feel very proud of, of that. I feel very blessed to live in a world where I can go and learn, come back and be with the kids. That's a big part of what I feel, I tend to, uh, enjoy that I'm able to have these opportunities and then, you know, there's, uh, frustrated and stressed out piece that creeps in.

P-10: I'm proud that I'm in a Ph.D. program. I mean, I worked really hard and am working really hard and that is a definite part of my identity that I'm very proud

of, you know? Um, but I think the being a grad student who's also a mother? It grounds me.

Guilt.

P-2: Um, the feelings of guilt sometimes, and the feeling of not being able to spend the time I feel like my kids deserve. But then, the flip side of it, and I don't think I mentioned this before, the guilt of not being able to do the things for the education side, too.

P-5: Um, I think just, there've definitely been moments of guilt, where I'm like, am I taking away too much time from them? Like, should I not do this?

P-7: I feel sad for the moments I know that I'm missing out on. Um, sometimes I experience ambivalence, um, not, not with being a mom, but with, like, work in my program. Um, when I guess I'm feeling, you know, really guilty or really sad about missing out on what I wanna do with my kids, I can feel a little ambivalent about my program. Um, and it, and it typically doesn't last very long, but I guess that happens. Um, I don't think that I really experience anger. Um, the closest thing that I mentioned frustration, uh, but yeah.

P-10: And I would say that that guilt is present there, too, um, that I mentioned earlier, and it's really just trying to reconcile within myself the times, like, is this really worth it? Like, it's worth it to me personally and I, I, I've never stopped being excited about this journey, but then what does this mean for my family, even when I graduate, you know?

P-11: Sometimes I'll hear him crying for me and that's hard 'cause I'm right there, you know, but I know all he needs is for me to just sit with him and pat him and, you know, kiss him or, um, just sing to him or those kinds of things.

Fulfillment.

P-3: When I started back to school, because I've always loved education, I have been much more fulfilled.

P-4: It's the same kind of feelings associated with the pride, too, that fulfilling, um, that fulfilling feeling, that fulfilled feeling, whereas being a mother is the most fulfilling part of my life, I also feel extremely fulfilled by my work as a doc student.

P-7: It's very meaningful. It's exciting for me and you're, it's, you nailed it on the head. It's meaningful, so I'm so invested in it.

P-9: As I told you, I love school, but all the time I, I put in my mind that the priority is your kid. This is so exhausted. As I told you, like, exhausted to, uh, keep going school with motherhood and, uh, sometime, like, most of the time proud, uh, be happy, be happy, very happy to, uh, spend time with here and there, so I feel I can, um, success, I can, um, put myself in a value, like I, I, like, I'm a good mom and same time, I'm a good student so this make me so happy. Yes.

Experiencing Constant Pressures Due to Responsibilities That Can Be Conflicting, Complimentary, or Both

Analysis of the data from this study showed that a significant experience for the participants in this study was one of constant pressures from both their student role and their mothering role. The data showed that these pressures were often in conflict with

each other. When children had needs that interfered with school deadlines, when professional/academic expectations included activities that could not be easily done while mothering young children, or when attempting to be present and intentional with family time when schoolwork and studying were nagging in the back of the participant's mind, the participants experienced these expectations and responsibilities pulling them in opposite directions.

At other times, participants experienced these roles as complimentary, creating a deep level of learning and application of what the participants were learning through their doctoral studies. Participants described a component of this experience as always feeling that more needs to/should be done, whether in the mothering role or the student role.

P-1: So, you know, the syllabus can be released, we've had our first class, and I'm trying to now fit this class and the assignments and the discussions into our life. It's like, you know, when you have a rhythm with children, you know, whether it be, you know, feeding them and bathing them and putting them to bed, that whole routine and then that moment when you just kind sit and the house is quiet and you're like, "Oh, well I could wash, like, 10 loads of clothes right now", "I could..... you know, unload the dishwasher twice", "I could do all these things" but then it's like, "oh, crap, I've got an assignment due at 12:00am, or 11:59pm and it's 11:45pm"...

P-3: You know, I know there's going to be moments and I've had those moments where I am out doing the dishwasher that starts at 2:00am 'cause I'm still up writing some paper, but that's, those are, you know those come in spurts, so, and even then my kids don't, um, they don't see mommy suffering, so to speak, um,

'cause, because, um, it's late at night or, so I, I, they're usually not, clearly they're not up seeing me working, but, and then I still get, get them up, take them to school, I mean, I'll still be tired, you know, in the evening, but, I mean, it all works out.

P-5: Now I'm snuggling up on the couch with them while they watch a movie and I'm behind my computer. Um, so still trying to do the mom things, but, um, but definitely also be a student. So my kids have learned, you know, they've seen me at soccer practice with one earbud in and my phone and they're like "Are you in class at soccer practice?" and I'm like, "I'm in class right now." *** me walking around with my earbud in, giving them a bath and participating in class. Um, just definitely like, yeah, two people at one time essentially is what it is.

P-6: And there's a lot of the ability to take your hat, take one hat, hat off and, you know, put another one on constantly and to wear multiple hats at the same time and I know that *** women who were better at that and we can do that and I work real hard, so....

P-9: So I am, like, push myself to the office or to, like, um, library, public library to the quiet room and I just study to pass the comps and, um, like, um, don't postpone anything and make me stronger to study. Uh, this is for good things. There was good things on this side, but the bad thing on the other side, it's so hard. Sometimes they being sick. Sometimes I feel very nervous because I have too much to do.

P-10: Going back to that balance just for me personally, um, the, the struggle is just, you know, it, it does take time, you know, it takes time to be a mom and I do

sometimes feel like, you know, I just wish I had a little more time to, to get things done and, and do the extras.

P-11: I'm trying to be intentional and present in the moment, there's still all this stuff in the back of my mind, like, okay, I have to do this paper, I need to submit that proposal and what about that..., you know, there's always those, those things that even though you're trying to be very intentional, they're always in the, in the background.

Responding by Increasing Coping Mechanisms to Accommodate the Doctoral Student Role

Participants in this study discussed adjustments and additions that they had to make as mothers of a young child/children in order to accommodate the doctoral student responsibilities, expectations, and overall new role in their lives. These accommodations included a significant level of planning and scheduling of all of the logistical components of their lives. From childcare or help in the home to class sessions and school deadlines, the participants relied on calendars/schedules to help them adapt to the increased responsibilities of a doctoral program and maintain a sense of order and ability to anticipate what was happening next.

In addition, participants experienced an increase in their awareness of the intentionality with their time as their available quantity of time decreased in some areas of their lives, they felt the need/desire to create more quality time with the time that they had. These doctoral student mothers of young children also experienced an adjustment in their own expectations of themselves, realizing that they had several significant responsibilities and understanding that the level of output that they were used to might

need to be adjusted. This seems to have been a process for the participants and something that they didn't always feel comfortable with, but that they realized was essential to their abilities to maintain both roles of doctoral student and mother of a young child/children.

This is illustrated in the below direct quotes from participants in this study:

P-1: You know, that whatever my study habit was or my, my prep time was, like, it doesn't, it doesn't apply in the same way. That in order for me to be successful as a student, it really means that I'm going to have to pay attention to the pockets of time and access that I have that are available to me so that I can maximize those.

P-2: So the support piece, that piece is something that I have to continuously just mention 'cause that's a big factor in being successful and you have small kids and you're trying to do any type of, um, schooling or educational pursuits or whatever, um, but even outside of building a support system, counting on your support system and using your support system, um, is understanding that, well, for me it was understanding that with this doc program, it's a little, it's not just what's done in the classroom, it's done with, it's stuff with outside of the classroom as well. So, um, finding that time and that balance to try to incorporate that, but then sometimes having to sit it out just because support system not available, um, child is sick, uh, kid don't want you to leave 'cause you already been gone for some days 'cause you already doing something. Just all of that and trying to, balance keeps coming up, but balancing, um, it all. Balancing it all. Yeah.

P-5: And there were times where that was very hard for me because I didn't want to admit that I needed help, but definitely learning to do that and being okay with

that was a big thing. Um, and then also I set realistic goals and expectations. ...I would say just the, um, the feeling of maybe not being able to commit 100%. Um, they're just, the aspect of kind of, um, like, lessening my expectations. I think that is very much needed with having younger children. I guess that I think if my children were older, I wouldn't have felt that as much and I probably could have poured a lot more into it.

P-6: I plan each and every day around the school tasks, so I think it has forced me to, okay, I only have this hour to get groceries, I only have, you know, I have to get them on a nap schedule. I, it, it's forced a lot of structure that I don't know was there for the period of time that I wasn't in school.

P-7: I've had to be way more intentional with how I utilize my time. Um, I have to [be] way more intentional and thoughtful about how I interact, um, and focusing on quality of interactions because, you know, quantity of interactions isn't there. But, I mean, it's hard, too, 'cause it's a huge sacrifice, um, and I recognize that I miss out on a lot, um, so I just, I really try to be very intentional, intentional about making, um, my moments count.

P-11: Like, especially in the middle of the semester when you're, like, "Okay, wow. I've got all this stuff ahead of me and how am I gonna finish this?" and, but you do it. And so I think, I think it, it is an adjustment of expectations. It's also management and then it's like, so this, it is, it's just understanding, like, this is where I'm at right now and just accepting that.

Believing in the Importance of Leading by Example

A significant experience described by the participants in this study was the significance of leading by example for their young children. The hard work, dedication, and commitment to education was important to these doctoral student mothers who were striving to excel in their roles as mother of a young child/children and counselor education doctoral student. Despite the many competing priorities, unending tasks that needed to be completed, and immense amounts of stress that these women could feel, there seemed to be a great level of pride and accomplishment when the participants discussed the example that they were setting for their children. At the heart of leading by example was the idea that they could show their child/children what was possible, that they too could follow their dreams and make multiple goals happen simultaneously through hard work and dedication, while still having their families be their priority.

Despite the difficulties, the complexities, the guilt, and sense of being overwhelmed, the idea that these women can show their children what can be done, what barriers can be broken, and what they are capable of is incredibly satisfying and often makes all of the challenges and exhaustion worth it. Participants also explained how this experience gave them the push that they needed at times, knowing the example that they were setting for their young child/children.

The idea of leading by example is not only just ensuring the child/children knows what their mother is doing, but also by sometimes including the child/children in the school process. Participants described ways in which they included their children in the school process. This included doing homework together with their children, or the child getting to be present during class sessions or group project appointments, or attending

celebratory school events. For many of the women in this study, it seemed that the experience included intentionality around engaging children in schoolwork (when age-appropriate). Participants explain this in the below quotations:

P-1: You know, we meet once a year. Great! We meet in class. I love that. They all come to class too, so I love that they get to see, okay, mommy is doing her assignments and mommy is in college and, and, and mommy is working on herself. Yes.

P-2: I know I shared with you before about implementing just homework time, which even the three year old participates in and, I mean, he may be putting together a puzzle or coloring a coloring book, but for him, you know, it's just structured time, um, it promotes how I feel about education, you know, um, it shows them how I feel about it, but it also allows opportunities for us to spend time together, too, when you think about it, 'cause we're all together.

P-5: I've really seen it, too, like as an example to them, like they've seen me want to pursue my education and they've seen the value that I've placed on that, so they ask me a lot of times, you know, are you, are, are we gonna call you, like, doctor? And I'm like, no, no, no, you're gonna call me mom. I'm still your mom. So they're very aware, my, um, my daughter said to me, "Wow. My mom's gonna be a doctor!" and like, so they're very aware of, like, what that holds, what that means. Um, yeah, just kind of thinking about, like, what that means and, you know, how I still am there mom and being present and juggling it all.

P-9: The most important thing in my life is my kids. So proud I'm a mother and doing school and I think, uh, the best thing in my life happen, that I'm a mom.

That so nice that, like, I'm really happy to have them. I'm really happy, uh, to be a mom. *** Sometimes I to them as, for the work. They, I'm sorry, as a motivation. They motivate me to, uh, doing better. When I see them, um, I'm always say, when they get bigger, I want them to be so proud of me.

P-11: So that idea of being a role model of, um, setting good intentions, of having good balance, of, of still taking care of myself while taking care of the family has really, um, shifted into my, you become, I've just become a lot more aware of it.

Acknowledging and Accepting That They Have a Different Experience Than Their Doctoral Student Peers

The participants in this study acknowledged that they had a significantly different experience than their doctoral student cohort members or peers due to being mothers of a young child/children. Some participants described feelings of inadequacy or isolation in their student roles due to the high needs of their mothering roles. The desire to be excellent students while also maintaining high levels of responsibility in their mothering roles may create a pull in opposite directions. For example, their pressures and demands were so high, yet there were times where particular areas of their lives had to give as they could not always maintain both the student and mothering roles at maximum effort. Participants described their doctoral student roles as significant due to the levels of sacrifice that they made in their home lives on a regular basis in order to accommodate their student roles. They explain these experiences in the quotes below:

P-1: There is a very distinct difference, you know between the students that have children and the students who do not have children and so when I, or the students who have, like, older children. You know, so their kids can fend for themselves. It's

like you can actually tell your kid to pick up dinner on the way home and everybody's eating. (Child talking in background). Um, um, but, but everything is mommy now. Everything she's pointing to, it's mommy.

P-2: One of the adjustments is not being able to do it all, like, when I say do it all, I'm not even talking about like, the role as a parent but just, um, hanging out or participating in leadership opportunities at school. Like, I can't do all those things because I do have small kids and I just can't get up and go like I want to. Um, you know, at the school they recently had a, a honors gathering and I couldn't find childcare, so didn't go.

P-3: I roll my eyes at some of my peers who don't have kids who complain about stuff, um, and I just go, um, it reminds, it keeps me, hmm, well, I work on keeping myself humble because they don't have kids, so of course, they wouldn't understand, like some of my peers who don't have kids, um, they wouldn't understand how much more difficult, or not even difficult, but how much more complex life can get. Um, so it's taught, so it's taught me patience as a student at school, um, and it's given me, I think more insight with, with, um, what I'm learning.

P-4: Don't use the baby as an excuse not miss class. Um, "Don't bring the baby around," um, "in the building." Um, uh, "Don't talk about it as something that's really, really hard." and I would have liked to have been a little more open about it, I think. Um, academia is very stifling and we're already trying to meet, um, expectations that, um, dehumanize us. Um, but some of that was, so some, some feeling that came up was insecurity, too, of I can't talk about the, the struggles.

Lack of sleep and striving for that balance. Um, and certainly didn't want to use that as an excuse to miss class. So if I did miss class and she was the reason, I didn't say that.

P-5: It is a different aspect, like, trying to write a paper when you've got a little one snuggled up next to you or, you know, trying to *** you've got a little one, like, wanting to play, so yeah, that part's different.

P-6: I don't have the time that others have. I just don't. They can go, like some of my classmates will say, "Oh, I'm going to the library all day today to work on the statistics assignment." and I will think to myself, "Oh, my gosh, I haven't even started it yet. I can't even start it until..." because I know, every single day I know and I have to map out my assignments in a manner that allows me to be here present with my family. So that, that time is, you're going to hear me say it a million times. That's what it comes down to. I wish I had more of it. I wish I could pause things sometimes. Um, there are no extensions in a big girl program, big person program. You have to do your work, so, um, I'm constantly searching for a way, for ways to balance.

P-7: It's kinda one of those things where, um, you know, as everyone else is planning out, you know, what they're gonna be doing, you know, like when they're studying, when they're doing this, when they're doing that and, you know, maybe not entirely fair, and I'm, I'm aware of this, but, yeah, I can be a little, um, internally critical 'cause I'm like, "You don't have that much to do!" And I know that's not fair because they've set up their lives in a certain way and I'm sure they have different commitments, but yeah, as, you know, a mom, you know, with two

kids, um, full-time job, in a Ph.D. program, um, yeah, my time is, is much more limited, um, so yeah, I mean, yeah, I, I definitely notice the differences.

P-8: I remember having to bring my kids to, like, a meeting with other doc students. We were doing, like, a research paper together. Um, and I remembering it being, like, just really super awkward. And I remember having to bring my kids to a meeting with my advisor 'cause my, like, babysitter fell through or my husband had to go out of town. So, like, I mean, that experience *** it impacted being a student, for sure. Because I could stop being a student but I couldn't stop being a mom.

P-9: It's so hard, I keeping with little one, but it really is different when they get bigger. So nice. Like, uh, um, you can give them some responsibility and, uh, they can go by themselves, they can play by themselves and when, when you give them the basic thing like eat, uh, shower, uh, studies, homework, that's it, so they can go and sometime also they take care of my little one, so that's so nice. Like, is different, different, very different the motherhood, uh, between five years and under and five years and above. It's so different, you know? Like, as I told you, the little one need more time, uh, more money, uh, more, um, more emotion, more patience, more everything. (laughs)

P-10: I am jealous of people who don't have kids sometimes, you know? In their ability to just really focus on this and, and because as much as I love my kids, it's a stressor, you know.

Discussion

The researchers specifically used phenomenological research methods to explore the student perspective of 11 counselor education doctoral student mothers with children under the age of five. Online face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant individually to gain an understanding of their lived experience and the results presented above. Through a thorough phenomenological data analysis process, five common themes were found between the 11 participants.

Results from this study shined light on the complex interplay between two important roles in the participants' lives. Results indicated that the participants strongly desired to be excellent students while also being exceptional mothers. These pressures were high and although they were often in conflict, they also complimented each other. These findings align with research found by Anderson and Mieztis (1999) who found that "participants with children reported that much of the conflict that they experienced as students was due to their parental role, especially if the children were very young" (p. 37). However, the participants in Anderson and Mieztis' (1999) study also discussed the many positive facets of their student experiences. Subsequently women in our study spoke to the ways in which their roles as students and mothers of young children created some of the most challenging times, while also being some of the most rewarding. Again, this created yet another dichotomy for the participants that could create confusion and at the same time yield satisfaction.

The findings suggest that there is a significant level of identity development that these women were experiencing being a doctoral student and mother of a young child/children. "Upon entering a doctoral program, students are exposed to multiple

academic and scholarly cultures and begin to undertake a number of identity transitions concurrently” (Foot, Crowe, Tollafield, & Allan, 2014, p. 104). Further, Laney, Carruthers, Lewis Hall, and Anderson (2014) stated that little research has been done that focuses on identity development in mothers past the initial transition to motherhood; however, they acknowledge that “becoming a mother causes women to lose or alter much of what they defined themselves by prior to motherhood” (p. 1229). As their additional role of doctoral student was taken on while their child/children were young, it seemed that there were renegotiations of what it meant or looked like to be a mom to their children and what motherhood meant to themselves. This is where the complex mixed-emotions appeared, inseparable roles converged to create this new identity, and the process of acknowledging and accepting their different student experiences took place.

The participants in this study were mothers before starting their doctoral studies, so they had developed or were in the process of developing their identities as mothers of young children. Likewise, all participants had been college students prior to starting their doctoral programs, so they had created student identities as well. We interviewed our participants as they were still navigating these two identities coming together with the heightened pressure of the college identity being at the doctoral level. In addition to these identities converging and the navigation necessary to interweave these roles, the participants were at least one year into their doctoral programs, meaning that they were also likely to start developing their counselor educator identities as professionals in the field. This phenomenon is supported in a study done by Dollarhide, Gibson, and Moss (2013) which indicated that “as students progress in their doctoral study in counselor

education, they face multiple challenges in their professional identity development” (p. 142).

The ability to bring these identities together can be exciting (resulting in feelings of pride, fulfillment), while findings also suggested that this process was also demanding and could be stressful (bringing up feelings of exhaustion and guilt). A study done by Colbeck (2008) explored the development of professional identity for doctoral students and found that, “When two identities with contrasting meanings and expectations are activated at the same time, an individual is likely to experience stress” (p. 10). The identity formation and renegotiation process found in participant experiences in our study seemed to require the participants to engage with and significantly increase use of coping mechanisms as the sheer volume and level of responsibility that they faced during their doctoral programs required an adjustment of their own expectations of themselves. This aligns with the findings from a study done by Haynes et al. (2012) that explored opinions on well-being for women in doctoral programs. They found that women in doctoral programs who were able to create coping mechanisms felt a greater sense of control and that, in turn, they gained a greater sense of “feeling they have influence over their lives and in decision-making as a student and in other roles they identify” (Haynes et al., 2012, p. 12). In addition, Kurtz-Costes, Helmke, and Ulku-Steiner, (2006) conducted a study exploring gender differences in doctoral experiences and found that students often implemented coping mechanisms such as drawing boundaries or setting limitations in attempts to lower their stress levels around balancing school and their personal lives.

Our findings suggest that this identity formation was a process and one that was neither easy nor comfortable for participants, but one that was fulfilling and a source of

pride for them. Although adding the role of doctoral student to their already busy lives was not a simple process, it was one that seemed to bring a significant level of satisfaction and fulfillment. This aligns with findings from Brown and Watson's (2010) study, which revealed that "all participants confessed that being a doctoral student was affirmative and stimulating; it enriched their lives" (p. 391).

For the participants in our study, it was important to be able to show their children the importance of education, following their dreams, and working hard to achieve one's goals. Despite having different experiences than many of their doctoral student peers, it seemed that there was a level of self-assurance and pride that came from the participants in this study as they succeeded at multiple roles in demanding and often challenging situations. This is not to say that their peers did not also face challenges in their lives during their doctoral studies, but the experience of being a doctoral student mother with a young child/children was one that brought unique and complex challenges. As Springer et al. (2009) stated, "Graduate student mothers are not only confronted with logistical difficulties, limited support, and eventually constrained career paths; they must also contend with conflicting and powerful ideologies that surround academia and motherhood" (p. 438).

Limitations

There are potentially several limitations to this study. To begin with, the researcher herself fit the same criteria as the participants in this study, so she could relate to the experiences being explored, which could be seen as a bias and she was the only interviewer for this study. However, the researcher utilized her research team to explore biases, participated in member checking to confirm that the themes formulated reflected

the thoughts and feelings of the participants directly, and attempted to bracket her opinions and perspectives as discussed above.

The participants who engaged in this study could have specific characteristics, experiences, or attitudes towards their experiences that may differ from the greater population of counselor education doctoral student mothers with children under the age of five. Being that, for this study, participants had to already be mothers when starting their doctoral studies, it is possible that doctoral students who became mothers during their programs might have different experiences. In addition, participants in this study were in a variety of stages of their degree programs, which could create different opinions about their experiences. They were also interviewed during a break from their studies (in between fall and winter terms), which may have affected their responses to the questions asked.

