

**21st-century Nontraditional Doctoral Student Fathers:
Negotiating Competing Role Identities as Fathers, Workers, and
Doctoral Students**

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Abstract

The contexts of fatherhood in the 21st-century are leading to meaningful changes in responsibilities for fathers. These changes are welcomed by many and benefit the family unit in many ways. However, nontraditional doctoral student fathers pursuing a doctorate and maintaining full-time employment face numerous challenges as they seek a work-life balance. Due to the lack of research on this subset of doctoral students, this research fills in the gap and lends a voice to fathers navigating the doctoral journey. Through this qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study of eight nontraditional doctoral student fathers, this paper aims to provide more insight into this population's lived experiences. Role strain theory, identity theory, and doctoral student socialization theory were used to examine the participants' experiences. Through thematic analysis, three major themes were developed: (1) Balancing Multiple Roles; (2) Fatherhood Identity and Roles; (3) Support and Well-being. Implications of the study are discussed for future online doctoral student fathers, faculty, academic program administrators, and their families, and how they may aid this group of students in completing their doctoral degree.

Keywords: fathers, online education, doctoral students, work-life balance, role strain, identity, socialization

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Dedication

To my wife Kristen, you have stuck with me through thick and thin, in sickness and in health. Our lives have changed so much since I began this degree, but one thing has never changed: your support for me. You have always been the rock for me and our family in difficult times and I thank you for that! I love you!

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List of Abbreviations

GSP Graduate student parent

WLB Work-life balance

Chapter 1: Introduction

As 21st-century fathers fight antiquated gender role expectations and increase their role at home, they are less likely to have a healthy work-life balance (WLB) (Gatrell et al., 2013; Ladge et al., 2015). The conflicts a working father encounters in maintaining a healthy WLB lead to increased stress, emotional fatigue, a sense of role overload, and deteriorating health (Evans et al., 2013). By adding the role of a doctoral student to their multiple role identities, nontraditional doctoral student fathers add yet another role often viewed as mutually incompatible with work and family domains. This incompatibility can result in role conflicts (Goode, 1960; Kulik et al., 2016) and may lead to role strain as they attempt to establish a WLB (Goode, 1960).

Many fathers who pursue their doctoral degrees do so through online programs and enroll part-time as they cannot attend full-time or in-person due to having a family and being employed (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012; Stimpson & Filer, 2011). Online education has proliferated since the 1990s (Kentnor, 2015) and continues to be one of the fastest-growing segments of higher education in the United States (Seaman et al., 2018). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.), 31% of graduate students within degree-granting postsecondary institutions enroll in a fully online program. However, the exact number of online doctoral students in the United States is difficult to determine as the center does not distinguish between types of post-baccalaureate students.

Since the beginning of the 21st-century, there has been a significant shift in doctoral students' demographics as the number of nontraditional students enrolling in online doctoral programs has increased drastically (Ames et al., 2018). Online doctoral programs provide greater accessibility for nontraditional students and an alternative to traditional, ground-based programs. Nontraditional students have been characterized in a variety of ways as one encompasses one or multiple of the following characteristics: a parent; participate online; enrolled part-time (Naidoo, 2015; Shepherd & Sheu, 2014); concurrently employed; over thirty years old; married; or self-funded (Archbald, 2011; Eakins, 2019; Offerman, 2011). With increased technological capabilities, they may now attend classes from home, while traveling, or at work (Archibald et al., 2019). Doctoral student parents, including nontraditional doctoral student fathers, benefit from online programs by enabling them to

retain full-time employment, manage family responsibilities, and simultaneously pursue a doctorate (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017).

Research Questions

The following research questions directed the study and assisted in bringing to light the experiences of nontraditional doctoral student fathers' attempts to establish a work-life balance. These questions underpinned the research design, data sources utilized, and data analysis.

The central research questions directing this study were:

RQ1: How do nontraditional doctoral student fathers experience establishing a work-life balance within their multiple role identities and the changing context of 21st-century fatherhood?

RQ2: What are the experiences of nontraditional doctoral student fathers in an online program?

Background and Context

This qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study positions fathers in a particular context and culture, 21st-century nontraditional doctoral students--as operationally defined for this study--within the United States. Before the Industrial Revolution, mothers and fathers played an equal role in providing for their families through their shared responsibilities in agricultural labor (Lamb, 2000). With the Revolution's arrival, the importance of agriculture and the home industry was reduced, and a split between in and out-of-home work was forced (Lamb, 2000). The economic shift from this time period led to the development of the father's role in society as primarily the family's financial provider. Today, fathers face the same clash of social ideals that mothers first encountered in the 1960s and 1970s as women increased in the workforce and left home more – how can one be a good parent and a good worker?