This study included small sample of women, and a wider sample would potentially broaden the understanding of the experiences of women in this population. In addition, it would be important to include greater ethnic diversity in future studies as the current study is limited in this area. In addition, the majority of the participants in this study were from Eastern Standard Time zone, with only a couple in Central Standard Time zone. Thus, participants from a wider cross section of the country is preferred to potentially ensure a more robust sampling group

Implications for Counselor Education (and Graduate Education in General)

The primary purpose behind this research study was to explore the student experiences of counselor education doctoral student mothers with a child/children under the age of five. Through interviews with 11 participants who fit the inclusion criteria

listed above and analysis of their responses, five themes arose from the data that all participants had in common. It is our hope that these findings will influence counselor education doctoral program administration, faculty, advisors, and even other students as they interact with such students.

To begin with, this research presented can help doctoral program administration, faculty, and advisors gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of mothers with young children who are also going through their doctoral studies. This is becoming increasingly important as the number of women entering doctoral programs continues to grow (U.S. Department of Education, 2012) and it is important to understand how to best support these students during their educational experiences. A study done by Brown and Watson (2010) suggests that “Universities need to be more aware of the ‘dual lives’ often lived by women researchers: acknowledgement of the importance of time, especially for women students with families, is imperative” (p. 402). Brown and Watson (2010) go on to mention the importance of empathy for doctoral student mothers and how significant it can be for these students to feel understood.

In addition to a greater understanding of their experiences and providing empathy to graduate student mothers with young children, Lester (2013) suggested that programs evaluate current policies and implement “new programs and policies to support graduate students” (p. 60). We agree with Lester’s (2013) suggestion based on the results from our research. According to Springer et al. (2009), university or programmatic support systems for graduate student parents are limited. Steps that graduate programs might take to implement institutional supports for this population could include creating flexible family leave policies, offering access to health care insurance, providing private breastfeeding

spaces for graduate student mothers, creating affordable childcare options at school, offering flexible hours for graduate or research assistantships, having greater awareness of special days, holidays, important events when scheduling mandatory student meetings or classes, and/or forming support groups for graduate student parents (Lester, 2013; Trepal et al., 2014).

In addition to developing and implementing family-friendly policies, it is important that departments and academic programs create a culture that is family-friendly, encouraging, and positive towards graduate student parents. Springer et al. (2009) discussed how implementation of family-friendly policies and the creation of a welcome environment can help alleviate the isolation and lack of connection that graduate student parents often feel: “Although sometimes subtle, there are constant reminders in the social and physical environment of the university that graduate student parents and their children do not truly belong” (p. 439).

Several research studies discuss the importance of mentorship for doctoral student mothers (Springer et al., 2009; Trepal et al., 2014). “Mentoring and faculty support are crucial for any graduate student’s success, but are disproportionately lacking for mothers” (Springer et al., 2009, p. 451). We too suggest that graduate programs evaluate their mentorship opportunities in their programs and that doctoral student mothers might be matched with someone in their department who might be able to relate to some of the complexities that they are experiencing as they juggle the demands of academia and family life (Trepal et al., 2014).

In addition, it is hoped that the findings we present can help graduate student mothers with young children know that they are not alone in their experiences, and that

they might feel better understood during this journey. Because being a mother and being a doctoral student “place harsh demands on one’s body and mind” (Springer et al., 2009, p. 435), it can often be an isolating experience to go through both of these simultaneously. It is hoped that this research will provide some normalization for these students as well and that they might feel more empowered to advocate for themselves.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could explore experiences of working doctoral student mothers. Although several of the participants in this study also worked outside of the home, that was not the focus of this study. It would be valuable to explore the experiences specifically related to working mothers who are pursuing their doctoral degrees as they might have varying complexities and experiences.

As suggested above, counselor education doctoral programs could create supportive programs or implement further strategies to assist doctoral student mothers during their studies and research should be done to examine the effectiveness of advising and mentoring practices of programs that seek to address stress, role ambiguity, and professional identity development of doctoral students who are parents. In addition, future quantitative research could be done to determine how well these themes apply to a greater number of graduate student mothers, creating more generalizable findings. Future studies could also include longitudinal studies that track the development of student mothers as well as student fathers.

Conclusion

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), female graduate students were projected to comprise 57% of all graduate students in 2016, with the number of

women attending graduate school increasing every year. Many of the female graduate students started their degree programs during their prime childbearing years (Hoffer et al., 2006) and according to Lynch (2008), currently one of the greatest concerns in higher education is the “rise of attrition rates for graduate student mothers” (p. 585). This research intended to shed light on the unique student experiences of counselor education doctoral student mothers with children under the age of five.

Our research found that there were five common themes that our participants could all relate to about their counselor education doctoral student experiences while also mothering young children: (a) experiencing ambivalence about being a doctoral student while mothering a young child/children; (b) experiencing constant pressures due to responsibilities that can be conflicting, complimentary, or both; (c) responding by increasing coping mechanisms to accommodate the doctoral student role; (d) believing in the importance of leading by example; and (e) acknowledging and accepting that they have a different experience than their doctoral student peers.

It is hoped that as a result of this study, counselor education doctoral program faculty, advisors, and administration would gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and unique situations that these students face. Although each experience is different, there are several themes that many women in similar life stages might relate to and it could be helpful and encouraging to them if they felt heard and understood by those in their educational departments.

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Chapter 4: General Conclusions

This chapter provides a summary of the research studies contained in the previous chapters on the experiences of counselor education doctoral student mothers with children under the age of five. The summary will include the findings from the first study that focused on the mothering experience of the research participants, recommendations from the first study, findings from the second study that focused on the student experience of the participants, the summary of the findings from the second study, and recommendations from the second study, as well as the limitations of both studies. Additionally, this chapter will also explore the thematic link between the two studies and discuss potential further research opportunities in this area.

Summary of Research

We used phenomenological research methods in both studies to explore the experiences of 11 counselor education doctoral student mothers with children under the age of five. Study 1 explored the mothering experience specifically while Study 2 focused on their student experience. Participants were recruited via invitation through CACREP-accredited doctoral program directors and the CESNET and COUNSGRAD listservs.

We had 32 people responded to the request for participants. Of the 32 respondents, 11 women met the inclusion criteria and agreed to participate in the study. The same 11 participants were used for both studies. Criteria for inclusion in the study were as follows: (a) current counselor education doctoral students who is a mother of at least one child under the age of five, (b) the child or children are living in the mother's home at least 80% of the time, (c) the mother has substantial caregiving responsibilities

(as determined by participant), (d) the mother has been in her counselor education doctoral program for at least one year continuously, and (e) the student was already a mother prior to entering her doctoral program. Of the participants who responded to the request for demographic information (10 of the 11), they ranged in age from 31 to 41 years old, six identified themselves as Caucasian-American, while two identified themselves as African-American, one identified herself as African-American and Korean, and one identified herself as Middle Eastern. All participants were married, nine of the ten were in full-time counselor education doctoral programs (one was in a part-time program), and the majority of the participants lived in Eastern Standard Time zone, while two were from Central Standard Time zone.

Ethical considerations were followed including Oregon State University IRB approval for all steps of the research process, verbal informed consent, contact information for the research team, as well as information about voluntary participation and the ability to withdraw from the study at any time.

Findings from Study 1

Study 1 explored the mothering experience of 11 counselor education doctoral student mothers who had a child (or children) under the age of five. The following specific questions were asked of each of the participants (and follow-up questions were asked as the researcher saw fit):

1. What has your experience been as a mother of a young child or young children while concurrently enrolled as a doctoral student?
2. What does it mean to you to be a mother now that you are in a doctoral program?

3. What changes in your experience as a mother have you noticed since becoming a doctoral student?
4. What feelings are associated with the experience of being a mother of young children while in a doctoral program?
5. What aspect of your mothering experience is associated with the age of your child(ren)?

The results from Study 1 indicated six common themes that existed for the participants. The first theme was found to be *thoughts and feelings of ambivalence where the priority of the mothering role met that of a strong desire to be a successful doctoral student and professional in the counselor education field*. From the data, many thoughts and feelings were found to often affect the participants simultaneously with the three central emotions being guilt, pride, and exhaustion. Participants discussed how these thoughts and feelings were often in conflict with each other, although they could add depth to the mothering experience.

The second common theme found in Study 1 was *increasing and accepting give-and-take: negotiating expectations while increasing coping mechanisms*. Participants discussed the ways in which they increased or implemented strategies since becoming doctoral students in order to accommodate all of the responsibilities between their multiple and demanding roles. These included asking for and accepting help from others, drawing boundaries, saying “no,” and adjusting expectations. The third theme that emerged from this study was the *teeter-tottering of the mothering and student roles*, which really identifies the striving for balance.

The fourth common theme was “*Superwoman syndrome*,” which refers to the pressures that women feel to do it all and do it all well. The participants in this study strongly related to the need to take care of everyone at home, especially the young children, while meeting or exceeding expectations at school (and in their other roles).

The fifth theme found in Study 1 was the *indistinguishable roles that these women have that combine together to create their identity*. They were not able to completely separate being a being a mother of a young child/children and being a doctoral student; however, at times they needed to be able to switch roles and quickly.

The sixth theme to emerge from the data from Study 1 was *the importance of leading by example*. The participants in this study discussed how significant it was to them to be able to be a good role model for their young child/children, showing them dedication, commitment, and hard work as they juggled being a mother and doctoral student. In addition, following their dreams was an example that they valued and wanted to show their children.

Discussion of Study 1

Overall results from Study 1 revealed a great depth of emotions, thoughts, and pressures that existed for mothers of a young child/children who were also counselor education doctoral students. There was an awareness that their young child was at a critical developmental age (being under the age of five) and had significant emotional and attachment needs from them at that time. The roles of mother of a young child/children and counselor education doctoral student were complex and often in conflict with each other.

Considering that there are such high levels of expectations for mothers in today's society, the pressure to be physically, emotionally, and mentally available and engaged with their children continues to increase (Springer, Parker, & Leviten-Reid, 2009). Specifically, Lynch (2008) described motherhood as a key identity component for many women. Many complex and deep emotions and thoughts were present for the participants in this study around their mothering roles, including guilt, pride, and exhaustion. These emotions seemed to live simultaneously much of the time and they also created ambivalence for the participants as they attempted to integrate the two roles. This integration of roles placed a pull on the participants at times, and considering that their mothering role was stated as their first priority, being away from their children for schoolwork at times caused significant guilt for the participants. This finding aligns with previous research done by Brown and Watson (2010). Participants in our study did not like missing out on time with their children, despite doing something that they found to be rewarding and fulfilling (i.e., their doctoral studies).

A feeling that seemed to counter or at least balance the guilt a bit was the feeling of pride. The participants noted feeling proud for their accomplishments and that they were able to maintain their multiple roles while following their dreams. This seemed to be a significant feeling for the participants; however, this was not a strong theme that we found in other similar studies. Maintaining multiple roles did bring up the feeling of exhaustion for the participants, which was likely magnified due to having a young child/children who required a great deal of emotional, physical, and mental energy.

The high levels of emotions that existed for these women around the mothering experience speaks to their deep passion and love for their children and their roles as

moms, which was stated to be their top priority. Therefore, adding this intense and demanding role of doctoral student to their lives created a need for balance, which seemed to be a process and something that is continually adjusted and reevaluated for the participants. This balance was in the logistics (planning, scheduling, accepting help); yet it also seemed to be a balance in expectations and negotiations for the participants. Kurtz-Costes, Helmke, and Ulku-Steiner (2006) found similar results related to the stress between doctoral studies and family life: “Some students had developed strategies to combat their stress by consciously setting limits and boundaries between their academic and personal lives” (p. 146). In addition, our findings suggested that the participants each went through a balancing process individually as they negotiated family needs, school requirements and expectations, and so forth.

Balance was attempted while participants were feeling pressure from multiple avenues, including societal and often personal expectations of being “Superwoman.” How did one fulfill all of these expectations, especially when they added the role and responsibilities of being a doctoral student? These roles were described as intertwined, although participants talked about the roles as conflicting at times. This would suggest that there were times that the participants felt unsure, possibly questioning themselves, and wondering how to make it all happen. Similar findings were presented in the study done by Brown and Watson (2010), which found a strong theme of role conflict as their participants discussed being “pulled between the role of doctoral student and that of wife and mother” (p. 399). It seemed something that assisted with this uncertainty was the awareness that our participants seemed to have around the example that they were

showing their young children by following their dreams, working hard, staying dedicated, and maintaining multiple roles while still putting their families as a priority.

Recommendations from Study 1

The findings from Study 1 have implications for counselor education doctoral programs, faculty, administration, and even doctoral student mothers themselves. Being that attrition rates are high for this population and that the number of female graduate students is continuing to increase every year, it is increasingly important to understand the ways in which these women can be better supported and encouraged (Lynch, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Departments could use the results from this study to develop specific mentoring programs between faculty and doctoral student mothers, or even peer mentoring programs or support groups where other students can help support each other as they go through similar stages of life. These mentoring programs could follow what Haynes et al. (2012) suggest for faculty mentors, which is that faculty mentors should come alongside these doctoral student mothers and help them set both short-term and long-term goals, assisting the students in planning how they can achieve their goals.

Peer support groups or connection between students in similar stages could also be offered, providing a place for doctoral student mothers to come together and support each other. Lynch (2008) reports that graduate student mothers can feel isolated and discouraged when they are the only or one of the only students with a child in their department, whereas “students who report high levels of satisfaction in peer group relationships have informal ties to other graduate student mothers” (p. 601). Considering that our participants discussed their mothering roles to be their most important role, it

would be important that they felt supported as they integrate their roles during their doctoral studies.

According to Lester (2013), “Institutes of higher education need to consider evaluating current policies and practices and developing new programs and policies to support graduate student parents” (p. 60). Lester (2013) went on to provide a number of suggestions for doctoral programs, including creating family leave policies, offering health insurance for their students, providing lactation spaces, exploring potential childcare options that could be provided on campus, and creating a support system for their doctoral students with families. Trepal, Stinchfield, and Haiyasoso (2014) specifically discuss the importance of mentorship, encouragement, and creating a family-friendly culture within doctoral programs.

In addition, faculty can gain awareness as to how they can both positively and negatively influence and affect these students’ experiences as they face the challenges of motherhood and doctoral studies. Faculty should attempt to connect with students with these unique experiences and come alongside them as they navigate these often-conflicting roles and responsibilities. Springer, Parker, and Leviten-Reid (2009) suggested that this included “department chair training, faculty training, family-life discussion in standard first-year pro-seminars, and job market workshops for parents” (p. 451). In addition, for faculty this might mean offering extensions, accommodations, or excused absences when needed. Showing greater levels of compassion, empathy, and understanding could be comforting and might even result in greater levels of retention for these students.

Ideally, the results from Study 1 would provide some comfort, understanding, and normalization for doctoral student mothers, prospective students, and their families. In addition, it is hoped that doctoral student mothers with young children would seek the support and mentorship that they need during this season of their lives and advocate for themselves as they balance motherhood, doctoral studies, and the other important roles in their lives.

Findings from Study 2

Study 2 explored the student experience of counselor education doctoral student mothers who had a child (or children) under the age of five. The below questions were asked of each of the participants (the researcher asked follow-up questions as she saw fit):

1. What has your experience been as a counselor education doctoral student while also being a mother of a young child/children?
2. What does it mean to you to be a graduate student who is also a mother?
3. How does being a mother of a child (or children) under the age of five affect you being a student?
4. What changes or adjustments to being a student, if any, have you had to make due to being a parent of a young child?
5. What feelings are associated with experience of being a graduate student while mothering a young child/children?
6. What aspect of your student experience is associated with the age of your child(ren)?

The results from Study 2 indicated that there were five common themes that existed for the women in this study. The first theme was *the experience of ambivalence about being a doctoral student while mothering a young child/children*. Many thoughts and emotions were present for the participants when asked what their experience has been as a doctoral student while also mothering a young child/children, including exhaustion, pride, guilt, and fulfillment.

The second theme to emerge from Study 2 was *the experience of constant pressure due to responsibilities that can be conflicting, complimentary, or both*, which speaks to the high levels of expectation and responsibility that the women continuously faced. At times this pulled the participant in different directions while at other times the roles complimented each other.

The third theme that emerged from Study 2 was *participants increasing coping mechanisms to accommodate the doctoral student role*. The women in this study found ways to increase or implement coping mechanisms so that they were better able to juggle the many demands and responsibilities that they were facing with the addition of graduate school. These included planning, intentionality with time, and adjusting their own expectations of themselves.

The fourth theme found in Study 2 was *believing in the importance of leading by example*. Participants discussed how they valued role modeling hard work, dedication, and commitment to school for their child/children. This included following their dreams and obtaining their goals.

The fifth theme that emerged from Study 2 was acknowledging and accepting that the participants in this study had a different experience than their doctoral student peers

who do not have a young child/children. The participants discussed how they had fewer opportunities to engage in leadership positions, that they could not as easily or regularly participate in conferences, that they sometimes felt isolated or inadequate as they were not able to only focus on their studies but rather that they were torn between two very important priorities, with their families coming first.

Discussion of Study 2

The results from this study showed the multifaceted interchange between the roles of doctoral student and mother of a young child/children for the participants in this study. Participants described both of these roles as very important and the results indicated that they combine to create the identity of the participants. Although they combine together, the roles were also seen as conflicting as the participants often felt that they were pulled in opposite directions with competing demands and responsibilities. “The symbolic nature of both roles (mother and student) is often in conflict” (Lynch, 2008, p. 595). Participants in our study seemed to relate to this statement. However, our results showed this dichotomy of stressful and challenging roles combined with roles that really accentuated and complimented each other. This aligns with findings from a study done by Anderson and Mieztis (1999). They found significant levels of satisfaction existed simultaneously with high levels of stress and role conflict for their participants (who were mature female graduate students).

The results from our study highlights what seems to be a grappling with and renegotiation of identity for the participants as they integrated the role of doctoral student with their lives as mothers of a young child/children. A study conducted by Foot, Crowe, Tollafield, and Allan (2014) that explored identity development in doctoral students

found that “as doctoral students strive to become successful scholars and future academics, there may be a reluctance or a sense of loss as they place less emphasis on previous identities” (p. 110). Dollarhide, Gibson, and Moss (2013) specifically explored the development of counselor education doctoral students and found that after the first year of doctoral studies, students begin to combine their identities of counselor and student. At the same time that our participants were going through this important stage of identity development combining their roles as counselor and student, they were also trying to negotiate how to integrate all of their important roles together, most importantly those of mother and student. Complex emotions existed for our participants as they engaged with these multiple roles and navigated their identity development/changes.

As the participants in this study were mothers prior to starting their counselor education doctoral programs, they had created or were in the process of developing their identities as mothers of a young child/children. Very few studies have been done on identity development in mothers past the infancy stage, but a study done by Laney, Carruthers, Lewis Hall, and Anderson (2014) explored identity development in faculty members who were mothers. They found that their participants “constructively negotiated their identities as mothers by allowing their children to affect them and by stretching themselves to create more internal space for their children and their children’s needs” (p. 1236).

Combining these identities can be positive (eliciting feelings of pride and fulfillment), while this process can also be nerve-racking (including feelings of guilt and exhaustion). Increasing coping mechanisms is necessary in order to accommodate these roles and assimilate them into a new identity. Several other studies on female

doctoral students also found the importance of the integration of coping mechanisms for participants in their studies (Haynes et al., 2012; Kurtz-Costes, Helmke, & Ulku-Steiner, 2006)

The results of our study imply that this identity development is a process. This process is not something that participants seemed at ease with or that they appeared to have answers to, but it did seem to be rewarding, creating a depth to all of their roles and experiences, and bringing pride and fulfillment to their lives. For the participants in Study 2, it seemed that leading by example for their children and showing them hard work and dedication, was very important. This was something that, to our knowledge, has not been discussed in similar studies.

As the participants engaged with peers in their doctoral programs, the participants acknowledged that they had a different experience than those students who did not have young children. This is an experience that appeared to be frustrating at times, yet also one that created great depth for our participants in experiences as mothers of a young child/children. There was a sense of frustration from many participants that they were not able to do as much as their peers, they did not have the availability or even the time to stew over assignments or participate in conferences; yet a depth came from being able to directly apply what they were learning at home at times and having a forced balance that gave them a great perspective. These experiences are similar to those found in other research studies. Findings from a study done by Brown and Watson (2010) found that almost all of their participants discussed the difficulties with attending conferences due to “familial constraints” (p. 398) and Springer et al. (2009) discussed many of the challenges that are unique to this population including time constraints.

Other research has shown the unique positive aspects that mothers in doctoral programs experience. Anderson and Mieztis (1999) discussed how graduate student mothers found that their multiple roles created a balance between their school and personal lives while Trepal et al. (2014) found that counselor education doctoral student mothers see how their mothering experiences strengthened their counseling, teaching, and supervising roles.

Recommendations from Study 2

It is hoped that this study provides insights and a greater understanding of the depth of the experience of counselor education doctoral student mothers who have a young child/children. The recommendations based off of the results of our study include suggestions made by Brown and Watson (2010), who stated:

Universities need to be more aware of the ‘dual lives’ often lived by women researchers: acknowledgement of the importance of time, especially for women students with families, is imperative. Empathy is an important component of the supervisory relationship; feeling understood could help to offset feelings of stress and inadequacy over slow progress. (p. 402)

In addition to recommending that programs and doctoral faculty gain a deeper level of empathy and understanding for these students, as a result of the findings of this study the researchers would recommend that faculty and graduate programs provide greater levels of flexibility or opportunities for alternative assignments when needed for students with these unique roles and experiences who might be up against conflicting demands. Springer et al. (2009) discussed the importance of flexibility for graduate student parents: “Flexibility can create the space for graduate student parents to focus

part of their time on their studies and part of the time on their children, and to tailor their graduate student experience to their needs and temporal circumstances” (p. 444).

In addition, faculty can help create a classroom environment that encourages family involvement and integration of the whole student. Springer et al. (2009) also suggested that creating a family-friendly university and departmental environment is essential and can help graduate student parents to feel more connected and less isolated. By establishing this culture for graduate student parents, it is hoped that peers of these students with unique challenges will provide support and encouragement for their cohort members.

An additional recommendation from our research findings is that universities and departments evaluate their policies and the support systems (if any) that are in place for graduate student mothers (and even parents overall who are attending their schools). Springer et al. (2009) found that “there is an association between graduate school success and implementation of supportive policies and programs” (p. 445). Starting with focus groups and research on what could be implemented to better support graduate student parents of young children could increase retention rates and raise satisfaction levels in students. Numerous studies have suggested several policies and programs that can be implemented in order to better support graduate student parents. These suggestions include providing flexible leave policies for family issues, offering lactation rooms for mothers, offering health care programs for students, implementing affordable childcare options for students, creating family support systems, etc. (Lester, 2013; Springer et al., 2009). Mentorship programs are additional support that could be implemented by graduate programs and faculty. Trepal et al. (2014) discussed the importance of

mentoring for counselor education doctoral students. Mentoring can be done by a female faculty member, who is also a mother, who might be able to relate to the doctoral student mother and provide some support for her during a very complex and unique experience.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this dissertation project that involved two phenomenological studies. First, the researcher was the only interviewer for this study and she acknowledges she has a personal bias around this topic as she fit the demographic requirements for this study when she began her doctoral studies. Many of her interests in studying this particular topic were based off of personal experiences. However, the researcher attempted to utilize specific research approaches to lessen the presence of bias and conducted bias checking with her research team and member checking with participants to ensure that their experiences were accurately represented in the findings. In addition, semi-structured interview questions were created prior to the interviews (based off of recommendations that came from the pilot studies); however, it is possible that these questions led the interviews and that another approach may have elicited different responses.

Another limitation was that the participants who took part in this study only represent a small number of counselor education doctoral student mothers with young children, so their responses may not be accurate for all women who fit the demographic. This study also had limited ethnic diversity in the participants. Of the nine participants who responded to the request for demographic information, six identified as Caucasian, while two identified as African-American. All participants responded that they were married. Those that agreed to participate in this study might have fit particular personality

characteristics and might have found successful coping mechanisms that helped them succeed in the multiple roles that they were facing. Therefore, they might have felt more confident in sharing their stories and experiences. In addition, we recruited students who had been in their programs for at least one year, so these participants might have different experiences than those in the first year of their programs, and as some were doing dissertation work while others were doing coursework their experiences may have varied. Finally, our interviews were conducted during a break from school, so responses may have been different or influenced had we interviewed participants during a school term.

Thematic Link Between the Studies

Research Study 1 explored the mothering experiences of 11 counselor education doctoral students with children under the age of five, while research Study 2 explored the student experiences of these same participants. The studies explored two clearly different, yet overlapping perspectives and roles that these women experience. It is important to understand both of these individually as they are unique, yet combine together as components of the social identities of these women. Although many of the findings from both studies were similar in nature (and many participants discussed the overlap), there were some distinctly unique themes from both the mothering and student experiences. Through exploring both of these roles and experiences individually, the researchers of these studies gained a depth of understanding of these experiences and the ways that they enhance or conflict with one another.

While both studies revealed multiple ambivalent thoughts and feelings, and some of the feelings identified were the same, the focus of each emotion varied based on which role was being explored. The ambivalent thoughts and feelings for the mothering

experiences seemed to have an underlying acknowledgment of the impact on and from their young child/children, while there was a strong thread of fulfillment in the participants' student experiences. Striving for balance was a common thread between both studies and even the approaches to maintaining that balance were similar. However, there seemed to be a stronger emphasis from the student experience of participants adjusting their expectations of themselves. Many spoke to the limitations that they felt due to having young children and that they were not able to dedicate everything to school, yet it was difficult at times to not be able to give more. Some appreciated the forced balance that being a mother of young children brought to their lives.

Both Study 1 and Study 2 found that participants greatly valued the example that they were setting for their young child/children. The importance of leading by example was a strong thread through both studies. Another commonality between studies was the experience that their roles as both mother and doctoral student combined together, despite being conflicting or even complimentary at times.

One of the distinct differences between the findings from Study 1 and Study 2 was the strong theme of *Superwoman syndrome* discussed in Study 1. Participants seemed to feel higher levels of societal and personal expectations around their mothering roles as this came up throughout most of the interviews exploring the mothering experience; however, it was not discussed much when exploring the student experience of the participants. As previously discussed, this may be due to the fact that there are high levels of expectations placed on mothers in today's society (Kurtz-Costes, Helme, & Ülkü-Steiner, 2006). This is illustrated in the responses of our participants in Study 1.

Another distinct difference between the findings between Study 1 and Study 2 was the strong theme in Study 2 of the participants' *acknowledgement and accepting that they have a different experience than their doctoral student peers*. When exploring their student experiences, it was clear that the participants felt that they had unique experiences due to having young children during their doctoral programs. It is hoped that because they were able to share these experiences and elaborate on these differences, their voices will be heard and some of the above suggestions to universities and specifically to counselor education departments would be implemented to better support these students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, future research could be done specifically to explore the experiences of women who become mothers while enrolled as counselor education doctoral students, as the above studies explored the experiences of those women who were mothers prior to entering their doctoral programs. It is likely that becoming a mother while in graduate school would bring about different experiences than those explored in these studies. It is also important to explore the experiences of doctoral student fathers, transgender parents, parents in same-sex relationships, and single mothers to understand their unique experiences.

Although several of the participants in both studies were working mothers, future research could focus specifically on the experiences of working mothers who are also counselor education doctoral students. In addition, further research could be done specifically exploring the desired support systems for counselor education doctoral student parents to determine the best policies and systems to put into place to meet the needs of these students.

As this was a small-scale qualitative research study, the intent was to give voice to these women. Conducting quantitative studies that could be more generalizable to a larger population could expand this line of inquiry. In addition, single-subject research could be conducted to study the effectiveness of the implementation of a mentoring program and longitudinal research could also be done to explore how these experiences change over the course of the participants' doctoral programs. Ultimately, it is hoped that further studies would expand our understanding of the unique experiences that parents have during their doctoral programs and, in turn, create greater opportunities for these parents and increase programmatic support for these students.

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Appendix A-IRB Approval Document**Human Research Protection Program***Institutional Review Board*

Office of Research Integrity

B308 Kerr Administration Building, Corvallis, Oregon 97331-2140

(541) 737-8008

IRB@oregonstate.edu | <http://research.oregonstate.edu/irb>**RESEARCH PROTOCOL****RESEARCH PROTOCOL****07/21/2017**

1. A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experiences of Counselor Education Doctoral Student Mothers with Young Children

PERSONNEL

2. Principal Investigator: Dr. Kok-Mun Ng
3. Student Researcher(s): Brooke Lundquist
4. Co-investigator(s): N/A
5. Study Staff: Dr. Deborah Rubel, Methodologist

Marinda Peters, Team Member/Debriefeer

6. Investigator Qualifications

Kok-Mun Ng has a Ph.D. in Counseling. He has conducted many research studies and chaired several doctoral dissertations.

Brooke Lundquist is a Ph.D. Candidate in Counseling at Oregon State University. Brooke has training through doctoral course work on conducting qualitative and quantitative research.

Deborah Rubel has a Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Counseling. She has conducted many research studies and chaired many doctoral dissertations, particular qualitative studies.

Marinda Peters is a Ph.D. Candidate in Counseling at Oregon State University. Marinda has training through doctoral course work on conducting qualitative and quantitative research.

7. Training and Oversight

Dr. Kok-Mun Ng (the Principal Investigator) will oversee study by meeting regularly with Brooke Lundquist and reviewing research materials. Dr. Deborah Rubel (the Methodologist) will be reviewing the methodological aspects of the studies.

Dr. Ng will be responsible to complete and submit all IRB related documents to the IRB board in a timely manner. In addition, Dr. Ng will review all documents prior to

submission to the board and will oversee any changes to the documentation. Dr. Ng will provide support and oversight on a weekly basis during the course of the study, from beginning to end.

Dr. Rubel will provide oversight of the phenomenological research methods being utilized in this study. This will be done through Adobe Connect meetings and via email and will include oversight of proposal, data collection and phenomenological analysis.

Brooke Lundquist will conduct the research for this study, including interviews, analysis of the data obtained during the interview, and writing up findings. The student researcher will obtain approval from Dr. Ng on all aspects of the study (in collaboration with Dr. Rubel).

Marinda Peters will be a research team member who will review data coding and findings performed by Brooke Lundquist. Marinda Peters will provide verbal and written feedback to Brooke in helping Brooke debrief her research activities concerning the interviews Brooke conducts, data coding Brooke performs, and interpretation and writing up of the findings.

8. Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest.

FUNDING

9. Sources of Support for this project: Unfunded

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH

10. Description of Research

This project explores the experiences of mothers in Counselor Education doctoral programs who are also mothers of children five years old and under. This research is being done as part of a doctoral dissertation, and will be submitted for publication in a counseling journal such as Counselor Education and Supervision.

The two research questions that are addressed are as follows:

1. How do Counselor Education doctoral students experience being mothers of young children under five years old? Findings on this question will be reported in Manuscript 1, titled "A Phenomenological Exploration of the Mothering Experience of Counselor Education Doctoral Students with Young Children.
2. What is the student experience of counselor education doctoral students who are mothers of children under five years of age? Findings on this question will be reported in Manuscript 2, titled "A Phenomenological Exploration of the Student Experience of Counselor Education Doctoral Student Mothers with Young Children."

The researchers will use phenomenology method to interview a group of participants and analyze the information they disclose in the interviews. The interviews will address the above listed two central research questions.

11. Background Justification

Doctoral students are under a great deal of stress while they are also facing high levels of expectations and an abundance of work, oftentimes in multiple areas of their lives (Kurtz-Costes, Helme, & Ulku-Steiner, 2006). This has been found to be especially true for females (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992), and in particular doctoral student mothers who often experience multiple demands in their lives that can adversely affect their studies (Brown & Watson, 2010). These complexities are more so today than they were for doctoral students in the past (Smith, Maroney, Nelson, Abel, & Abel, 2006). Hence, it is important for graduate programs, faculty, and even prospective students to understand these pressures and stressors in order to better support and accommodate doctoral students, as well as to help minimize attrition rates in doctoral programs (Smith et al., 2006; Lester, 2003; Trepal, Stinchfield, & Haiyasoso, 2014).

Though the number of women pursuing graduate studies is increasing and in 2016 women are projected to comprise 57% of all graduate students in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), “(t)he rise of attrition rates for graduate student mothers is one of the most serious problems in the American system of higher education today” (Lynch, 2008, p. 585). Higher education is not currently structured in a way that works well for many graduate students who are also mothers. Women, and even more so women with children, in doctoral programs often drop out due to the barriers that exist for them as graduate students (Brown & Watson, 2010, p. 392). Therefore, there is an urgent need to understand the experiences of doctoral student mothers as the number of women entering graduate school increases (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) and many of them enter graduate work during their main childbearing years (Hoffer et al., 2006).

According to a report done by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), almost three quarters of the graduates from Counselor Education doctoral programs in 2011-2012 were females (NCES, 2013). It is no surprise that these female students who are also mothers face incredible demands in various areas of their lives (Brown & Watson, 2010). To date, there are less than a handful studies that have specifically looked at the experiences of mothers in counselor education doctoral programs (Trepal et al., 2014; Lynch, 2008).

Among the existing studies, none have specifically explored the impact of the ages of the children at the time the mother is in her doctoral program. Children of different ages have varying needs of their parents, and especially of their mothers and/or primary caregivers. Children under five often require a great deal of physical, emotional, and mental energy and they are less able to be independent compared to older young. This may lead to different challenges for parents than parents of older children. What are the experiences of counselor education doctoral student mothers of children under five? The purpose of this phenomenological study is to gain a greater understanding of this phenomenon, and even more so how these women experience being a mother and being a student. With this data, it is hoped that graduate programs can better accommodate the needs of these students, faculty might have increased

levels of sensitivity and understanding of the competing demands placed on these mothers, and the mothers themselves would feel heard and validated in their journeys. In turn, revisions in departmental policies or faculty expectations might increase retention rates with this particular population.

12. Subject Population

Criteria for inclusion in the study include current female counselor education doctoral students who fit the following criteria:

- (a) mother of at least one child under five years old
- (b) child or children are living in the mother's home at least 80% of the time
- (c) mother has substantial caregiving responsibilities (as determined by participant)
- (d) mother has been in her counselor education doctoral program for at least one year continuously, and
- (e) student was a mother prior to entering her doctoral program.

Additionally, criteria for inclusion include:

- Must have an interest and willingness in exploring their experiences being a mother and being a student
- Have the ability to participate in two or three 60-minute interviews flexibly scheduled
- Have the ability to access the Internet and email

Description of any vulnerable population(s): All participants in the study will be adults of legal age and are doctoral students. Pregnant women may participate in this study. No research interview questions will be about their pregnancy, however.

Recruitment: The researchers will use a purposive sample strategy by recruiting participants through:

- (a) Advertising in the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision NETwork Listserv (CESNET-L) and the counseling graduate student listserv (COUNSGRAD) to reach professionals and doctoral students in the field across the United States (see Appendix B);
- (b) Sending recruitment emails to Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Program (CACREP) program coordinators and directors who oversee counselor education and supervision doctoral programs requesting them to pass it onto potential participants in their programs (see Appendix C);
- (c) Sending recruitment emails to professional contacts asking them to forward the email to individuals they know who meet the research participation criteria (see

Appendix D).

Recruitment materials instruct potential participants to contact the student researcher if they wish to participate in the research.

13. Consent Process

Verbal consent is required for participation in this study (see Appendix A). Potential participants who responded to the recruitment email will be sent the research study explanation document (see Appendix E) and the consent form (see Appendix A). The email will also start the process of setting up a time for the researcher to talk to the potential participant via phone. During the initial phone meeting, the researcher will begin by obtaining consent (after going over consent document-Appendix A), go over study eligibility, and introduce the study to those who fit the inclusion criteria. After going over the informed consent, the researcher will be available to answer any questions that the participant might have. The first interview will be scheduled at the end of this phone meeting.

14. Eligibility Screening

Eligibility requirements will be presented in the recruitment materials and reiterated in the informed consent sent to all interested participants. The participants will be asked the following Eligibility Screening questions:

- Are you a current counselor education doctoral student?
- Are you the mother of at least one child under five years old?
- Is your child or children living in your home at least 80% of the time?
- Do you have substantial caregiving responsibilities (as determined by participant)?
- Have you been in your counselor education doctoral program for at least one year continuously?
- Were you a mother prior to entering your doctoral program?
- Do you have an interest and willingness in exploring your experiences being a mother and being a student?
- Do you have the ability to participate in two or three 60-minute interviews flexibly scheduled?
- Do you have the ability to access the Internet and email?

If the participant answers “no” to any of the above questions, she will be thanked for her willingness to participate and the researcher will let her know that she does not fit the participant criteria for this study.

15. Methods and Procedures

This research study will be done using qualitative research methods, specifically phenomenology. A phenomenological approach to research explores the participants' lived experience of a phenomenon that they have in common. In a phenomenology,

each “experience is perceived along a variety of dimensions” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 24). Through this approach, participants will explore their individual experiences from their own personal framework and from their responses; essential themes may arise that give insight into what this common lived experience is like. This information will be gathered via interviews comprised of open-ended questions. Two to three interviews will be conducted for each participant so that follow-up questions may be asked and a better understanding of the phenomenon can be gained.

Interviews will be done online via Adobe Connect or Zoom and will be audio and video recorded in order to transcribe the interviews most accurately. Audio and video recording is required for participation in this study. All names will be removed from the transcription in order to keep confidentiality for the participants. Transcriptions will be kept in a secure folder on a password protected computer.

Participants will be answering questions during the interview that will be utilized for two phenomenological studies. The first study will document a qualitative research study exploring the experiences of mothering in counselor education doctoral students with children under five years of age, while the second study will offer a qualitative study specifically exploring the student experience that mothers in counselor education doctoral programs have. While similar in focus, the studies will be differentiated by their focus on the individual roles that these women have. The first study will specifically explore the mothering experience of these women while the second will purposely look at their experiences as a student. The same participants will be interviewed for both studies and questions for both studies will be asked during the same interview.

An initial pilot study has been done to check the questions below to make sure they are asking what the study intends to explore. For this, the methodologist for this research study interviewed the student researcher with the below questions. They found that these questions elicited responses that were focused around the phenomenon being explored.

Interview One Questions

- "What has been your experience as a mother of a young child while concurrently enrolled as a doctoral student?"
- "What does it mean to you to be a mother now that you are in a doctoral program?"
- "What changes in your experience as a mother have you noticed since becoming a doctoral student?"
- "What feelings are associated with the experience of being a mother of young children while in a doctoral program?"
- "What aspect of your mothering experience is associated with the age of your child(ren)?"
- "What has your experience been as a counselor education doctoral student while also being a mother of a young child/children?"
- What does it mean to you to be a graduate student who is also a mother?
- How does being a mother of a child (or children) under the age of five affect you being a student?

- What changes or adjustments to being a student, if any, have you had to make due to being a parent of a young child?
- "What feelings are associated with the experience of being a graduate student while mothering a young child/children?"
- "What aspect of your student experience is associated with the age of your child(ren)?"

It is expected that each interview will last for approximately an hour. Follow-up interviews may be scheduled and conducted for clarification of previous responses if deemed necessary in order for the researchers to reach data saturation.

The phenomenological interview process often consists of multiple interviews containing open-ended questions in a casual and collaborative environment (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher intends to prepare the interview environment (online or face-to-face) and build trust by introducing herself and the purpose of the study, explaining how the interview process will go, and answering any initial questions that the participants might have.

The researcher will follow the method of phenomenological data analysis provided in Moustakas (1994), which is a modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis. This process includes horizontalization, clustering and thematizing, determining the final invariant constituents and themes, creating individual textural descriptions, and finally creating an integrated description of the complete phenomenon as constructed from the combination of the participant responses (Moustakas, 1994).

The researcher will follow several of the recommendations made by Lincoln and Guba (1985) on how to increase trustworthiness in qualitative research. These criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The suggested steps that the researcher will take for this phenomenological research study include implementing prolonged engagement, conducting peer debriefing, performing member checking, keeping an audit trail, and engaging in reflexivity.

The researcher will engage with the participants multiple times for initial interviews and follow-up interviews over extended periods of time, leading to prolonged engagement. The researcher's advisor will be overseeing the research process and the researcher will also be consulting with a qualitative research methodologist, who will be the third author for this study. In addition, the researcher will also debrief the findings with another research team member who will review the coding and findings.

It will also be important for the researcher to member check with the research participants to make sure that they are accurately represented and see if there is anything to add after interviews have commenced. In addition, member checking will be conducted to ensure that the researcher established categories and subcategories accurately based on the information gained from the participants. Lincoln and Guba

(1985) view member checking as the most important technique in ensuring credibility. The researcher will email the participants with the research findings from the data analysis process, asking for their feedback on the themes found. In this email, the researcher will also include a consent to obtain demographic information and will ask for the participants to return the demographic information when replying with the member checking feedback. Returning the demographic information will signal consent to obtain that information. Participants will have 2 weeks to respond to the request for member checking and a reminder email will be sent to participants. If a response is not received within that timeline the researcher will present the findings as they stand. An audit trail will also be kept throughout the data gathering and analysis process and reflexivity will be integrated into several components of the research.

16. Compensation

Participants will be given a \$20 Starbucks card for their participation in the study. The gift card will be delivered via email at the conclusion of their interviews. Participants will still receive the gift card if they choose not to respond to the member checking request.

17. Costs

There are no costs to the participants to complete this study other than their time.

18. Anonymity or Confidentiality

The videos will be transcribed via a hired transcriber. Once the interviews have been transcribed, the researcher will utilize alias names in the research documents to de-identify participants. Once transcriptions and data analysis has been completed, video and audio files will be deleted. Transcriptions will be kept until no further analyses can be done. All research related materials will be stored by the PI for at least three years post study termination and may be utilized for future research. Future use of the data will be limited to studies about the experiences of mothers as students in higher education. Please note, audio/video files may be destroyed following transcription. Information will be shared and stored in a manner that provides access only to authorized individuals (study team), and that the computers storing the data will be password protected, have fully patched operating systems and applications, and current antivirus software with current virus definitions. Researchers plan to submit completed manuscript to the archives.

19. Risks

This study is not meant to be uncomfortable; however, the researchers are aware that the topic being explored may be one that brings up emotions for the participants. If at any time participants feel that they need emotional support, the researchers will refer the participant to mental health providers (see appendix F). Although the study team will take steps to ensure subject confidentiality, there may be a risk of identification by participating in this research study. Online communication cannot be guaranteed to be secure; however, the researchers will do all they can to protect confidentiality to the extent they are able to.

20. Benefits

There are no direct benefits to subjects. Research participants are helping counselor educators, faculty members, and graduate programs gain a deeper understanding of the experiences that some of their students have and hopefully in turn making accommodations as needed for these students.

21. Assessment of the risks and benefits.

There are more benefits than risks to the participants in this study.

APPENDIX A

EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

**Office of Institutional Review Board**

Office of Research Integrity | Oregon State University
 B308 Kerr Administration Building, Corvallis, OR 97331-2140
 Telephone (541) 737-8008
 Irb@oregonstate.edu | <http://oregonstate.edu/irb/>

Project Title: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experiences of Counselor Education Doctoral Student Mothers with Young Children

Principal Investigator: Dr. Kok-Mun Ng

Student Researcher: Brooke Lundquist, Ph.D. (Candidate)

Co-Investigator(s): Dr. Deborah Rubel, Methodologist

Team Member/Debriefers: Marinda Peters, Ph.D. (Candidate)

Version Date: 10/20/2016

1. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM?

This form contains information you will need to help you decide whether to be in this research study or not. Please read the form carefully and ask the study team member(s) questions about anything that is not clear.

2. WHY IS THIS RESEARCH STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this research study is to explore the experiences of mothers in Counselor Education doctoral programs who are also mothers of children five years old and under. This research is being done as part of a doctoral dissertation, and will be submitted for publication in a counseling journal such as *Counselor Education and Supervision*.

3. WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

You are being invited to take place in the study because you were identified as fitting the study criteria and expressed interested in being a participant. You qualify for the study if you meet the following:

- (a) current female counselor education doctoral student

- (b) mother of at least one child under five years old
- (c) child or children are living in your home at least 80% of the time
- (d) you have substantial caregiving responsibilities (as determined by participant)
- (e) you have been in your counselor education doctoral program for at least one year continuously, and
- (f) you were a mother prior to entering your doctoral program.