Fathers have increasingly sought a work-life balance that would allow them to engage in a loving relationship with their children (Galinsky et al., 2013; Lamb, 2010). In recent decades, fathers have increased their participation in household duties, including housework, homework, and childcare, as they have wanted to care more for their children and have more equality within their families (Goldscheider et al., 2015). As a result, fathers have reported more difficulties than mothers in balancing their additional responsibilities, contrary to the

widespread belief that women experience more challenges with WLB (Shockley et al., 2017). Fifty-nine percent of fathers reported "work-life conflict" while handling their various responsibilities, compared with 45% of mothers (Furman & Stevenson, 2014), which can lead to increased stress, emotional fatigue, a sense of role overload, and deteriorating health (Blair & Obradović, 2018; Evans et al., 2013).

While research on WLB in higher education exists (Denson et al., 2018; Marshall et al., 2012; Sallee, 2014, 2015; Sallee & Lester, 2017), there is a paucity of literature addressing doctoral student work-lives (Sallee, 2015). Furthermore, extant literature primarily focuses on women and mothers within academia (Brus, 2006; Prikhidko & Haynes, 2018; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Stimpson & Filer, 2011). We know nontraditional doctoral students encounter several challenges during their academic experiences. These include workload, loneliness, and difficulties balancing family and career needs with their academic commitment (Abetz, 2019; Bawa, 2016; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017).

However, the general problem is that we do not understand how nontraditional doctoral student fathers experience establishing a WLB (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012; Stimpson & Filer, 2011). In research on doctoral student mothers, Trepal et al. (2014) stressed the importance of conducting additional research on other students who are parents (e.g., doctoral student fathers) to benefit educators' understanding of the experiences and needs of the student-parent population. Moreover, (Estes, 2011) exclaimed, "the voice of fathers is virtually absent from the literature on the conflict between education and parenthood. Including the voices of fathers allows us to see how some men are negotiating the increasing expectations of fatherhood" (p. 203).

The contexts of fatherhood in the 21st-century are leading to meaningful changes in responsibilities for fathers. These changes are welcomed by many and benefit the family unit in numerous ways. However, a nontraditional doctoral student father pursuing a doctorate while maintaining full-time employment must participate in unceasing role bargaining. Role bargaining is the continuous process of selecting alternative role behaviors associated with their often incompatible identities as students, workers, and fathers to fulfill their role demands and reduce the level of felt role strain (Goode, 1960).

The remainder of Chapter 1 includes the impetus for the study, containing the statement of the problem and its purpose. The central research questions which guided the study are also specified. Next, the study's significance is highlighted, including its empirical, theoretical, and practical significance. Following, an initial overview and justification for the methodological choices, including the research methods and design employed, is offered. Additionally, the study's assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are identified. Finally, operational definitions of terms in this study are defined.

Statement of Problem

At least half of all doctoral students are part-time students who cannot attend full-time or in-person, have family or other obligations, are working professionals, and primarily participate through online programs (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012; Stimpson & Filer, 2011). From the review of the literature, we know finding a WLB remains elusive for many nontraditional doctoral students, especially for part-time student mothers, and has been shown to create different forms of guilt, stressors, anxiety, and increased time constraints (Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Sverdlik et al., 2018). Additionally, limited research has sought to understand how students manage their academic and family domains satisfactorily while pursuing an online doctoral degree (Markle, 2015; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019).

While WLB studies exist examining role conflicts and the resulting role strain within the context of higher education, these studies primarily examined the experiences of faculty parents (Barker, 2017; Kinman & Jones, 2008; Sallee, 2015) and traditional graduate student parents (Dyk, 1987; Estes, 2011; Grady et al., 2014; Moreau & Kerner, 2015). Furthermore, the scant literature examining doctoral student experiences and WLB predominately focused on women (Brus, 2006; Prikhidko & Haynes, 2018; Stimpson & Filer, 2011). Therefore, the problem is the absence of literature exploring nontraditional doctoral student fathers' experiences in establishing a WLB.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore how 21st-century nontraditional doctoral student fathers--enrolled in various online programs within the United States--experience establishing a work-life balance. Additionally, the study aimed to address the gap discovered during an exhaustive search of the literature, which led to an unsuccessful location of literature that included nontraditional doctoral student fathers.

This glaring void provided the need and justification for the study. Additionally, the exploration of nontraditional doctoral student fathers' experiences aimed to extend the literature on doctoral student parents' WLB to include fathers. Moreover, the absence of doctoral student fathers' voices is deafening within the paltry amount of extant literature on doctoral student WLB. Therefore, this study's impetus was to understand the experiences of how nontraditional doctoral student fathers establish a WLB within their role identities as students, workers, and fathers.

Significance of the Study

Empirical Significance

This study has empirical, theoretical, and practical significance concerning nontraditional doctoral education. Empirically, recent literature on doctoral student experiences is scarce and has focused primarily on women (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012, 2016), students from backgrounds of poverty (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014), and online doctoral students of all genders and races (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014). Furthermore, a single peer-reviewed article (Dillon, 2012) and recent dissertations (Billman, 2015; Garcia, 2018) were located after an exhaustive literature search seeking studies focusing solely on doctoral student fathers. However, the dissertation's sample consisted solely of full-time students enrolled in a traditional doctoral program. Therefore, research on doctoral student fathers is rare (Dillon, 2012).