Additionally, criteria for inclusion include:

- Must have an interest and willingness in exploring their experiences being a mother and being a student
- Have the ability to participate in two or three 60-minute interviews flexibly scheduled over 6 months
- Have the ability to access the Internet and email

4. WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?

If you participate in this research study, you will be contacted via email to set-up a time to meet on the phone to go over the informed consent document and obtain verbal consent to participate in the research study. The researcher will verify study eligibility and answer any questions you might have at this time. The study activities include interviews and a follow-up email. You will participate in up to three 60-minute interviews over several months. These interviews will be scheduled during a mutually agreed upon time and will be conducted online. Lastly, you will be contacted via email to member check the data found prior to the research being submitted.

Study duration: As a participant, you may be asked to dedicate up to four hours to this research study over the course of six months.

Recordings and photographs: All interviews will be audio and video recorded so that they can be most accurately transcribed at the conclusion of the interview. By verbally consenting to participate in this research study, you acknowledge that these interviews are being recorded. All identifying information will be excluded from the transcriptions.

Storage and future use of data: At the conclusion of the study, all documentation will be stored in a locked file cabinet at Oregon State University by the Principal Investigator for at least three years. Data may be utilized for future research. Future use of the data will be limited to studies about the experiences of mothers as students in higher education. All data stored on the computer will be password protected and only accessed by the researchers.

Study results: The findings of the research study will be sent to you so that you can provide feedback and suggest any changes to be made. The researchers will evaluate participant feedback

and implement what they deem necessary prior to completion of the dissertation. Participants will have 2 weeks to respond to the request for member checking. If a response is not received within that timeline the researcher will present the findings as they stand. The subject's wishes with respect to their individual level data will be honored during the member checking process, but feedback related to the findings that is not specific to individual level data may not be implemented in reporting findings.

5. WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND POSSIBLE DISCOMFORTS OF THIS STUDY?

This study is not meant to be uncomfortable; however, the researchers are aware that the topic being explored may be one that brings up emotions for the participants. If at any time you feel that you need emotional support, the researchers will refer you to mental health providers. Although the study team will take steps to ensure subject confidentiality, there may be a risk of identification by participating in this research study. Online communication cannot be guaranteed to be secure, however the researchers will do all they can to protect your confidentiality to the extent they are able to.

6. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

There are no direct benefits to subjects. However, it is hoped that this study will help counselor educators, faculty members, and graduate programs gain a deeper understanding of the experiences that some of their students have and hopefully in turn they will make accommodations as needed for these students.

7. WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You will be given a \$20 Starbucks gift card for participating in this research study at the conclusion of all interviews.

8. WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE?

The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Research records will be stored securely. Regulatory agencies and Oregon State University employees may access or inspect records pertaining to this research as part of routine oversight or university business. Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you.

Other people may learn that you participated in this study but the information you provide will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Data will be transcribed by a transcriber who will be briefed on the transcription process and confidentiality requirements. This transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement that states that she will not disclose information arising from the research data. Once the interviews have been transcribed, the researcher will utilize alias names in the research documents. Once transcriptions and data analysis has been completed, video and audio files will be deleted. Transcriptions will be kept until no further analyses can be performed.

The security and confidentiality of information collected from you online cannot be guaranteed. Confidentiality will be kept to the extent permitted by the technology being used. Information collected online can be intercepted, corrupted, lost, destroyed, arrive late or incomplete, or contain viruses.

9. WHAT OTHER CHOICES DO I HAVE IF I DO NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers may keep information collected about you and this information may be included in study reports. You are free to skip any questions that you prefer not to answer. Your decision to take part or not take part in this study will not affect your grades, your relationship with your professors, or standing in the University.

10. WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Brooke Lundquist, the student researcher at lundquib@oregonstate.edu or Dr. Kok-Mun Ng at kok-mun.ng@oregonstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights or welfare as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) office, at (541) 737-8008 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu

Your participation in the study indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study.

APPENDIX B

**Recruitment Letter of Introduction to Counseling Listservs
(CESNET-L, COUNSGRAD)****Office of Institutional Review Board**

Office of Research Integrity | Oregon State University
B308 Kerr Administration Building, Corvallis, OR 97331-2140
Telephone (541) 737-8008
Irb@oregonstate.edu | <http://oregonstate.edu/irb/>

Dear _____

My name is Brooke Lundquist and I am a Ph.D. in Counseling student at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon. I am in the process of recruiting participants for my dissertation research, which has been approved by the Human Subjects Board of Oregon State University and is study number is 7736. The title of this study is A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experiences of Counselor Education Doctoral Student Mothers with Young Children. This research is a study exploring the experiences of mothers with a child or children under the age of 5 years old.

I am requesting that my study information be sent out via the _____ listserv. Below is the information that I would like to pass along to potential participants:

**Invitation to PhD Students in Counselor
Education Who Are Mothers with
Children Under 5 Years of Age**

Title of Study: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experiences of Counselor
Education Doctoral Student Mothers with Young Children

I am looking to interview students who fit the following criteria:

- mother of at least one child under five years old,
- child or children are living in the mother's home at least 80% of the time,
- mother has substantial caregiving responsibilities (as determined by participant),
- mother has been in her counselor education doctoral program for at least one year continuously, and
- student was a mother prior to entering her doctoral program

The project: My name is Brooke Lundquist and I am a Ph.D. in Counseling student at Oregon State University. The information will be used for my dissertation and for future

publication. The reason for the study is because there is a lack of literature that provides an understanding of the student and mothering experiences of doctoral students in Counselor Education with children under 5 years of age.

To participate: Participating in this research study is strictly voluntary and, if you qualify, it is up to you to decide if you would like to participate. A cohort of participants will be invited to take part in this study.

What is involved: You will be interviewed about your experience as a doctoral student and as a mother during your PhD program. The initial interview will take about an hour, with possibly one or two shorter follow-up interviews. The interviews will be conducted via an online site (AdobeConnect, Zoom, or Skype). The study will span no more than six months and your responses will be kept confidential. If you are interested, I will email you the informed consent and we will review the consent document before proceeding with the interview and you will have the opportunity to ask questions.

You will be compensated with a \$20 Starbucks card at the end of your participation in the interview process. The gift card will be sent via email.

Contact information: Again, my name is Brooke Lundquist and I can be reached by email at lundquib@oregonstate.edu. Please include phone contact information so that I can contact you to set up an initial phone meeting.

This research is conducted under the direction of Dr. Kok-Mun Ng, Counseling Academic Unit at Oregon State , and he can be reached at kokmun.ng@oregonstate.edu or by direct phone at 541-737-3741. This study has been reviewed and approved by the OSU Institutional Review Board.

Should you have any questions related to my project or my request, please do not hesitate to contact me. My email address is at lundquib@oregonstate.edu and my direct phone number is 425-327-2859. This research is conducted under the direction of Dr. Kok-Mun Ng, Counseling Academic Unit, and he can be reached by email at kokmun.ng@oregonstate.edu or by direct phone at 541-737-3741.

Thank you in advance for your support and assistance.

Sincerely,

Brooke Lundquist
Oregon State University

APPENDIX C**Recruitment Letter of Introduction to University Personnel (CACREP Liason)****Office of Institutional Review Board**

Office of Research Integrity | Oregon State University
B308 Kerr Administration Building, Corvallis, OR 97331-2140
Telephone (541) 737-8008
Irb@oregonstate.edu | <http://oregonstate.edu/irb/>

Dear _____

My name is Brooke Lundquist and I am a Ph.D. in Counseling student at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon. I am in the process of recruiting participants for my dissertation research, which has been approved by the Human Subjects Board of Oregon State University and is study number is 7736. The title of this study is A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experiences of Counselor Education Doctoral Student Mothers with Young Children. This research is a study exploring the experiences of mothers with a child or children under the age of 5 years old.

Due to your role in working with Counselor Education doctoral students at the university, I am asking for your help in the recruitment of participants for my study. Specifically, I am asking you to help distribute the information to potential students. You may choose to distribute the email to the target population however you judge to be appropriate. .

In addition, I am including the recruitment email and consent form. You do not need to pre-screen individuals since the recruitment email listed the criteria for involvement in the study. So you are aware of participation requirements, the criteria are listed as follow:

- mother of at least one child under five years old,
- child or children are living in the mother's home at least 80% of the time,
- mother has substantial caregiving responsibilities (as determined by participant),
- mother has been in her counselor education doctoral program for at least one year continuously, and
- student was a mother prior to entering her doctoral program

I will send interested participants the consent form and go over it during the beginning of our appointment. After explaining more about the study, I will also ask whether they are still interested before we proceed with the first interview and I will make sure that they satisfy the participant requirements.

Participation is strictly voluntary and the email instructed potential candidates to contact me directly if they are interested. The study will include one 60-minute interview and

possibly one or two additional shorter interviews by a secure website. The interviews will be video audio-taped and will span less than 6 months. The participant will receive a \$20 Starbucks card upon completion of the study.

I appreciate your help in alerting potential participants of this research project, which will contribute to the literature in the field.

**Invitation to PhD Students in Counselor
Education Who Are Mothers with
Children Under 5 Years of Age**

Title of Study: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experiences of Counselor
Education Doctoral Student Mothers with Young Children

I am looking to interview students who fit the following criteria:

- mother of at least one child under five years old,
- child or children are living in the mother's home at least 80% of the time,
- mother has substantial caregiving responsibilities (as determined by participant),
- mother has been in her counselor education doctoral program for at least one year continuously, and
- student was a mother prior to entering her doctoral program

The project: My name is Brooke Lundquist and I am a Ph.D. in Counseling student at Oregon State University. The information will be used for my dissertation and for future publication. The reason for the study is because there is a lack of literature that provides an understanding of the student and mothering experiences of doctoral students in Counselor Education with children under 5 years of age.

To participate: Participating in this research study is strictly voluntary and, if you qualify, it is up to you to decide if you would like to participate. A cohort of participants will be invited to take part in this study.

What is involved: You will be interviewed about your experience as a doctoral student and as a mother during your PhD program. The initial interview will take about an hour, with possibly one or two shorter follow-up interviews. The interviews will be conducted via an online site (AdobeConnect, Zoom, or Skype). The study will span no more than six months and your responses will be kept confidential. If you are interested, I will email you the informed consent and we will review the consent document before proceeding with the interview and you will have the opportunity to ask questions.

You will be compensated with a \$20 Starbucks card at the end of your participation in the interview process. The gift card will be sent via email.

Contact information: Again, my name is Brooke Lundquist and I can be reached by email at lundquib@oregonstate.edu. Please include phone contact information so that I can contact you to set up an initial phone meeting.

This research is conducted under the direction of Dr. Kok-Mun Ng, Counseling Academic Unit at Oregon State , and he can be reached at kokmun.ng@oregonstate.edu or by direct phone at 541-737-3741. This study has been reviewed and approved by the OSU Institutional Review Board.

Should you have any questions related to my project or my request, please do not hesitate to contact me. My email address is at lundquib@oregonstate.edu and my direct phone number is 425-327-2859. This research is conducted under the direction of Dr. Kok-Mun Ng, Counseling Academic Unit, and he can be reached by email at kokmun.ng@oregonstate.edu or by direct phone at 541-737-3741.

Thank you in advance for your support and assistance.

Sincerely,

Brooke Lundquist
Oregon State University

APPENDIX D**Recruitment Letter of Introduction to Professionals in the Counseling Field****Office of Institutional Review Board**

Office of Research Integrity | Oregon State University
B308 Kerr Administration Building, Corvallis, OR 97331-2140
Telephone (541) 737-8008
Irb@oregonstate.edu | <http://oregonstate.edu/irb/>

Dear _____

My name is Brooke Lundquist and I am a Ph.D. in Counseling student at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon. I am in the process of recruiting participants for my dissertation research, which has been approved by the Human Subjects Board of Oregon State University and is study number is 7736. The title of this study is A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experiences of Counselor Education Doctoral Student Mothers with Young Children. This research is a study exploring the experiences of mothers with a child or children under the age of 5 years old.

Due to your role in working in the counseling field, I am asking for your help in the recruitment of participants for my study. Specifically, I am asking you to help distribute the information to potential participants that you may know.

In addition, I am including the recruitment email and consent form. Please pass along the information to contacts that you know that might fit the research participant criteria for this study.

So you are aware of participation requirements, the criteria are listed as follow:

- mother of at least one child under five years old,
- child or children are living in the mother's home at least 80% of the time,
- mother has substantial caregiving responsibilities (as determined by participant),
- mother has been in her counselor education doctoral program for at least one year continuously, and
- student was a mother prior to entering her doctoral program

I will send interested participants the consent form and go over it during the beginning of our appointment to obtain verbal consent. After explaining more about the study, I will also ask whether they are still interested before we proceed with the first interview.

Participation is strictly voluntary and the email instructed potential candidates to contact me directly if they are interested. The study will include one 60-minute interview and

possibly one or two additional shorter interviews by a secure website. The interviews will be video audio-taped and will span less than 6 months. The participant will receive a \$20 Starbucks card upon completion of the study.

I appreciate your help in alerting potential participants of this research project, which will contribute to the literature in the field.

**Invitation to PhD Students in Counselor
Education Who Are Mothers with
Children Under 5 Years of Age**

Title of Study: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experiences of Counselor
Education Doctoral Student Mothers with Young Children

I am looking to interview students who fit the following criteria:

- mother of at least one child under five years old,
- child or children are living in the mother's home at least 80% of the time,
- mother has substantial caregiving responsibilities (as determined by participant),
- mother has been in her counselor education doctoral program for at least one year continuously, and
- student was a mother prior to entering her doctoral program

The project: My name is Brooke Lundquist and I am a Ph.D. in Counseling student at Oregon State University. The information will be used for my dissertation and for future publication. The reason for the study is because there is a lack of literature that provides an understanding of the

student and mothering experiences of doctoral students in Counselor Education with children under 5 years of age.

To participate: Participating in this research study is strictly voluntary and, if you qualify, it is up to you to decide if you would like to participate. A cohort of participants will be invited to take part in this study.

What is involved: You will be interviewed about your experience as a doctoral student and as a mother during your PhD program. The initial interview will take about an hour, with possibly one or two shorter follow-up interviews. The interviews will be conducted via an online site (AdobeConnect, Zoom, or Skype). The study will span no more than six months and your responses will be kept confidential. If you are interested, I will email you the informed consent and we will review the consent document before proceeding with the interview and you will have the opportunity to ask questions.

You will be compensated with a \$20 Starbucks card at the end of your participation in the interview process. The gift card will be sent via email.

Contact information: Again, my name is Brooke Lundquist and I can be reached by email at lundquib@oregonstate.edu. Please include phone contact information so that I can contact you to set up an initial phone meeting.

This research is conducted under the direction of Dr. Kok-Mun Ng, Counseling Academic Unit at Oregon State , and he can be reached at kokmun.ng@oregonstate.edu or by direct phone at 541-737-3741. This study has been reviewed and approved by the OSU Institutional Review Board.

Should you have any questions related to my project or my request, please do not hesitate to contact me. My email address is at lundquib@oregonstate.edu and my direct phone number is 425-327-2859. This research is conducted under the direction of Dr. Kok-Mun Ng, Counseling Academic Unit, and he can be reached by email at kokmun.ng@oregonstate.edu or by direct phone at 541-737-3741.

Thank you in advance for your support and assistance.

Sincerely,

Brooke Lundquist
Oregon State University

APPENDIX E**Email Response to Those Interested in Participating in the Study****Office of Institutional Review Board**

Office of Research Integrity | Oregon State University
B308 Kerr Administration Building, Corvallis, OR 97331-2140
Telephone (541) 737-8008
Irb@oregonstate.edu | <http://oregonstate.edu/irb/>

Dear _____,

Thank you for your interest in participating in our research study exploring the experiences of mothers in Counselor Education doctoral programs who have children under the age of 5 years old.

I am looking to interview students who fit the following criteria:

- mother of at least one child under five years old,
- child or children are living in the mother's home at least 80% of the time,
- mother has substantial caregiving responsibilities (as determined by participant),
- mother has been in her counselor education doctoral program for at least one year continuously, and
- student was a mother prior to entering her doctoral program

If you fit the above criteria, it would be great if we could set-up a time to talk via phone so that we can go over the informed consent document (see attached) and I would be happy to answer any questions that you have about the study at that time.

Please let me know of some days/times of the week that work for you as well as the best telephone number to reach you at and we can arrange a time to talk.

Again, thank you for your interest in our study. I look forward to talking with you soon.

Best wishes,

Brooke Lundquist
lundquib@oregonstate.edu
425-327-2859-cell

APPENDIX F

National Mental Health Resources

National Alliance of Mental Health
800-950-NAMI
<http://www.nami.org/Find-Support>

National Institute of Mental Health
800-662-HELP
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/find-help/index.shtml>

Mental Health America
703-684-7722
<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net>

APPENDIX G

Email Template: Consent to Obtain Demographic Information and Member Checking

Dear Study Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me for our initial interview several months ago. I have worked on analyzing the interview data from these interviews and have attached the themes I have found as a result of the analysis process. The first document outlines the themes that were found looking specifically at the mothering experience of the research participants while the second document describes the themes that were found looking specifically at the student experience. *Please email me back to let me know if you agree with these summaries and/or if you have any feedback on any of the themes presented. Please email your response/feedback within two weeks of receipt of this electronic notification. I will send you a friendly reminder email 10 days after my initial email request.*

In addition, I would like to obtain the following demographic information for study participants:

- Age
- Martial or partnered status
- Ethnicity
- Number of children and their ages
- Year in PhD program
- Program type (part-time, full-time)
- Work status (full-time, part-time, not currently working outside the home)

By responding with this information, you are consenting to us utilizing this information as a part of our study data. Please respond back to this email with the above information.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE?

The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Research records will be stored securely. Regulatory agencies and Oregon State University employees may access or inspect records pertaining to this research as part of routine oversight or university business. Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you.

Other people may learn that you participated in this study but the information you provide will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law.

The security and confidentiality of information collected from you online cannot be guaranteed. Confidentiality will be kept to the extent permitted by the technology being used. Information collected online can be intercepted, corrupted, lost, destroyed, arrive late or incomplete, or contain viruses.

WHAT OTHER CHOICES DO I HAVE IF I DO NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers may keep information collected about you and this information may be included in study reports. You are free to skip any questions that you prefer not to answer. Your decision to take part or not take part in this study will not affect your grades, your relationship with your professors, or standing in the University.

WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Brooke Lundquist, the student researcher at lundquib@oregonstate.edu or Dr. Kok-Mun Ng at kok-mun.ng@oregonstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights or welfare as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) office, at (541) 737-8008 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best wishes,

Brooke Lundquist
lundquib@oregonstate.edu
425-327-2859-cell

APPENDIX H**Reminder Email Template: Consent to Obtain Demographic Information
and Member Checking**

Dear Study Participant,

This is just a friendly reminder to please respond (within the next three days) to the previous email containing the below request. Again, thank you for participating in this research study. Upon completion of the member checking process, I will send you your \$20 Starbucks gift card in appreciation for your willingness to participate in this study. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Best wishes,

Brooke Lundquist
lundquib@oregonstate.edu
425-327-2859-cell

Dear Study Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me for our initial interview several months ago. I have worked on analyzing the interview data from these interviews and have attached the themes I have found as a result of the analysis process. The first document outlines the themes that were found looking specifically at the mothering experience of the research participants while the second document describes the themes that were found looking specifically at the student experience. ***Please email me back to let me know if you agree with these summaries and/or if you have any feedback on any of the themes presented. Please email your response/feedback within two weeks of receipt of this electronic notification. I will send you a friendly reminder email 10 days after my initial email request.***

In addition, I would like to obtain the following demographic information for study participants:

- Age
- Martial or partnered status
- Ethnicity
- Number of children and their ages
- Year in PhD program
- Program type (part-time, full-time)
- Work status (full-time, part-time, not currently working outside the home)

By responding with this information, you are consenting to us utilizing this information as a part of our study data. Please respond back to this email with the above information.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE?

The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Research records will be stored securely. Regulatory agencies and Oregon State University employees may access or inspect records pertaining to this research as part of routine oversight or university business. Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you.

Other people may learn that you participated in this study but the information you provide will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law.

The security and confidentiality of information collected from you online cannot be guaranteed. Confidentiality will be kept to the extent permitted by the technology being used. Information collected online can be intercepted, corrupted, lost, destroyed, arrive late or incomplete, or contain viruses.

WHAT OTHER CHOICES DO I HAVE IF I DO NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers may keep information collected about you and this information may be included in study reports. You are free to skip any questions that you prefer not to answer. Your decision to take part or not take part in this study will not affect your grades, your relationship with your professors, or standing in the University.

WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Brooke Lundquist, the student researcher at lundquib@oregonstate.edu or Dr. Kok-Mun Ng at kok-mun.ng@oregonstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights or welfare as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) office, at (541) 737-8008 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best wishes,

Brooke Lundquist
lundquib@oregonstate.edu
425-327-2859-cell

Appendix B-Data Analysis Process Mothering Experience

Examples of the analysis steps taken with supporting data:

Horizontalization, and reduction/elimination steps of analysis:

Each full transcript was analyzed in Microsoft Excel, allowing the researcher to highlight content throughout each interview that was applicable to the phenomenon being explored (in red) and eliminate anything that wasn't essential (grayed-out). This was a process and the researcher went over each transcript multiple times, creating memos and identifying elements that were vital to the participant's experience.

Example 1:

<p>... takes you over and he said, you know, he said don't forsake relationships just because you want this degree. So, I think about the other moms that are in the program that kinda, you know, give those, those nuggets, you know, they're like when you're with your kids, be with your kids. When you're with your husband, be with your husband. Don't take, you know, your stats book to the aquarium. Like, be present! And so, I try to be mindful with that, try to, try to be present with all these hats that I wear, and they do, they do bleed over and, you know, outside of exhaustion, I'm just like, you know. So there are some days people are like, "What's going on?" I'm like, "I don't know!"</p>	<p>Importance of being present wherever you are at the time</p>	<p>All of the roles "blee"</p>
<p>(laughs)</p>		
<p>(laughs) You know, my kids are alive, they're fed, they're clean. My husband, I think he's eating, you know (laughs).</p>	<p>Adjustment of expectations? (see if theme comes up again)</p>	
<p>Absolutely. So it's, it's a balance.</p>	<p>Balance between roles</p>	
<p>I'm trying to...</p>		
<p>Yeah...</p>		
<p>... trying to. Yeah, and then putting some things down when I just know I just, I cannot get to it and be okay that I can't get to it.</p>	<p>Being okay with some things not getting done</p>	
<p>Mmm...</p>		
<p>Um, that I'm trying to, you know, be this superwoman, this supermom, you know, make sure that my cape stays blowing in the breeze, but, like, sometimes that cape gets really tattered, you know, and it's dirty, it's dusty, and I'm just standing there like, "Yeah, I've got it all together" like "no I don't!"</p>	<p>Trying to have it all together, yet realizing that sometimes that's unattainable</p>	

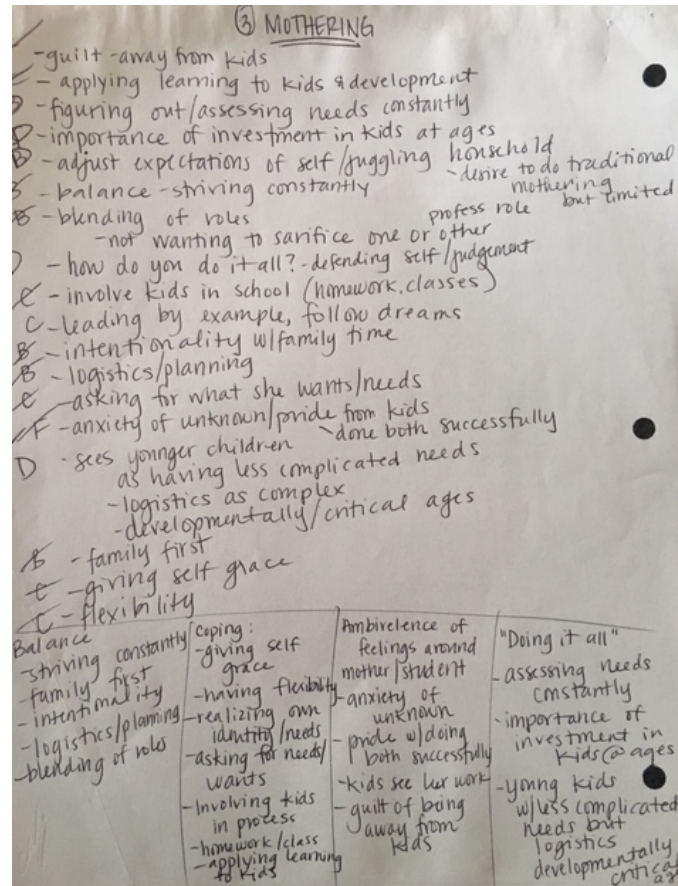
Example 2:

<p>Um, well, the, the time is definitely limited and so the balancing between being a mom, being a wife, being a PhD student and having a full-time career is tough. So I feel like when I'm super present, when I'm intentionally present, it's easier to have, um, a lot more patience because I'm, I'm present and I'm there and I'm focused. But when I've got a million things on my plate and I have to do this and I have to do that, my patience level is really, is really low, and especially with the younger one, that can be difficult because, it's like, you just don't have time for that, you know? And you want to do the, you know, the easy fix. I know one thing that's extremely lax for me in terms of mothering is structure. So before when, when I was only working, you know, and not a PhD student, it, we had routines, we, you know, take a bath, put on pajamas, brush teeth, have story time, go to bed and that was, like, the routine but now it's just, kind of like, up to the last minute. Everything is, everything is just like, ah, okay, okay, now it's time for bed, let's go. There's not a lot of structure. So I feel like that's kind of impacted my, the PhD program has impacted the level of structure I'm able to give my kids.</p>	<p>Time as limited</p>	<p>Bala</p>
<p>Okay.</p>		
<p>And it affects the younger one, I think, probably the most, I would say. Or it, it, I don't know if it really affects him, but it's more like, alright, if you fall asleep on the couch, you fall asleep on the couch, you know? Not a lot of that kind of quality one on one time that happens right before bed when you're singing songs. For me that's, I think that's been the most prevalent.</p>	<p>Affects children as less time available</p>	
<p>Mmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. So you mentioned this idea of kind of balancing...</p>		
<p>Right.</p>		
<p>... and so some of that comes into play?</p>		
<p>Yeah, having to balance it all, and even though I'm trying to balance it, it's like, okay, come home from work, five thirty, six, and then make dinner and eat dinner and you have to do homework with the other kiddo and then, you know, and then you're, um, well, you gotta talk to your spouse and then, but you still, even though you're try, at least for me, I'm trying to be intentional and present in the moment, there's still all this stuff in the back of my mind, like, okay, I have to do this paper, I need to submit that proposal and what about that...., you know, there's always those, those things that even though you're trying to be very intentional, they're always in the, in the background.</p>	<p>Balance as essential</p>	<p>Stuff in back</p>

Clustering/thematizing

After completing the above steps of analysis, the researcher went back through the transcript, reread memos and highlighted sections of the interviews to determine potential themes for each participant. A list was made of each of the important components of the transcripts that related to the phenomenon being explored. After initial notes were made, categories were developed and given labels and core themes were developed.

Example 1: Initial notes and clustering/thematizing



Individual textural and structural descriptions:

From the core themes, the researcher identified the individual textural descriptions for each theme through revisiting the transcripts and identifying the ways in which the participant explained and described each theme throughout the interview. The researcher also further engaged with the data by exploring statements through different lenses and perspectives, creating more comprehensive explanations of the experiences and leading to structural descriptions. The main components of the individual's experience were then described.

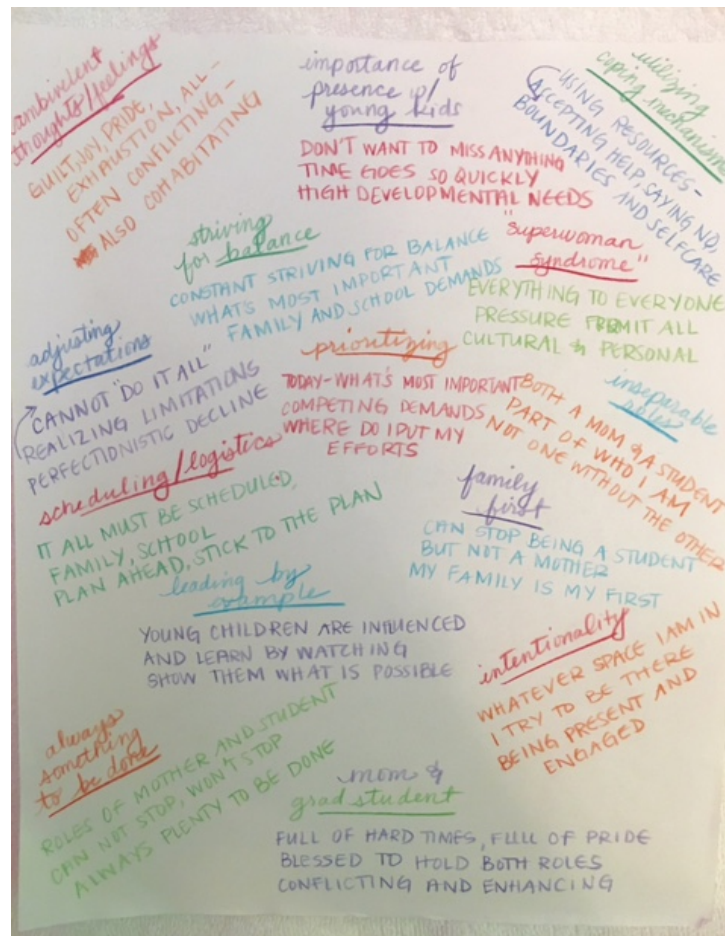
Example 1: Individual Textural-Structural Descriptions

Themes	
1. Implementation of coping mechanisms as essential to functioning in both capacities of mother and student	
a. Time management-always maximizing time	
b. Being as efficient as possible to make sure that all needs are being met	
c. Schedules and logistics as essential to meeting all needs of family and school	
d. Accepting support	
2. Importance of intentionality in both roles, but especially as a mother of young children	
a. Young child/children need nurturing and time	
b. Unexpected obstacles come with young children	
c. Importance of integration of what she is learning at school to home life/parenting	
d. Having children see hard work and further schooling as setting an example for them-important to mothering experience	
3. Balancing roles of mother and student as being complex, ever changing process	
a. Roles are often conflictual, but then also complimentary at times	
b. Roles are not independent of each other, but rather combine into identity	
c. Mothering role as coming first	
4. Ambivalent feelings and thoughts around being a doctoral student mother of young children	
a. Guilt about missing out on children's activities and events when at school or doing schoolwork	
b. Sacrifice of family commitments to be a doc student	
c. Exhaustion-always something or someone to be responsible for and demands that need to be met	
d. Pride about all that she is doing and accomplishing while raising young children	
5. Awareness and process of cultural and personal expectations of mothering young children	
a. Mothering comes first for participant, but this can be conflictual when other pressures are present	
b. Sees it as her choice to have children and do PhD	
c. Feelings of judgment or "mommy wars" over choosing to do graduate school	
d. Pressures to do all and do it well are very present	
e. Feelings of isolation and having very few people who understand/validate her current situation	

Example 2:

Themes	
1. Continual striving for balance between roles of mother of young child/children and doc student as a difficult endeavor	
a. The experience is one where there is always more work to be done in the various areas of participant's life	
b. Participant sees it as very important to set aside family time and be present when possible	
c. The roles of mother of young children and doctoral student are intertwined and often conflict with one another	
d. Balance includes an acknowledgement of priorities at the time	
1. Mothering as number one priority	
a. Mothering as always present while the other roles can be diminished or pushed aside if needed/wanted	
b. Always thinking of kids and their needs (especially at young ages) even when doing schoolwork	
2. Determining and implementing coping mechanisms to help participant be successful in multiple areas of life during this season	
a. Being planful and organized with logistics with both mothering role and student responsibilities	
b. Implementing self-care strategies	
c. Asking for and allowing help from others	
d. Putting boundaries into place so as to not take on too much more than already has on plate	
3. Experiencing ambivalence in multiple facets of mothering young children and doctoral student roles	
a. Mom guilt as very present-missing out on things with kids and realizing how stress affects how she interacts with kids	
b. Complexities of feelings: overwhelmed, anxious, challenged while also feeling that all of the work she is doing is very worthwhile	
c. Feelings of pride about all that she is doing and how she is managing	
4. Processing and adjusting expectations put on her by society and herself	
a. Societal expectations of intensive mothering are not necessarily possible, especially with doctoral work	
b. Others ask "how are you doing everything" which can be affirming yet also cause questioning for participant	
c. Realizing the needs are different for her children at different ages and therefore her interactions/responsibilities with them are different/ever changing	
1. Younger children are seen as less independent, therefore needing mother presence/assistance more	
2. Younger children also being more hands-on	
d. Importance of being a role model for children by being a doc student and working hard to balance it all	
e. She sees how being in a doc program could be seen as "selfish" for considering her own wants/dreams	

When cross-analyzing between participants after each individual analysis process, the researcher created haikus and wrote out narratives for the phenomenon being explored in order to create thorough and robust descriptions of the phenomenon.



Mothering Perspective-Narrative

Ambivalent Thoughts and Feelings

So many thoughts and feelings emerged from the participants in this study. Many of the emotions seem to exist simultaneously, yet are often conflictual. For many of the women it seemed uncomfortable to be experiencing so many contradictory emotions at one time. These often included guilt, pride, joy, feeling overwhelmed, immense love for their children, exhaustion, and even self-doubt at times.

Guilt: This seemed to be the most commonly mentioned emotion/thought that these mothers experience and this was for many reasons. To begin with, we have so many cultural, societal, and personal expectations of what mothering should look like and this seems to have an impact on many of these women who see themselves as doing a lot, but maybe not setting aside their own lives/dreams/goals for the lives of their children. Even though their mothering role comes first, I sometime sensed a theme of feeling selfish for pursuing their doctoral studies while having young children with high developmental needs of their mothers. The guilt aspect also seemed to emerge when participants spoke about missing out on things that their children were doing or needed because of school demands. Many of the moms put aside their own self-care or desires in order to be mother and doc student, prioritized in that order (as often as could be done).

Pride: This is another major thought/emotion that most if not all of the participants talked about. These mothers have a sense of pride around the work that they are doing, both mothering young children and pursuing doctoral education. Many of them talked about how they were doing a good job as a “super mom,” making sure kids were well cared for while also obtaining high grades and succeeding in other areas of life (work, school, etc). There seemed to also be a great sense of leading by example for their children and showing their kids that they can follow their dreams and pursue higher education, even as a mother of young children.

Joy: Participants mentioned having joy and being fulfilled by holding both the roles of mom of young children and counselor ed doctoral student. Some mentioned not seeing themselves as complete without either and that they would have a lack of satisfaction if they weren't pursuing their doctoral degrees, despite having that conflicting feeling that they were potentially selfish for feeling that way.

Feeling overwhelmed: Most of the participants talked about the fact that a mother with young children who is also a doctoral student doesn't have any time to waste. Everything is planned, methodical, orchestrated, and between the demands of mothering and the demands of school, there isn't much, if any, extra time. There always seems to be something that needs to be accomplished and this can lead to great feelings of being overwhelmed.

Immense love for children: Many of the participants talked about the deep, unexplainable love that they had for their children. I could feel how deeply they hurt when their children hurt, and how disappointing and sad it was for them when they missed an event or even time with their children in order to pursue their doctoral degrees. Most offered up on their own that they would always put their child first before school, but some admitted that they weren't ALWAYS able to do that as sometimes deadlines

came up and many participants mentioned that they did not want to ask for extensions on assignments/exams due to having children.

Exhaustion: Participants talked about being exhausted and from what I gathered, this is exhaustion in a couple of ways. Just generally very, very physically tired from staying up late, writing papers/reading/doing homework after small children are tucked in bed, and getting up early to fulfill the role of mom and the various needs that the young children have. I also got a feeling of emotional exhaustion-these mothers pour everything they have into being a mother and being a student, leaving little space for their own needs/desires. Always having something that needs to be done or someone who needs to be helped is often draining.

Self-doubt: Some participants discussed times that they had during their doctoral studies where they questioned why and what they were doing trying to make it all happen between home and school (and work for some). Several participants mentioned thinking about dropping out of the program or changing their pace due to the needs of their families (and even due to feeling this self-doubt and the choices they were making and how they were affecting their families).

Increasing Coping

From the above described emotions and thoughts, in addition to all of the logistics of “making it all happen,” the participants mentioned a number of coping mechanisms, without calling them such. I call them that as they seem to be actions put into place (or increased for those that they were already doing) in order for these women to be successful as moms of a young child/children and as a doctoral student. Although these coping strategies varied some from participant to participant, there were several ways in which this is done.

Asking for and receiving help: Many of the women mentioned that they have had to learn to ask for help (usually with their kids and usually from grandparents, partners, friends, or even other cohort members) in order for all of the logistics to fit into place. This seems to be a humbling experience as many stated that they had a hard time with that prior and that it has been a process of letting go and accepting help from others who are willing to support them during this season of life.

Saying no/drawing boundaries: Learning to say no, even to good opportunities, was something that many participants mentioned as a part of their strategies for success in both being a present mom of young child/children and a doc student. Drawing boundaries and realizing limitations seemed to be difficult at times, but they also seem to have become essential for many of the women interviewed.

Self-care: For some of the participants, their own personal self-care has helped them as they balance the roles of mother and doc student. This looks different for many of the participants, but seemed to be essential to the physical and emotional well-being of many of the women.

Adjusting Expectations

Many of the participants in this study talked about the need to adjust their own expectations of themselves in the mothering role as a result of adding the student role to

their lives. Several utilized the term “perfectionist,” as they all tend to be high achievers, which is why they are also able to do both the mothering and student roles. As a result of both roles and the needs/demands from each, several participants noted the change in their personal standards of themselves.

From the mothering perspective, this might mean that they don’t need to read every page of every textbook, but instead that they gather the needed content so that they are able to be present for kids and strive for that balance. This also might mean that the mothers work towards being satisfied with doing “enough” for school. Despite school being very important, most of the participants stated that their families come first, so sometimes the mothers complete schoolwork to the best of their abilities, considering all of the other various demands from having small children.

For many of these participants, it seems that this is a process, to be okay with doing “enough,” when in actuality their “enough” might still be of high quality, but they aren’t able to stew over assignments or spend the amount of time that their peers without children are able to. Realizing that they are still doing a lot in both their mothering and student roles and that it is okay to not get all A grades is something that many of the participants seem to be striving towards.

Another component of adjusting expectations seems to come from helping others in their lives to adjust their expectations of the participant. For some of the participants this meant being very clear with family and friends about how much they could actually take on, while others needed to let go of other external responsibilities and focus on their roles as mother and student. This seemed to create some internal conflict for some of the participants as many stated that people see them as “super mom,” able to do it all. And yet, these mothers do seem to be “doing it all” but it just looks a bit different now that they are also students.

Superwoman syndrome

Many participants utilize the term “superwoman” or stated that others see them as “doing it all” as they mother young children and they pursue doctoral degrees. For many of these women this seemed like a positive comment that they were proud of, while for others, it seemed to come with some pressures to continue to maintain it all. Some commented that they appreciated the acknowledgement that others saw all that they were doing to juggle and balance their new lives while others felt some sort of social pressure and potential judgment from other mothers that they were “choosing” to engage in another role separate from the mothering role.

Those that were proud of the term “superwoman” seemed to see themselves as doing a pretty good job at maintaining both the role of mother of young child/children and doctoral student. They understood the pressures, competing expectations, and were striving to maintain balance, which meant putting their families first, engaging in activities/time with their children while also being sufficient graduate students, successfully completing classes as they go along in their programs. By others or even the participants themselves seeing themselves as being superwoman, there is a level of acknowledgment of capacity, ability, and possibly even intelligence that is affirming and maybe even flattering to hear/think/feel.

For those who felt some judgment or questioning when some used the superwoman term or said “I don’t know how you do it all,” this seemed to induce some guilt and at times some defensiveness from the participants who experienced this. Already this balance of mothering a young child/children seems to feel isolating at times being that very few (if any) of the participant’s peers/cohort members are experiencing the same situations and challenges, feeling judgment from someone can be deflating and cause the mother to question if pursuing higher education and/or following her dreams is selfish and taking an unnecessary toll on her family.

Importance of presence with kids and intentionality

Most of the women mentioned how important it is that they spend time with their young child/children. This seems to be for many reasons. First off-they have a desire to be with their child/children. This is something that seems to add great joy and depth to their lives and they cannot imagine life without their little one(s). The level of joy seems to reach a level that not many other things can reach. Immense. Unending. Heart-bursting. The longing or desire seems to be greatly negatively affected when the participants are not able to spend that time with them as they desire. This is not necessarily all the time, but there is definitely a longing for significant time with their kid(s).

Secondly, many of the mothers mention their levels of awareness of developmental stages and just how important and influential the years 0-5 are in the development of a child. Many seemed to have a strong longing to positively influence that development, create a secure attachment, and secure an ongoing bond with these children. Part of the developmental stages that were discussed were the levels of need that a child of these ages have for their mother. These needs are mostly time and energy related and they meet many of the child’s basic needs during this time. That seems to be not only a responsibility but an honor that these women hold, although sometimes that can be conflictual when there are varying needs external from the family system.

Many of the participants took this idea of spending time with their children even further to say that it was vital to them that they were not only with their child physically but that they attempted to be as mentally and emotionally present as possible. Despite having many tasks, expectations, responsibilities running through their minds, these mothers felt/thought it to be important to put aside what they could during the times they were with their children. At times, this wasn’t possible and they were able to be with their children while they were working on homework, reading, etc. while other times intentionality with their time included putting that aside to fully engage with the child(ren).

There seems to be a strong effort and desire for intentionality with these participants-that they are present in whatever role they are in at the time. Again, that is challenging when there are so many competing demands, however it seems to be essential that there are at least efforts put in to be intentional, especially in the time that they are with their child(ren).

This seems to be an internal struggle with many of the participants as there is always something that needs to be done, yet the needs of young children are so high so these can often feel like they are opposing each other. From what I could gain from my

interviews, it seemed that trying to maintain a balance of these was what helped make this work for the participants.

Striving for balance

Balance was one of the most frequently used words throughout the interviews. This seemed to be something that isn't fully obtained, but rather a process of continual reassessment as to how mothering and the student role could maintain a harmony together, living in the same space, in the same home and be okay for the participant. Being okay meaning that the participant feels like the children are cared for, they get to spend sufficient intentional time with the child(ren), while still maintaining their studies and spending sufficient time dedicated to their doctoral studies.

It seemed as if this was something that looked different each term for many of the participants. It sounded like each term took a bit for the participant to get their bearings as to how they would juggle the current semester in light of family commitments and responsibilities. For many this included the calendar and when things fell throughout the term and once things were scheduled, laid-out, and logistics were in place, the feeling of balance increased. However, it was mentioned by many that oftentimes unpredictable events would come up (kids illnesses, extracurricular opportunities, lack of childcare, etc,) that would affect the balance and it would be usually up to the participant to make adjustments to accommodate.

I think of this theme as looking like a child's mobile that hangs over their crib when they are infants. When one piece is adjusted, all of the other items must be adjusted to accommodate/compensate for that imbalance. The participant's mobiles are filled with many various responsibilities, expectations (both personal and external), and desires. As these are balanced and reassessed, the mobile maintains more of a stability and security.

Both roles as inseparable

Many of the participants talked about their feelings around the individual roles of mother of young child/children and doc student. However, they were also clear in their statements about these two roles being overlapping and not able to be fully separated. Many of their feelings about their individual roles crossed over into their feelings about their identities overall. Many of them stated that they could not imagine having one role without the other, while they were all clear in stating that their roles as mothers came first as a priority. They can stop being students, but not being mothers.

For some of the participants, it seemed that this idea of inseparability is a benefit. They stated that their roles as students enhanced their mothering and visa versa, so much of their worldviews as moms added to their student experience. Some mentioned that at times they tried to implement at home what was learned in class and even that they had better context for school content due to having young children.

Prioritizing

This is another theme that seems to be a process and something that the participants are striving towards. The complexity here lies in that between the experience

as a mother of young child(ren) and the experience as a doc student, there are many requirements, many expectations, and many deadlines. For children under 5 years old, this is not always predictable, but there are some constants. Participants talked about feeding and bathing children, reading to them, taking them on outings, engaging with them in play, bedtimes, etc. not to mention the hundreds of questions they ask, the diapers or bathroom needs that are often hourly, the snuggles, the bumps and bruises, the life lessons that are taught as you go, and the list goes on, and on.

As a doc student, participants talked about assignments, books that needed to be read, group projects, meetings, class sessions, discussion board posts, comprehensive exams, internships, dissertation, etc. that were ongoing, many of these happening each semester. Oftentimes participants take several classes at a time that require the student to juggle deadlines and schedule-out their studying, allowing time for all classes.

So although the participants mentioned that their families come first, this can be conflictual when deadlines are approaching or kids needs come up during times when the women have scheduled schoolwork, which can and does happen. So the idea of prioritizing seems to be crucial to meeting the family and school needs/expectations/requirements. The way that this seemed to happen for many participants was as they go, continually doing a reassessment of what needs to happen and when and how that will all take place. It doesn't always work out and there are times where these women feel that they disappoint others or themselves, but the efforts to maintain and even strive for excellence in both areas is very apparent.

Scheduling/coordinating

Another commonly discussed theme was the idea that everything has to be scheduled in order for everything to work. The importance of planners or calendars was reiterated as a part of this theme to show the amount of planning, coordinating, and logistical oversight that the participants feel that they put into place during the experience of being a mother of young child/children while also a doctoral student.

Each of these roles on their own requires a great deal of coordination and planfulness. To describe the sheer responsibilities and logistical complexities behind the role of a mother is almost impossible. What seems to be present for these participants is a level of conscientiousness around the many needs that their children have, especially at their young ages. Needs to be fed, bathed, dressed, hugged, comforted, loved on, etc. etc. Not only do they have many physical and emotional needs that are not often able to be planned as they can come unexpectedly, but there are also logistics around sleep schedules, potty training, any preschool activities, play groups, physical activities, and so on.

The experience of being a doctoral student is one that involves a great deal of preplanning. Each semester there are different course requirements and planning out when specific projects will be worked on, reading will be done, meetings will be set, classes will meet, etc. requires a great amount of coordinating and scheduling. This doesn't take into account the more non-traditional requirements of doctoral studies, including studying for comprehensive exams (which takes place over several months), internships (which are often over many semesters or even a year or more), and dissertation work (which also spans many semesters or years).

Combining the two of these experiences requires a great deal of scheduling, coordinating, and planning out in advance. This might mean that childcare needs to be planned to accommodate for schoolwork, which adds an additional layer into the logistical side of things. Many participants talked about their requirements to switch from one role to the other quickly—the idea that their multiple “hats” fly on and off at a moment’s notice. That schoolwork usually takes place while children are sleeping or in the care of someone else. It seems that with young child/children, it is too difficult to try to get schoolwork done while they are nearby as they often have many needs of their mothers and cause distraction from the work being done. Again, most participants mentioned wanting to be present with their children when they were together, so attempting to schedule time to do schoolwork seemed vital to the success of the participants in both of their roles, which definitely combine into one identity.

Family first

As discussed above, there is a strong theme of these experiences of mothering a young child/children and being a doctoral student that are inseparable as they are both components of the identity of the participants. However, most of the participants talked about how their roles of mother come first before the role of student. They were clear to identify that their priorities are their child/children and family before anything else, including their school responsibilities.

At times this can be difficult and conflicting. Many participants mentioned that they were cautious and resistant to asking for extensions or using their children as an excuse (legitimate as the excuse might be) for late work or missing assignments or being absent for a class session. There seems to be a bit of fear around (?) or maybe more than that, a desire to be taken seriously and the importance on the part of the participants to be seen as serious and committed students, despite what is happening in their personal lives (even with those that are a greater priority than school).

So what happens when one of the participants had online class, but didn’t want to miss her child’s soccer game? She logged into class from the soccer field and participated in both simultaneously. Or the mother who is trying to juggle bedtime while her class is live online? She may have to step away or might even have a little visitor join her screen. For some it seems that was not a problem to have children and be involved in doctoral studies. For others, it seemed that they needed to keep their children and their role of mother quiet so as to not disrupt the educational experience and environment. The idea of maternal invisibility seemed to be present for some participants while others were encouraged to bring children to meetings or allow them to be present with their mothers while they were in online classes (unless there was confidential content).

It seemed that with those who were able to be transparent about their mothering experiences and engage in the classroom as their whole-selves, they had more positive things to say about combining their roles, whereas those who had to keep their mothering role quiet seemed to feel stifled and maybe even incongruent as part of who they are is not able to be expressed.

Always something that needs to be done

A strong theme throughout most of the interviews was a weight, a burden that there is always something that needs to or should be done by the participants. Whether it be something in their mothering role (childrearing, house keeping, organizing, etc.) or in the student role (reading, papers, discussion board posts, projects, studying, research, etc.). It seems as if the participants do not get much downtime where they can relax and let their minds go.

This seems to go along with intentionality with their time, as well as planning/scheduling as the norm for these participants is that they are busy---busy taking care of a young child/children, busy doing schoolwork, or busy doing a combination of the two, leaving little time for self-care or downtime. The pressure of always having something to do seems to be exhausting, as if their minds never get a break. I wonder about the toll that this takes on their bodies as well?

The needs of young children are great, as discussed previously. They always seem to need something from their mothers. This combined with the high levels of expectations and requirements for a doctoral program create very little margin in the lives of the participants. They seem to either be caring for family or focusing on school. Where is the downtime to recharge, reconnect with other relationships, and even really practice self-care? Not just the forced self-care, but the self-care where one can feel really refreshed and that this can happen on a regular basis? It seems that this isn't too possible between the experiences of being a mother of a young child/children while being a doctoral student as well. There is always more that can be done in either or both of the roles.

Mothering Experience-Study 1 Member Checking Documents

The below documents were sent to all participants for member checking:

Findings

A thorough analysis of the participants' descriptions of their experiences as mothers of children under five years of age while concurrently enrolled as Counselor Education doctoral students revealed a depth of feelings, thoughts, emotions, and tensions that exist for these women at this time in their lives. This seems to be characterized by growth and often-competing tensions in their developmental identities as students, young adults, mothers of young children, and emerging professionals in the field of counselor education. This is combined with the awareness that their children (under five years of age) are at critical ages in their development, striving for growth and developing identities in these various roles simultaneously, while trying to maintain family as their number one priority can create complex and often conflicting experiences for these women. Several commonalities were found between the experiences of the eleven participants in this study. These similarities include: (a) Experiencing multiple ambivalent thoughts and feelings about parenting young child/children while also enrolled as a doctoral student; (b) Utilizing/increasing coping mechanisms as essential to functioning in both capacities of mother of young child/children and maintaining role as doctoral student; (c) Striving for balance between roles of mother of young child/children and doctoral student; (d) "Superwoman syndrome"; (e) Inseparable and often conflictual roles, and ; (f) The influence on young child/children and the importance of leading by example.

Category #1

Ambivalence where the priority of the mothering role meets that of the strong desire to be a successful doctoral student and professional in the counselor education field

Each participant described the great depths of ambivalence that they feel in their experiences as doctoral student mothers of a young child/children. This ambivalence seems to exist due to the many pulls on the participants mixed with the various expectations and hopes that they have for themselves. The emotions that seemed to be the most impactful on the participants were the feelings of guilt, pride, and exhaustion, which all seemed to be present simultaneously much of the time. These feelings and thoughts often pull the participants in opposing directions, sometimes causing internal questioning and uncertainty in their decisions to pursue their doctoral degrees. The participants in this study discuss how their role as mother is their first priority, so the pull towards the emotions and thoughts that are in conflict with this role seem to be the heaviest and most impactful. This can cause great ambiguity for the participants.

Participants in this study discuss an awareness and understanding that their children were at critical places in their development (being that they were under 5 years of age at the time of the study). This seemed to be a significant factor in the feelings of

guilt that the participants described as they felt that they were missing significant moments in their young child/children's lives as a result of taking on their student roles.

Example of Participants' Narrative for the Category (P=participant, Number listed below=participant number in the coding system utilized by researchers)

P-2: Being overwhelmed at times, but having moments of joy and clarity. I didn't use that word last time, but clarity in the sense of, as I stated previously about the whole guilt piece and all that and sometimes feeling like maybe I'm, I'm taking away from them, I'm not spending enough time with them.

P-10: There was a lot of guilt that went on with that to begin with, um, what have I signed my family up for? (laughs) I, I can handle the personal sacrifice. That's not a problem, but I was taking this whole group of people along with me? There was definitely some guilt with that.

P-11: There's always this mom guilt, and that's a little frustrating, but I think it's even, it's even, it weighs heavier when you know that, I don't know, the PhD program sometimes feels a little, a little selfish, you know, in the now. For the future, it's not. But in the now it feels a little selfish, so that adds to the, you know, that adds to everything else.

Pride was a strong feeling involved in the ambivalence experienced by the participants in this study. There seemed to be this great level of pride around all that the participants were able to juggle between home, school, and sometimes work life. In addition, the pursuit of a doctoral degree seemed to be a great source of pride for the participants. It seemed to be a common experience for these participants to feel pride, as they were able to spend time outside of the home, following their dreams, and "having it all."

P-4: Pride, for sure. Um, being able to balance it. Um, a little bit of insecurity

P-6: I feel incredibly, very rewarding to overcome the obstacles and I feel like it will be more rewarding again, than if I had waited until they were *** feeling very proud with each semester that I complete with the obstacles like sick babies and sleepless babies and teething babies and potty training babies. I'm feeling very, um, a lot of success

P-7: I feel really proud. I feel really proud of myself and what I'm able to accomplish and the fact that, like, I'm a great mom. I really am a great mom. I'm a great employee and I'm a great doc student

P-11: definitely being proud. And I'm a first-born, so, like, I'm always wanting to, like, make my parents proud and happy, you know, looking for that validation, and so I think everything I do is, you know, it's a lot like, I want that validation, I

want that, but also I have to, you know, it's like giving, I have to, I'm doing this for me, too, so I'm giving that validation to myself by achieving my goals.

Another common feeling that seemed to exist for the participants in this study is the feeling of exhaustion, which seemed to be both physically and emotionally tiring, which is backed by the sheer amount of pressure and expectations that the participants described during their interviews. Between competing expectations, deadlines, young children to care for (who often have ongoing needs from their mothers), etc., participants described juggling a lot while mothering young child/children and fulfilling their doctoral student obligations.

P-1: you know, outside of exhaustion, I'm just like, you know. So there are some days people are like, "What's going on?" I'm like, "I don't know!"

P-4: so fatigue and being tired, um, which is understandable because, you know, she was, she was still very young in my first semester. And then I miss, I also miss putting her to bed at night if I had a late class. That was something that I noticeably missed.

P-5: just being tired, 'cause little ones are demanding.

P-8: is tired a feeling? 'Cause I'm tired! Um, um, you know, um, feelings, um, I mean, I feel challenged, but I feel accomplished. I feel overwhelmed. Um, I feel like a juggler, like I can do, I can multitask, like, way better than anyone else I know, um, 'cause I have to! Um, there's a lot of good feelings and then there's some bad feelings. Not bad feelings but, like, this isn't, I'm not normal compared to my other friends, so *** a little bit. Um, feeling, what other feelings? Um, you know, the one thing that comes to mind is that I'm tired. I'm tired as heck. Um, but, um, I don't know, motivated, I guess. Ambitious! (laughs) Ambitious, yeah.

These emotions and feelings often all live simultaneously and oftentimes they are unpredictable. The participants in this study shared their vulnerable feelings about the difficulties of the complexities of being doctoral student mothers of children under five years of age, and yet they also spoke of the beauty and the depth it added to their lives.

P-7: I always tell people that, um, our children really, um, really keep us human. Like, I experience every range of emotional and feeling and behavior related to my children and it's, um, it's deeply humbling and empowering to reflect on, on the person that I think they've helped me to become.

P-9: be happy, be happy, very happy to, uh, spend time with here and there, so I feel I can, um, success, I can, um, put myself in a value, like I, I, like, I'm a good mom and same time, I'm a good student so this make me so happy. Yes.

P-11: So I think, um, there's a lot of affirmation, there's a lot of validation, um, a lot of recognition that, that kind of keeps it going, too, you know, and those are

the feelings. They're all good feelings, um, most of the time, because, while it is tough and it is difficult, I love it. It's so worthwhile.

Category #2

Increasing and Accepting Give AND Take: Negotiating Expectations While Increasing Coping Mechanisms

An integral part of the mothering experience for the participants in this study included their ability to increase and implement specific coping mechanisms in their roles as both a mother and a student. The experience of implementing these coping mechanisms was not always a natural experience or one that was comfortable for the participants, but rather participants describe this as a necessary implementation in order for all of the parts to fit and work together. These coping mechanisms included asking for and/or accepting help from others, setting boundaries, saying “no”, implementing self-care, and/or utilizing resources available to the participants. By increasing or implementing some of these coping mechanisms, participants experienced that they were better able to manage being a mother of a young child/children while being a doctoral student.

P-2: I've had a support system but I've had to 1. expand my support system in the doc program, so you don't burn people out, and, um, 2. use it.

P-3: I became very direct, um, with what I wanted, and, and that came with confidence, that came with, um, going through this program and reflecting on myself and who I was, um, working through stuff and, and finding myself, finding my center and being able to communicate my wants, um, in a non, like, def, aggressive way.

P-4: I really did rely on my cohort, um, for help with those in-between childcare things, especially in the beginning, um, just asking for, for free help, an hour here and there.

P-5: one thing was asking for help. Um, I've never really been one to ask for help. I've always just kind of been like, well, it was my choice to go to school, it was my choice to have kids, and it was my choice to do it all at the same time, so i shouldn't put it on anyone else. So, um, accepting help when it was offered to me and asking for help were really big.

P-8: I don't want my kids to be overbooked, also. Balancing is balancing down time

P-10: And so, just having to learn to let other people help, um, which is not my nature, you know.

P-11: I'm able to put school aside in special moments. And just even, like, going on these little vacations, like, here and there, you know, I'm, I'm able to say, I'm

able, I'm able to place a boundary on that, and I think, again, that's good role modeling for my kids

Category #3

The Teeter-Totter of Mothering-Student Roles

Due to the often-conflictual pulls between the roles of mother of young child/children and doctoral student, there is a constant striving for balance in the lives of the participants in this study. Each participant discussed their desires to have their families and children as their first priority, so the balance that they experience is one of figuring out how to make their family first while fitting in the other responsibilities and expectations around their most important role of mother. This can be difficult when school deadlines are approaching or they need to attend classes or conferences that conflict with family schedules or young children who want/need their mom. The data from this study showed that the participants utilized scheduling and calendars, being intentional with their time, and prioritizing to strive towards balance, although many mentioned that the balance wasn't something they ever thought that they could fully obtain. It was seen as an ongoing process and something that was always evolving.

P-1: You know, taking their little schedules into consideration, my husband's schedule into consideration, and then, like, our family schedule...into consideration and learning not to be, um, selfish. Um, because then it, you know, it breeds resentment. Because, you know, like, you're the mom, you set the tone. So if you're doing it, everybody's doing it.

I had to learn to be okay with that, 'cause before it was, "Yeah, let me look at my calendar. If I shift this around, if I..." and then we were going crazy, and then you'd be mad at your kids 'cause they don't move as fast

P-2: Even though everything is a priority and I think that's one of my challenges is realizing that maybe everything is not a priority.

P-3: that this age is extremely critical and so I'm constantly doing a self-check, um, or backpedaling on what I've done or said, um, so because I know and I recognize that this age is, is, is, well, being a student has taught me, well, and this program has taught me how critical it is for them right now, um, so it goes back to, um, for me, being intentional about what I do with my kids, even so, to the point where I have apologized for something that I've said to them or, um, yeah. It's made me, being a student has made me constantly watch myself as a mom especial, because, especially because of their age, 'cause they're so young and I know that

P-4: So, it's something that I have to balance. I know that I need both, um, and I crave both, um, and I wouldn't be as good of a mother if I weren't working, but still that is the first thing that I want to do is the mothering.

Um, so I have a completely different routine as a mother of a young child who gets up in the, early in the morning and who doesn't understand play by yourself, get yourself a bowl of cereal and watch tv. So maybe a parent who, um, has a child over the age of five can let that child be more independent and have a little bit more flexibility with sleep. Um, for me, I have to sleep between ten and five, 'cause that's when she sleeps.

P-5: definitely with young kids, they're, um, more needy obviously, so I think the need to be present,

P-6: a lot of times I'm doing it by myself and trying to balance and I really do have to separate the little girls from it. My only time that a lot of my best work happens is from nine o'clock at night on.

Category #4

Superwoman Syndrome

Superwoman syndrome is “the expectation that a woman must perform well in all of her roles” (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992, p. 716). This is a strong experience described by the participants in this research study. Many of the participants used these exact terms, while others explained the expectations that they feel in other words, but alluding to the superwoman syndrome (see below quotes). These expectations are not only those that these women feel from society, but also expectations that these women put on themselves. The responsibilities and obligations that the participants experience are numerous and heavy.

P-1: I'm trying to, you know, be this superwoman, this supermom, you know, make sure that my cape stays blowing in the breeze, but, like, sometimes that cape gets really tattered, you know, and it's dirty, it's dusty, and I'm just standing there like, “Yeah, I've got it all together” like “no I don't!”

P-2: Yes, what it looks like, um, and just understanding that I don't have to do it all. The understanding of not having to do it all. Um, but at the same time, still wanting to do it all.

P-3: sometimes I, I, I know that there have been moments where I feel like I've had to defend myself to other mothers. (laughs) You know, because, uh, they're like, “I don't know how you do it!” So on the one hand, I take that as a compliment. On the other, I'm speculating that they're thinking, “Whoa! When the hell are you with your kids?”

P-5: so there were times when, um, I felt like I was spreading myself very thin, where maybe I wasn't, you know, the best mom I could be or wasn't the best student I could be, um, but for me, what I found is because I'm such a perfectionist, I was like, I started something, I'm not gonna quit, and so essentially what ended up, you know, happening was I, you know, I've gotten to the point

where I've finished now, I mean I just have my dissertation left, um, and I'm still a mom, um, but along the way, my hobbies or my interests or my needs kind of fell to the wayside. So, I was a working mom and a student and that's pretty much all I had time for in my life

P-6: there are a lot of, the mommy wars and pop culture references are very real. They're these variables that we're judged by as women and mothers. You know, "Oh, I would never leave my small children. You don't have to leave right now. Why would you want to?". And I, that, that's the social piece that I get from friends and people that are around

P-8: , this intensive mothering, I mean, you're a everything and doing everything and you're involved in everything, and, you know, there's that societal expectation, but I don't, I don't know how real it is. I think I'm pretty involved. My kids think I'm involved. I wanna be there because I want to be there, not because the Jones' are doing these things.

P-11: especially with family members or just even my friends who are not in the PhD program, they're like, "Wait, you're doing this, this, this and that? Like how are you, how are you doing everything?" you get that response and it's like, on one hand it's like, gee, I don't know, but on the other hand it feels kind of good, it feels very empowering to have people recognize that, holy cow, you're doing a lot! And so that, sometimes it makes you want to do a lot more. You're like, yes, I can do it! You, like, get this Superwoman effect. But then, again, it's all just keeping, keeping everything in check and managing expectations.

Category #5

Indistinguishable Roles Create Identity

The experience of being a mother of young children while also being a doctoral student is not one of separate identities. The mothers interviewed for this study discussed the lack of separation between their roles and the inability to have those roles be distinctly different. Rather, based on the analysis of the data, the roles of mother and student are intertwined, combined, and unable to be completely separated. The ability to switch from one role to the other is seen as necessary and much of who the woman is as a student is due to their role as mother and visa versa according to the analysis of the data from these participants. Participants describe these roles as often in conflict with each other when there are competing responsibilities or deadlines or unpredictable things arise. They also explain the pressure and push-pull from multiple roles as immense and overwhelming at times. But participants also describe how multiple roles can also be complimentary, offering the woman a greater appreciation for her responsibilities and adding a level of depth to the roles she experiences.

P-4: People ask me all the time, "How do you do what you do?" I, I don't engross myself in any one identity, I think.

P-5: Um, I feel like, you know, before where, on a Saturday afternoon, I might snuggle up on the couch with them and watch a movie with them, actually watch it, now I'm snuggling up on the couch with them while they watch a movie and I'm behind my computer. Um, so still trying to do the mom things, but, um, but definitely also be a student. So my kids have learned, you know, they've seen me at soccer practice with one earbud in and my phone and they're like "Are you in class at soccer practice?" and I'm like, "I'm in class right now." *** me walking around with my earbud in, giving them a bath and participating in class. Um, just definitely like, yeah, two people at one time essentially is what it is.

So there really is like a mind shift that has to happen and sometimes it has to happen within five minutes or two minutes. Like it's, there's not like let's cleanse my brain and get it to, like, grad brain, you know? Like, it literally has, like, a light switch at times.

P-6: At times they (the roles) are in conflict with one another and at times I figure out ways to make them compliment each other

P-7: They're each, these identities are constantly feeding each other, um, enhancing the other, shaping, um, changing, challenging,

P-10: And so, to me, being a mother, like I said, it, in that academic world, those are pieces of my identity, um, but neither of them I feel like is the totality of who I am. It all fits.

I feel like I never really, truly get recharged, because even, like, when I was off on break, which is wonderful, you know, I'm still on break, I'm not sleeping in, you know? I, I'm just, I'm trying to keep everything, all the balls in the air, getting up at 6am when my five year old is like, "Hi! Good morning!"

P-11: I'm being a good role model for positive self-care and trying to balance everything. I'm not completely one hundred percent a student or completely one hundred percent a mom or wife. I'm everything, you know, jumbled into one and so I try to do a good job of, (child talking in the background) of balancing that out.

Category #6

Leading by Example

A significant experience of the mothers in this study is the awareness and importance of leading by example for their children. Not only does this include a hyperawareness of how their studies and schooling is affecting their children, but it also includes a keen sense of being a role model for hard work, dedication, following one's dreams, while still holding family as the central priority. Participants described a desire for their children to be proud of them as they obtain their doctoral degrees while also acknowledging the levels of sacrifice and team effort that the family has made as a result

of this significant academic pursuit. Participants discussed including their children in their studies (if age appropriate) by doing schoolwork together or taking them to meetings or classes when they could.

P-2: which even the three year old participates in and, I mean, he may be putting together a puzzle or coloring a coloring book, but for him, you know, it's just structured time, um, it promotes how I feel about education, you know, um, it shows them how i feel about it, but it also allows opportunities for us to spend time together, too, when you think about it, 'cause we're all together.

P-3: I have my kids sometimes help me with what assignments they can, um, I don't know, um, uh, I've brought them to class before.

P-5: so they ask me a lot of times, you know, are you, are, are we gonna call you, like, doctor? And I'm like, no, no, no, you're gonna call me mom. I'm still your mom. So they're very aware, my, um, my daughter said to me, "Wow. My mom's gonna be a doctor!" and like, so they're very aware of, like, what that holds, what that means. Um, yeah, just kind of thinking about, like, what that means and, you know, how I still am their mom and being present and juggling it all.

P-7: I remember that I'd had a conversation with her, like, maybe a month prior to that where I was talking about, like, working really hard in school, like what I was doing and I was working really hard in school, um, and she sees that and she notices that and it was just, it was a powerful moment for me 'cause I was like, she does notice that

P-8: I hope that they're proud of it because they made sacrifices

P-11: You know, and so, just also, so being a good role model I think for me encompasses pretty much everything I do as a mom and I'm, I'm a good role model for what it means to be a good husband and wife in a relationship, what it means to love your spouse, what it means to love your kids, your friends, what it means to, um, be satisfied in your career, what it means to be in conflict, what it means to talk about your feelings when you're frustrated instead of just yelling, so all of those things for me go into being a role model, which has definitely been highlighted since being a PhD student.

Appendix C-Data Analysis Process Student Experience

Examples of the analysis steps taken with supporting data:

Horizontalization, and reduction/elimination steps of analysis:

Individual interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Excel where the researcher was able to identify content that was applicable to the student experience being explored (in red below) while also excluding anything that wasn't applicable to the phenomenon (grayed-out below). This process was repeated a few times in order to identify essential components, memo about what was being identified, and deciphering what were essential components to the phenomenon being explored.

Example 1:

Participant 83	I think, I think it, yeah, the time management and just being more intentional, I um, that there is no time to, I can't waste time. Um, if that, if I take advantage of those, um, small moments, so yeah, when they're down sleeping, no, I'm probably not going to be able to read a chapter, but I can search for the articles that I'm gonna need to do whatever I'm gonna do later on. So I'll search, search, you know, put it in my google drive, and so at that, at that late at night when I do have that four hour chunk, then I can go through it. So learning to just kinda integrate my day between work and school and mommyhood and wife and all that, kinda just, just know that, okay in these small pockets, I can do such and such because there'll be moments where I could be waiting for my daughter to do something and crazy trying to be present but I'm sitting there while she's in the bathroom and I'll flip google drive and, you know, if I can just write a paragraph and get it in and highlight and then, hey, I wrote a little something today and on to the next.	Time management	Inten
Researcher 84	Mm-hmm. So organization and just kind of being mind, always being mindful of what needs to get done?		
Participant 84	Yeah, and recognizing that it's not going to look like anybody else's, or look like what it did before this. You know, that whatever my study habit was or my, my prep time was, like, it doesn't, it doesn't apply in the same way. That in order for me to be successful as a student, it really means that I'm going to have to pay attention to the pockets of time and access that I have that are available to me so that I can maximize those.	Adjusting expectations	ns from g
Researcher 85	Mm-hmm		
Participant 85	Um, that when I do, that I can't just wait for the end of the day to come, and then feel overwhelmed, I feel like I've done, I've laid the groundwork so that I can really maximize those four hours.	Overwhelmed	h the day
Researcher 86	Mm-hmm.		
Participant 86	So, yeah, because, you know, in the, on top of that, you know, um, because we have a group meet. you know. your phone's firing off all the time so it's just like. oh crap. what did I miss. did I		

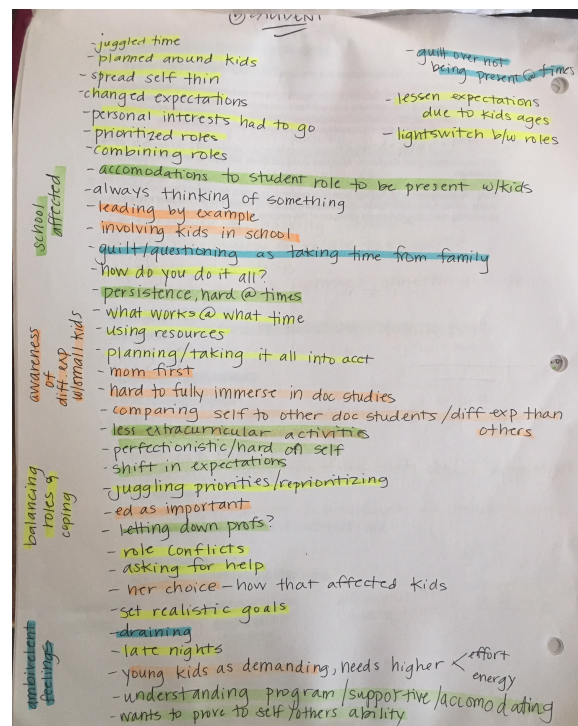
Example 2:

Participant37	Um, I think it's, um, trying to think of how to answer that question. Um, I think for me, education is very important, so it kind of *** that, although I'm a mom, I can still further my education, so, um, looking at myself as a student, um, just the importance that education holds for me. Um, really seeing this is furthering my career and, um, but also, like, you know, not stopping life for my education, if that makes sense. Like, life still happens. You still have, um, other duties, um, but that's definitely a struggle at times because the programs require a lot of you and they have high expectations for you and so there were definitely times when I was like, huh, am I letting down my professors? Am I, you know, not achieving what they would want me to achieve? Um, I don't really think that answered your question but um	Education as very important	At times wondering if she was letting dow
Researcher38	No, it did, and I, I'm wondering did you find yourself at times, it sounds like maybe it, um, conflicting in terms of priorities or expectations?		
Participant38	Yes, definite role confliction, um, at *** that I just, like, would, I would think to myself, like, I wonder how this program would be different for me if I was not a mom, so not regretting that I was a mom, but definitely acknowledging and validating that this is a completely different experience as a mom with young children than it, you know, just as a professional with older children or a professional with no children or, um, whereas I also have the financial constraints to think about, like, you know, I'm taking out student loans and then, you know, in a couple more, well, like ten years, I'm gonna be thinking about how to pay for my daughter's college, and so just, like, the financial sacrifice that it is, too. Um, so yeah, definitely it all kind of, yeah. There were some role conflicts, definitely.	Role confliction	Completely different student experience a:

Clustering/thematizing

The researcher's next step in the data analysis process, after completing those listed above, was to go back through each transcript and evaluate the memos and highlighted sections to create themes that represented what was said by the participant. The researcher then created a list of applicable memos that were representative of the student experience. After this list was created, the researcher created categories, applied labels to these categories, and created core themes of the experience.

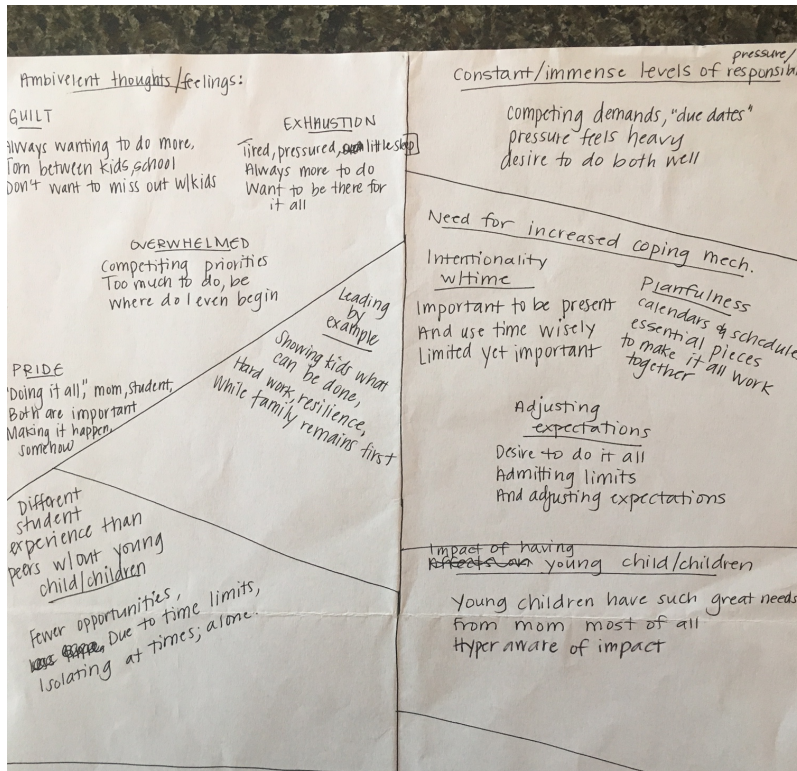
Example 1: Initial notes and clustering/thematizing



Individual textural and structural descriptions:

The researcher took the identified core themes and created individual textural descriptions for each theme by reviewing the transcripts and identifying the components of each theme that were representative of the participant's experience and creating descriptions for those themes, often utilizing the exact words that the participant used in their explanations of the experience. Further, the researcher engaged with the themes and content of the interviews from various perspectives and identified fuller descriptions of these themes (structural descriptions). The researcher then identified the textural-structural descriptions of each theme by assimilating the textural and structural descriptions into a more comprehensive description for each theme.

The researcher also created haikus and wrote narratives about the different themes that were emerging and were common between participants in order to add depth and richness to the descriptions of the themes found.



Student Perspective-Narrative

Ambivalent Thoughts/Feelings

There seem to be a variety of emotions for the participants around being a doctoral student while having a young child/young children at home. Although there are many emotions that seem to exist for these women, most of the emotions seem to be present for all of them. It is clear that these emotions are sometimes at odds with each other, while others are complimentary. Most of these emotions/thoughts were mentioned multiple times and with a great depth to them, showing me just how deep and sometimes heavy these exist for these women. The dichotomy that is experienced by these emotions is large---some emotions seem to be incredibly painful, strong, difficult (the immense guilt, pressures, feelings of being overwhelmed) while others seem beautiful, encouraging, and life-giving (the strong pride, sense of accomplishment, and even the enhancement of life that the student role seems to give to the individual). This dichotomy must be difficult to hold at times, especially when the thoughts/feelings compete or are present at the same time.

Guilt: The guilt that seems to exist for the women in this study is on both the student experience and the mothering experience. From the student experience, some of the participants discussed feeling guilty over not being able to be more invested in their education due to the lack of time and competing priorities (most clearly stating that their families were their priorities). In addition, there is a desire for many of the women to participate in more of the extracurricular activities associated with their doctoral programs (more research opportunities, more conferences, more cohort activities, etc.). From the student perspective, these women also feel guilt over what they are missing at home while they are either in class or doing work for classes. There seems to be a big desire to “do it all” but with the recognition that by being both a mom and a student, there are sacrifices, that often end in guilt in one way or another.

Pride: There is a clear level of pride that exists for many (if not all) of the participants in this study. The pride exists around multiple areas and seems to be a result of all of their accomplishments in their roles of mother and student. It seems that in order to do both roles, the women need to be well-organized and have high capacity in order to meet the expectations and requirements of being both a mom and a student simultaneously. The amount of work, energy, and effort that goes into maintaining and succeeding at being both a “good” mother and a “good” student seems like it is definitely something to be proud of.

Exhaustion/Overwhelmed: Along with both the guilt and pride seems to come the feelings of exhaustion and being overwhelmed. Although I tend to think of exhaustion as being a physical reaction, with these participants it seems to be physical and emotional. The late nights (many participants seem to do their schoolwork after their young children are in bed so as to not take away time with them and to meet their high needs), long days, and what seems to be a consistent pulling in multiple directions, there is a physical toll that these women experience. The emotional exhaustion seems to be present due to the consistent pressures. Although seeming to be such a gift and blessing, the role of being a mother can be draining, especially with young child/children who have high levels of need of their mothers at such young ages. In addition, the requirements and

expectations of doctoral students are very high. For these women, there seems to be a feeling of always having something that needs to be done or tended to, which can lead to feeling overwhelmed in all areas. This can be draining and create a feeling of little margin in one's life.

Fulfillment: A feeling that also exists simultaneously with the above mentioned emotions seem to be one of great fulfillment, fulfillment in the multiple roles that these women are experiencing. For many, their journeys to become mothers were hard work and for all it seems that their roles as mothers comes first and is their priority above all else. This role seems to bring great joy and purpose to their lives. Many mentioned that the addition of doctoral student in counselor education helped them to feel fulfilled as they could see both roles as being part of their identity, inseparable from the other. Both roles together help create who they are and how they feel fulfilled in their lives. Despite the challenges, conflicts, and great amounts of output that these women face, it seems that the women in this study see their combination of experiences/roles as combining together to create the feelings of contentment, success, and satisfaction.

Constant /immense levels of pressure/responsibility

This somewhat relates to the feeling of being overwhelmed as discussed previously, but is also more than being overwhelmed. It is apparent that those who work to get into PhD programs are usually very capable, high functioning people who can handle stress, meeting expectations, and remain organized. The participants in this study seem to value those qualities and yet find them difficult to maintain when also juggling life as a mother of a young child/children. Although definitely having their benefits, there also seems to be a theme of pressure, heavy pressure on these women. Pressure to meet and exceed standards set by both society and themselves.

What about when they are unable to meet the expectations? I'm not sure that I heard any of the women discuss not meeting the standards or exceeding expectations. This just doesn't seem to be much of an option to these high functioning (some self-proclaimed "perfectionists"). So what does that pressure feel like? It seems to feel heavy, like there is no option, no choice but to "make it all happen." So what gives? It seems that what gives is the student herself. This seems to come in a lack of sleep, little margin in life, little or no downtime, and putting (all) others in front of her. This might be the mom life overall, but I would wonder if it is even more extreme when the mother is also facing a doctoral program.

The weight of there always being something that needs to/could be done seems to be heavy for these participants. When the child(ren) are finally put to bed at night, and the day is coming to a close, after busy schedules and multiple demands during the day, for these women there is a "second shift" of student work. When others are settling in for the night and maybe taking time to relax for the evening, these women are usually working away on schoolwork, studying, writing papers, researching, etc. This has to take a toll at some point.

Increasing Coping Mechanisms to Include the Student Role

For these participants, it seems that their lives were already busy/full prior to starting their PhD programs, so how are they able to make it work with this significant addition to their lives and the lives of their families? According to the participants, they have had to increase their coping mechanisms through planning/scheduling (everything!), being increasingly intentional with their time, and adjusting expectations (their own and those that society might put on them).

Through a combination of these strategies, these women seem to be striving for a balance between their roles of mother and student to make it all work.

Planning/scheduling: The participants in this study each mentioned multiple times the importance of scheduling in their lives. It seems that through utilization of a calendar, advanced planning, and coordinating family schedules and school due dates and activities, these women are better able to balance the demands of their multiple roles. By increasing their levels of organization and developing a system (which seems to be different yet similar for each participant), they are able to fulfill the roles that they are experiencing while managing their time in a way that works best for all involved.

Intentionality with time: Another strong theme that came out of the data was the importance of being intentional with the time that the participants have. This is combined with the importance of planning as these women often go from one role to the next in seconds. By being intentional with their time, these women are better able to invest in whatever role they are in and give it their all during that time, although many mention that they are always thinking about their other roles while attempting to be intentional with their time. The idea of maximizing their time was also common. Being that time is so limited between the multiple roles and requirements that they face, it is important to use the time that they do have to its full potential. There is such little time to waste and all time as of highest importance.

Adjustment of expectations: The participants seem to have high expectations for themselves as students (and as mothers). Many of them were not mothers in their previous studies or degree endeavors, so there has had to be an adjustment of expectations in how much they can dedicate to or the standards they hold for themselves in their academics. For many this means that they are adjusting to the idea of just getting things done well enough, but lessening their perfectionistic tendencies so that everything can fit in their lives. This seems to be a process and a journey, but something that many are aiming towards. There is also a culture in doctoral programs of high levels of output and very high levels of quality work. Many of the participants discussed needing to be okay with doing good work, but putting their children as a priority and not taking unnecessary time or efforts to be perfect in their schoolwork.

Leading by example:

What seems to be a common theme for the participants in this study is the importance of leading by example for their child/children. This is a significant part of both the student and mothering experiences of these women. Despite the many competing priorities, unending tasks that need to be completed, and immense amounts of stress that these women can feel/face, there seems to be a great level of pride and accomplishment when the participants discuss the example that they are setting for their children. The idea

that they can show their child/children what is possible and that they too can follow their dreams and make multiple goals happen simultaneously through hard work and dedication, while still having their families be their priority.

The idea of leading by example is not only just the child/children knowing what their mother is doing, but also by sometimes including the child/children in the school process. This might mean that the mother and child do homework together or simultaneously or that the child gets to be present during class sessions, group project appointments, or attend celebratory school events. For many of the women in this study, it seemed that there was intentionality around including children in schoolwork.

Another component of this theme was how many women in this study discussed how they implement what they are learning in class in their own homes and with their children. They see the coursework as not only benefitting them in their future Counselor Education professions, but also as benefitting their families and children as they find ways to parent or interact in new, different, or more healthy ways. This is another component of leading by example, showing their children how they are implementing what they are learning and that they are continuously bettering themselves.

Acknowledgement of different experience than peers:

The participants in this study discussed how their experiences as doctoral students have been different than their peers due to their roles as mothers of young child/children. This was explained in multiple different ways. Several participants mentioned that their peers might have more time to perfect assignments or put more efforts into studying, research, etc. but that with young children, it is often difficult just to complete assignments on time much less perfect them. Young children have constant needs from their mothers, which often means that other things get pushed off or just completed to the best of their ability at the time.

Some participants mentioned that they just do not have time to stew over assignments or coursework, but rather they just need to get it done, make it happen. For many, they see this as a forced balance in their lives. They don't have time to perfect all of their schoolwork because they have other more pressing priorities in their young child/children. Others mentioned feeling jealous/envious of their peers who do not have young children. This comes out of a desire to do more, to put more efforts into school, to be more available for GA positions or research assistantships. This is not the reality for many of the women in this study as their children have significant needs that the women need to or want to meet.

There also seems to be this heightened level of organization that exists for these women. As discussed before, the level of scheduling, coordinating, and prioritizing is so high for them in multiple areas of their lives. This seems to be a great asset to have for their schoolwork as they "get it done" and are able to really hone in on what needs to happen and when. Maximization of time is essential for these women and this seems to be something that might be different for their peers.

Many participants mentioned that this experience of being a mother of young child/children while concurrently enrolled as a doctoral student can be quite isolating. Not many of the participants had cohort members or peers who were in the same stage of childrearing. This can cause the women to feel that others do not understand the

complexities that they face on a daily basis. In addition, it can cause the women to downplay their roles as mothers (“maternal invisibility”) as many mentioned not wanting to use their children as an excuse, despite many times this being a legitimate reason. To have to stifle such an important part of one’s life can seem incongruent, disregulating, and even a bit painful, potentially causing increased stress, guilt, and questioning about their current endeavors.

In addition, very few people outside of their programs understand the complexities of doctoral studies. Friends and family, although many supportive aren’t able to fully grasp the pressures, competing emotions, and multiple demands that these women face. Therefore many feel isolated outside of their programs as well. In addition, some participants mentioned feeling judged by other moms due to their decisions to pursue doctoral education while concurrently have young child/children at home.

In terms of participants feeling supported by their professors and programs, this was greatly mixed. Several participants felt understood, validated, and supported by faculty. These faculty encouraged some participants to be present with their children, involving them in their studies. Other participants felt unsupported and some even felt judged for doing the work they were doing. These participants didn’t feel comfortable talking about their children, engaging their kids in their programs outside of the home, and often felt that they needed to stifle that part of their identities.

Many participants talked about the complexities of participating in extracurricular academic activities (research, conferences, graduate assistanting, etc.) due to having young child/children. The sheer amount of coordinating and complexities that come with leaving a child/children for a number of days to attend a conference are extensive and many of the women didn’t have the financial or personnel support to make that happen. Others didn’t feel that GA or research opportunities were an option due to scheduling, having to put children in childcare, and taking more time away from home life. Some felt that this put them as a disadvantage while others did engage in some extracurricular activities.

Impact of having young child/children:

Amongst all of the participants in this study there seems to be a high awareness of the importance of the mother’s presence in the life of young child/children. Many of them mentioned how critical the first several years of life were in a child’s life and how impactful the mother’s role is. This level of awareness and sensitivity to the developmental needs of the child has implications for the student role that these women have as they are constantly thinking about how their work, time away, and other requirements affect their child/children.

In addition to this awareness is the acknowledgement that having young child/children affects their student experience. As discussed above, these women are pulled in multiple directions, with the mothering role as their first priority, this often creates internal conflict as the participant tries to juggle these priorities and make all of the components fit in their lives. Some participants talked about how they have to take school with them to soccer games, family movie nights, etc. Others talked about how they burned the candle into the late nights because that is when everyone else was taken care of so it finally gave them time to focus on schoolwork.

There also seems to be a great desire amongst these participants to be involved with their children. It isn't just a need on the part of the children, but a longing on the part of the mother, a strong pull to be with their children because they enjoy it, it enhances who they are, in addition to it being a necessity for their children. This pull can create stress for these women as they can feel guilty for that time that they do spend away at school or studying.

Many participants acknowledged their choice in this process, taking responsibility for taking on doctoral studies while mothering young child/children. Some participants talked about seeing their roles as mothers of young child/children as actually easier during their studies than those that had older children. For one, younger children typically go to bed earlier, allowing for more time in the evening to be productive with school requirements. Another participant mentioned the levels of complexity.

Student Experience-Study 2

Member Checking Documents

The below documents were sent to all participants for member checking:

Findings

The data analysis completed for this research study revealed a number of common experiences for the Counselor Education doctoral student mothers with children less than five years of age. Although many discussed how their roles of student and mother overlapped and were inseparable, there were distinct themes that emerged from the data. These themes spoke strongly to the student experiences of the participants, which were very complex due to their multiple roles as doctoral student and mother of young child/child. Participants describe the student experience as difficult, challenging, and sometimes isolating, while also acknowledging the added value and depth that they feel due to their various roles, so while these responsibilities often conflict, they also seem to enrich their student experience. The eleven participants in this study had several common experiences in their student roles, including: (a) experiencing ambivalence about being a doctoral student while mothering a young child/children; (b) experiencing constant pressures due to responsibilities that can be conflicting, complimentary, or both; (c) Responding by increasing coping mechanisms to accommodate the doctoral student role; (d) Believing in the importance of leading by example; (e) Acknowledging and accepting that they have a different experience than their doctoral student peers.

Category #1

Experiencing Ambivalence About Being a Doctoral Student While Mothering a Young Child/Children

Numerous thoughts and feelings were described by the participants, although there were many that the interviewees had in common. Not only were there many commonalities, but there was also the acknowledgement that these thoughts and emotions often existed simultaneously and that they were not always complimentary, but often conflicting. Most of these emotions/thoughts were mentioned multiple times and with a great depth to them, showing just how deep and heavily these exist for the participants. Participants describe the dichotomy that is experienced by these emotions as large as some emotions are explained as incredibly painful, strong, and difficult (guilt, exhaustion, feelings of being drained) while others are described as beautiful, encouraging, and life giving (the strong sense of pride, feelings of fulfillment). This dichotomy seems to be difficult to hold at times, especially when the thoughts/feelings compete or are present at the same time for the participants. The common thoughts and feelings between the participants included exhaustion/feeling drained, pride, guilt, and fulfillment.

Simultaneous and often conflicting thoughts and feelings:

P-2: No sleep (laughs), or limited sleep. Mostly no sleep (laughs). Um, it means sacrifice. Definitely means a lot of sacrifice, um, but it's still rewarding at the same time. It's still rewarding and it feels good, yet again, for my kids to be able to see this side and know, like, at the end of the day, no matter what obstacles come your way, ain't nothing can stop you.

P-8: um, feelings, um, I mean, I feel challenged, but I feel accomplished. I feel overwhelmed. Um, I feel like a juggler, like I can do, I can multitask, like, way better than anyone else I know, um, 'cause I have to! Um, there's a lot of good feelings and then there's some bad feelings. Not bad feelings but, like, this isn't, I'm not normal compared to my other friends, so *** a little bit. Um, feeling, what other feelings? Um, you know, the one thing that comes to mind is that I'm tired. I'm tired as heck. Um, but, um, I don't know, motivated, I guess. Ambitious! (laughs) Ambitious, yeah.

P-11: the tough feelings are a lot of, a lot of guilt, a lot of sh, not shame, um, anxiety, like, overwhelmingness, um, just like, I mean, and there is that imposter feeling, like, that self-doubt that creeps in. No matter how much validation you get, there's so much that we're learning right now and it's like, oh, my gosh, can I really do this? You know, just feeling like I'm not good enough. Those comes up, those feelings come up, too. Um, and then the good feelings are just, I mean, just that we're in, in, going to be influencing, inspiring generations of counselors in training, the future generations of counselors in training. Um, that we're contributing professionally to our, you know, to the mental health profession, um, and just, I guess, it's just a really, and probably, the majority of the feelings is just, um, self-worth.

Exhaustion/feeling drained:

P-2: No sleep (laughs), or limited sleep. Mostly no sleep (laughs). Um, it means sacrifice. Definitely means a lot of sacrifice, um, but it's still rewarding at the same time. It's still rewarding and it feels good, yet again, for my kids to be able to see this side and know, like, at the end of the day, no matter what obstacles come your way, ain't nothing can stop you.

P-4: that I was more tired than my classmates and, um, I would think well, shit! I got up twice last night at 2am and 5am and maybe slept for half an hour after that, so, yeah, I'm going to be more tired.

P-5: I think it can definitely be draining, just energy level, you know, for me working full-time and having kids, most of my schoolwork was done either on the weekends or after eight o'clock at night, which, we all know, is not your best time, after eight o'clock at night. I've been up since 6 o'clock getting kids ready for school, um, and so I found that it actually took me longer to complete assignments

because, you know, if you think about it, if you're able to write or really like, review literature and do your assignments when your mind is really sharp versus nine, nine-thirty at night when you're exhausted. Like, it took me longer to write because, I, my brain is just just not there. Like, I don't want to drink caffeine and be up all night but I really, like, it's just not there. So, yeah, like, that was definitely a huge part of it, just being tired, 'cause little ones are demanding.

P-10: I, that's another part of it is I feel like I never really, truly get recharged, because even, like, when I was off on break, which is wonderful, you know, I'm still on break, I'm not sleeping in, you know? I, I'm just, I'm trying to keep everything, all the balls in the air, getting up at 6am when my five year old is like, "Hi! Good morning!"

Pride:

P-3: I've always wanted my PhD so that's one piece and pride in believing that my kids would be proud of me, um, uh, you know, they, they, they came to the graduation for the master's program, um, they will come to my graduation for the Ph, stuff like, you know, so that's where the pride comes from.

P-4: I've been really proud of being able to balance all of that and do all of that with efficiency, while still producing at a high level. I'm graduating my doctoral program with six publications and seventeen national presentations and twenty-seven regional state presentations, um, just high levels of producing, but I've also been able to be there for my child, um, most days throughout the entire process.

P-6: I feel proud, um, for the most part that would be the primary feeling. I, I shared every time, it, it's not just turning in a paper, it's a huge accomplishment because I'm juggling and my husband is not always here to help and especially when he's gone more for his work, um, I don't have a huge, I mean, I have some support, but, so each thing, each event feels like a victory and I do feel very proud of, of that. I feel very blessed to live in a world where I can go and learn, come back and be with the kids. That's a big part of what I feel, I tend to, uh, enjoy that I'm able to have these opportunities and then, you know, there's, uh, frustrated and stressed out piece that creeps in

P-10: I'm proud that I'm in a PhD program. I mean, I worked really hard and am working really hard and that is a definite part of my identity that I'm very proud of, you know? Um, but I think the being a grad student who's also a mother? It grounds me.

Guilt:

P-2: Um, the feelings of guilt sometimes, and the feeling of not being able to spend the time I feel like my kids deserve. But then, the flip side of it, and I don't

think I mentioned this before, the guilt of not being able to do the things for the education side, too.

P-5: Um, I think just, there've definitely been moments of guilt, where I'm like, am I taking away too much time from them? Like, should I not do this?

P-7: I feel sad for the moments I know that I'm missing out on. Um, sometimes I experience ambivalence, um, not, not with being a mom, but with, like, work in my program. Um, when I guess I'm feeling, you know, really guilty or really sad about missing out on what I wanna do with my kids, I can feel a little ambivalent about my program. Um, and it, and it typically doesn't last very long, but I guess that happens. Um, I don't think that I really experience anger. Um, the closest thing that I mentioned frustration, uh, but yeah.

P-10: And I would say that that guilt is present there, too, um, that I mentioned earlier, and it's really just trying to reconcile within myself the times, like, is this really worth it? Like, it's worth it to me personally and I, I, I've never stopped being excited about this journey, but then what does this mean for my family, even when I graduate, you know?

P-11: sometimes I'll hear him crying for me and that's hard 'cause I'm right there, you know, but I know all he needs is for me to just sit with him and pat him and, you know, kiss him or, um, just sing to him or those kinds of things

Fulfillment:

P-3: when I started back to school, because I've always loved education, I have been much more fulfilled

P-4: it's the same kind of feelings associated with the pride, too, that fulfilling, um, that fulfilling feeling, that fulfilled feeling, whereas being a mother is the most fulfilling part of my life, I also feel extremely fulfilled by my work as a doc student.

P-7: It's very meaningful. It's exciting for me and you're, it's, you nailed it on the head. It's meaningful, so I'm so invested in it.

P-9: As I told you, I love school, but all the time I, I put in my mind that the priority is your kid. This is so exhausted. As I told you, like, exhausted to, uh, keep going school with motherhood and, uh, sometime, like, most of the time proud, uh, be happy, be happy, very happy to, uh, spend time with here and there, so I feel I can, um, success, I can, um, put myself in a value, like I, I, like, I'm a good mom and same time, I'm a good student so this make me so happy. Yes.

Category #2*Experiencing Constant Pressures Due to Responsibilities That Can Be Conflicting, Complimentary, or Both*

Analysis of the data from this study showed that a significant experience for the participants in this study is one of constant pressures from both their student role and their mothering role. The data shows that these pressures are often in conflict with each other. When children have needs that interfere with school deadlines, professional/academic expectations include activities that cannot be easily done while mothering young children, or when attempting to be present and intentional with family time when schoolwork and studying are nagging in the back of the participant's mind, the participants experience these expectations and responsibilities pulling them in opposite directions.

At other times, participants experience these roles as complimentary, creating a deep level of learning and application of what the participants are learning through their doctoral studies. Participants describe a component of this experience as always feeling that more needs to/should be done, whether in the mothering role or the student role.

P-1: So, you know, the syllabus can be released, we've had our first class, and I'm trying to now fit this class and the assignments and the discussions into our life. It's like, you know, when you have a rhythm with children, you know, whether it be, you know, feeding them and bathing them and putting them to bed, that whole routine and then that moment when you just kind sit and the house is quiet and you're like, "oh, well I could wash, like, ten loads of clothes right now", "I could..... you know, unload the dishwasher twice", "I could do all these things" but then it's like, "oh, crap, I've got an assignment due at twelve, or eleven-fifty nine and it's eleven-forty five"...

P-3: You know, I know there's going to be moments and I've had those moments where I am out doing the dishwasher that starts at 2am 'cause I'm still up writing some paper, but that's, those are, you know those come in spurts, so, and even then my kids don't, um, they don't see mommy suffering, so to speak, um, 'cause, because, um, it's late at night or, so I, I, they're usually not, clearly they're not up seeing me working, but, and then I still get, get them up, take them to school, I mean, I'll still be tired, you know, in the evening, but, I mean, it all works out.

P-5: now I'm snuggling up on the couch with them while they watch a movie and I'm behind my computer. Um, so still trying to do the mom things, but, um, but definitely also be a student. So my kids have learned, you know, they've seen me at soccer practice with one earbud in and my phone and they're like "Are you in class at soccer practice?" and I'm like, "I'm in class right now." *** me walking around with my earbud in, giving them a bath and participating in class. Um, just definitely like, yeah, two people at one time essentially is what it is.

P-6: And there's a lot of the ability to take your hat, take one hat, hat off and, you know, put another one on constantly and to wear multiple hats at the same time and i know that *** women who were better at that and we can do that and I work real hard, so...

P-9: So I am, like, push myself to the office or to, like, um, library, public library to the quiet room and I just study to pass the comps and, um, like, um, don't postpone anything and make me stronger to study. Uh, this is for good things. There was good things on this side, but the bad thing on the other side, it's so hard. Sometimes they being sick. Sometimes I feel very nervous because I have too much to do.

P-10: going back to that balance just for me personally, um, the, the struggle is just, you know, it, it does take time, you know, it takes time to be a mom and I do sometimes feel like, you know, I just wish I had a little more time to, to get things done and, and do the extras.

P-11: I'm trying to be intentional and present in the moment, there's still all this stuff in the back of my mind, like, okay, I have to do this paper, I need to submit that proposal and what about that..., you know, there's always those, those things that even though you're trying to be very intentional, they're always in the, in the background.

Category #3

Responding by Increasing Coping Mechanisms to Accommodate the Doctoral Student Role

Participants in this study discussed adjustments and additions that they have had to make as mothers of a young child/children in order to accommodate the doctoral student responsibilities, expectations, and overall new role in their lives. These accommodations included a significant level of planning and scheduling of all of the logistical components of their lives. From childcare or help in the home to class sessions and school deadlines, the participants relied on calendars/schedules to help them adapt to the increased responsibilities of a doctoral program and maintain a sense of order and ability to anticipate what was happening next.

In addition, participants experienced an increase in their awareness of the intentionality with their time as their available quantity of time decreased in some areas of their lives, they felt the need/desire to create more quality time with the time that they had. These doctoral student mothers of young children also experienced an adjustment in their own expectations of themselves, realizing that they had several significant responsibilities on their plates and understanding that the level of output that they were used to might need to be adjusted. This seems to have been a process for the participants and something that they didn't always feel comfortable with, but that they realized was essential to their abilities to maintain both roles of doctoral student and mother of young child/children.

P-1: You know, that whatever my study habit was or my, my prep time was, like, it doesn't, it doesn't apply in the same way. That in order for me to be successful as a student, it really means that I'm going to have to pay attention to the pockets of time and access that I have that are available to me so that I can maximize those.

P-2: So the support piece, that piece is something that I have to continuously just mention 'cause that's a big factor in being successful and you have small kids and you're trying to do any type of, um, schooling or educational pursuits or whatever, um, but even outside of building a support system, counting on your support system and using your support system, um, is understanding that, well, for me it was understanding that with this doc program, it's a little, it's not just what's done in the classroom, it's done with, it's stuff with outside of the classroom as well. So, um, finding that time and that balance to try to incorporate that, but then sometimes having to sit it out just because support system not available, um, child is sick, uh, kid don't want you to leave 'cause you already been gone for some days 'cause you already doing something. Just all of that and trying to, balance keeps coming up, but balancing, um, it all. Balancing it all. Yeah.

P-5: And there were times where that was very hard for me because I didn't want to admit that I needed help, but definitely learning to do that and being okay with that was a big thing. Um, and then also I set realistic goals and expectations.

I would say just the, um, the feeling of maybe not being able to commit 100%. Um, they're just, the aspect of kind of, um, like, lessening my expectations. I think that is very much needed with having younger children. I guess that I think if my children were older, I wouldn't have felt that as much and I probably could have poured a lot more into it

P-6: I plan each and every day around the school tasks, so I think it has forced me to, okay, I only have this hour to get groceries, I only have, you know, I have to get them on a nap schedule. I, it, it's forced a lot of structure that I don't know was there for the period of time that I wasn't in school.

P-7: I've had to be way more intentional with how I utilize my time. Um, I have to way more intentional and thoughtful about how I interact, um, and focusing on quality of interactions because, you know, quantity of interactions isn't there. But, I mean, it's hard, too, 'cause it's a huge sacrifice, um, and I recognize that I miss out on a lot, um, so I just, I really try to be very intentional, intentional about making, um, my moments count

P-11: Like, especially in the middle of the semester when you're, like, "Okay, wow. I've got all this stuff ahead of me and how am I gonna finish this?" and, but you do it. And so I think, I think it, it is an adjustment of expectations. It's also management and then it's like, so this, it is, it's just understanding, like, this is where I'm at right now and just accepting that.

Category #4*Believing in the Importance of Leading by Example*

A significant experience described by the participants in this study is the significance of leading by example for their young children. The hard work, dedication, and commitment to education is important to these doctoral student mothers who are striving to excel in their roles as mother of a young child/children and counselor education doctoral student. Despite the many competing priorities, unending tasks that need to be completed, and immense amounts of stress that these women can feel/face, there seems to be a great level of pride and accomplishment when the participants discuss the example that they are setting for their children. The idea that they can show their child/children what is possible and that they too can follow their dreams and make multiple goals happen simultaneously through hard work and dedication, while still having their families be their priority is at the heart of believing in leading by example.

Despite the difficulties, the complexities, the guilt and sense of being overwhelmed, the idea that these women can show their children what can be done, what barriers can be broken, and what they are capable of is incredibly satisfying and often makes all of the challenges and exhaustion worth it. Participants also explained how this experience gives them the push that they need at times, knowing the example that they are setting for their young child/children.

The idea of leading by example is not only just the child/children knowing what their mother is doing, but also by sometimes including the child/children in the school process. Participants described ways in which they included their children in the school process, including doing homework together simultaneously with their children or that the child gets to be present during class sessions, group project appointments, or attend celebratory school events. For many of the women in this study, it seemed that the experience included intentionality around engaging children in schoolwork (when age-appropriate).

P-1: you know, we meet once a year. Great! We meet in class. I love that. They all come to class too, so I love that they get to see, okay, mommy is doing her assignments and mommy is in college and, and, and mommy is working on herself. Yes.

P-2: I know I shared with you before about implementing just homework time, which even the three year old participates in and, I mean, he may be putting together a puzzle or coloring a coloring book, but for him, you know, it's just structured time, um, it promotes how I feel about education, you know, um, it shows them how i feel about it, but it also allows opportunities for us to spend time together, too, when you think about it, 'cause we're all together

P-5: I've really seen it, too, like as an example to them, like they've seen me want to pursue my education and they've seen the value that I've placed on that, so they ask me a lot of times, you know, are you, are, are we gonna call you, like, doctor? And I'm like, no, no, no, you're gonna call me mom. I'm still your mom. So

they're very aware, my, um, my daughter said to me, "Wow. My mom's gonna be a doctor!" and like, so they're very aware of, like, what that holds, what that means. Um, yeah, just kind of thinking about, like, what that means and, you know, how I still am there mom and being present and juggling it all

P-9: The most important thing in my life is my kids. So proud I'm a mother and doing school and I think, uh, the best thing in my life happen, that I'm a mom. That so nice that, like, I'm really happy to have them. I'm really happy, uh, to be a mom. *** Sometimes I to them as, for the work. They, I'm sorry, as a motivation. They motivate me to, uh, doing better. When I see them, um, I'm always say, when they get bigger, I want them to be so proud of me.

P-11: so that idea of being a role model of, um, setting good intentions, of having good balance, of, of still taking care of myself while taking care of the family has really, um, shifted into my, you become, I've just become a lot more aware of it.

Category #5

Acknowledgement and Accepting That They Have a Different Experience Than Their Doctoral Student Peers

The participants in this study acknowledge that they have a significantly different experience than their doctoral student cohort members or peers due to being mothers of a young child/children. Some participants described feelings of inadequacy or isolation in their student roles due to the high needs of their mothering roles. The desire to be excellent students while also maintaining high levels of responsibility in their mothering roles can create a pull in opposite directions. Their pressures and demands are so high, yet there are times where particular areas of their lives have to give as they cannot always maintain both the student and mothering roles at maximum effort. Participants describe their doctoral student roles as significant due to the levels of sacrifice that they make in their home lives on a regular basis in order to accommodate their student roles.

P-1: there is a very distinct difference, you know between the students that have children and the students who do not have children and so when I, or the students who have, like, older children. You know, so their kids can fend for themselves. It's like you can actually tell your kid to pick up dinner on the way home and everybody's eating. (Child talking in background). Um, um, but, but everything is mommy now. Everything she's pointing to, it's mommy

P-2: one of the adjustments is not being able to do it all, like, when I say do it all, I'm not even talking about like, the role as a parent but just, um, hanging out or participating in leadership opportunities at school. Like, I can't do all those things because I do have small kids and I just can't get up and go like I want to. Um, you know, at the school they recently had a, a honors gathering and I couldn't find childcare, so didn't go.

P-3: I roll my eyes at some of my peers who don't have kids who complain about stuff, um, and I just go, um, it reminds, it keeps me, hmm, well, I work on keeping myself humble because they don't have kids, so of course, they wouldn't understand, like some of my peers who don't have kids, um, they wouldn't understand how much more difficult, or not even difficult, but how much more complex life can get. Um, so it's taught, so it's taught me patience as a student at school, um, and it's given me, I think more insight with, with, um, what I'm learning

P-4: Don't use the baby as an excuse not miss class. Um, "Don't bring the baby around," um, "in the building." Um, uh, "Don't talk about it as something that's really, really hard." and I would have liked to have been a little more open about it, I think. Um, academia is very stifling and we're already trying to meet, um, expectations that, um, dehumanize us. Um, but some of that was, so some, some feeling that came up was insecurity, too, of I can't talk about the, the struggles. Lack of sleep and striving for that balance. Um, and certainly didn't want to use that as an excuse to miss class. So if I did miss class and she was the reason, I didn't say that.

P-5: it is a different aspect, like, trying to write a paper when you've got a little one snuggled up next to you or, you know, trying to *** you've got a little one, like, wanting to play, so yeah, that part's different.

P-6: I don't have the time that others have. I just don't. They can go, like some of my classmates will say, "Oh, I'm going to the library all day today to work on the statistics assignment." and I will think to myself, "Oh, my gosh, I haven't even started it yet. I can't even start it until..." because I know, every single day I know and I have to map out my assignments in a manner that allows me to be here present with my family. So that, that time is, you're going to hear me say it a million times. That's what it comes down to. I wish i had more of it. I wish I could pause things sometimes. Um, there are no extensions in a big girl program, big person program. You have to do your work, so, um, I'm constantly searching for a way, for ways to balance

P-7: it's kinda one of those things where, um, you know, as everyone else is planning out, you know, what they're gonna be doing, you know, like when they're studying, when they're doing this, when they're doing that and, you know, maybe not entirely fair, and I'm, I'm aware of this, but, yeah, I can be a little, um, internally critical 'cause I'm like, "You don't have that much to do!". And I know that's not fair because they've set up their lives in a certain way and I'm sure they have different commitments, but yeah, as, you know, a mom, you know, with two kids, um, full-time job, in a PhD program, um, yeah, my time is, is much more limited, um, so yeah, I mean, yeah, I, I definitely notice the differences.

P-8: I remember having to bring my kids to, like, a meeting with other doc students. We were doing, like, a research paper together. Um, and I remembering

it being, like, just really super awkward. And I remember having to bring my kids to a meeting with my advisor 'cause my, like, babysitter fell through or my husband had to go out of town. So, like, I mean, that experience *** it impacted being a student, for sure. Because I could stop being a student but I couldn't stop being a mom

P-9: it's so hard, I keeping with little one, but it really is different when they get bigger. So nice. Like, uh, um, you can give them some responsibility and, uh, they can go by themselves, they can play by themselves and when, when you give them the basic thing like eat, uh, shower, uh, studies, homework, that's it, so they can go and sometime also they take care of my little one, so that's so nice. Like, is different, different, very different the motherhood, uh, between five years and under and five years and above. It's so different, you know? Like, as I told you, the little one need more time, uh, more money, uh, more, um, more emotion, more patience, more everything. (laughs)

P-10: I am jealous of people who don't have kids sometimes, you know? In their ability to just really focus on this and, and because as much as I love my kids, it's a stressor, you know.