Consequently, to my knowledge, no studies exist that solely study nontraditional doctoral student fathers and WLB. By adding the voice of their experiences, this study fills that void and responds to the calls for further research on the socialization experiences of nontraditional online doctoral students (Berry, 2017). This study also continues to increase the inclusion of fathers' experiences regarding WLB in academia.

Theoretical Significance

To my knowledge, no studies employ the theoretical frameworks of role strain theory, identity theory, and doctoral student socialization theory simultaneously to analyze the experiences of this subset of students. Using multiple frameworks allowed me to interpret the empirical findings to answer the research questions posed.

Role strain is defined as the difficulty felt in fulfilling one's role obligations as role-related demands, lack of resources, lack of support, and insufficient time make it difficult to

perform all roles successfully (Goode, 1960). Fathers have multiple roles, which may cause allocation conflicts such as time, place, or resources, leading to role strain (Goode, 1960). Notwithstanding role conflicts between their worker and father identities, their competing identities may also impact their doctoral student identity. Stryker (1987) described identities as “internalized sets of role expectations, with an individual having as many identities as roles played in distinct sets of social relations” (p.89). Goode (1960) advanced that individuals engage in role bargaining, which is the continuous process of selecting among alternative role behaviors to fulfill one’s demands associated with that role identity to reduce their level of role strain.

Fatherhood requires unceasing role bargaining within and outside the family (Shezifi, 2004). As nontraditional doctoral student fathers do not fit into doctoral students’ traditional characteristics, their socialization experience is not entirely normative due to differences in their under-represented status (Gardner, 2008). The socialization process helps students navigate their doctoral journey toward professionalization (Weidman & Stein, 2003) and may be significantly impacted by being a nontraditional doctoral student father.

When integrated within the data analysis process, role strain theory, identity theory, and doctoral student socialization theory are theoretical frameworks that helped understand how nontraditional doctoral student fathers engage in unceasing role bargaining to meet their often incompatible role demands to establish a WLB. Additionally, the theories introduced above can help scholars and faculty understand both the internal and external role conflicts nontraditional doctoral student fathers experience, and are discussed further in Chapter 2.

Practical Significance

The study offers multiple practical significances by revealing the experiences of this subset of doctoral students. The study’s implications and subsequent recommendations enhance support by strategically establishing policies and practices for nontraditional doctoral student fathers to become socialized adequately in their program and field of study. Increased support for their socialization may be the difference between nontraditional doctoral student fathers completing their degree or adding to the percentage of online and traditional doctoral student attrition rates to which doctoral educators should be gravely concerned. An estimated 50%-with some estimations of traditional doctoral attrition rates as high as 70%-of doctoral students do not complete their degrees (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012;

Terrell et al., 2016). Furthermore, some estimates show nontraditional doctoral student attrition rates increase by 10-20% compared to the traditional doctoral program rates presented (Ames et al., 2018; Terrell et al., 2016).

Additionally, this study speaks to current and future nontraditional doctoral student fathers' and provides a human-level connection for other students and faculty within the program. Additionally, the study gathered rich accounts of participants' experiences with the phenomenon under exploration, and strategies for institutional administrators and faculty are provided to support the creation of a father-friendly strategy to help them attain their academic goals. The findings of this study may also assist employers and family members of nontraditional doctoral student fathers in better understanding their plight in establishing a WLB.

Study's Research Method and Design Rationale

An initial definition advanced by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) specified that qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matters. Furthermore, qualitative research helps develop an initial understanding of a less explored area (Levitt et al., 2017). Employing a qualitative method was the best choice to address the central research questions of this study as this method focuses on the participants' experiences, perceptions, observations, and behaviors, which is at the core of qualitative research (Machi & McEvoy, 2012). As the study aimed to explore a phenomenon (WLB) by relying on the perception of a person's (nontraditional doctoral student fathers) experience in a given situation, a qualitative method was appropriate (Yin, 2014).

Specifically, a hermeneutic phenomenological design was employed. Phenomenology strives to understand the "essence of the experience" (Creswell, 2007, p. 78) or "determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). Phenomenological researchers seek evidence from personal accounts of life experiences and emphasize describing the commonalities of the participants' experiences of the phenomenon. Phenomenology calls for the researcher to uncover the essence of a phenomenon by examining the perspectives of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). "Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the shared common understandings of experiences that are illuminated through crafted stories"

and seeks to create “study reports that compel thinking and invite reinterpretations of life experiences” (Crowther et al., 2017, p. 834). Therefore, phenomenology was appropriate for this research as this design helped explore multiple, diverse participants’ experiences with establishing a WLB. Participants’ experiences were impacted by the unique and separate settings of their education, work, and family environments. Semi-structured interviews with an embedded qualitative survey and a reflexive researcher journal served as the data sources and are detailed in depth in Chapter 3.

The population for this study was nontraditional doctoral student fathers currently enrolled in a fully online doctoral program. For this study, a nontraditional doctoral student father is operationally defined as a part-time student currently enrolled in a fully online program, concurrently employed full-time, and has at least one child. The population’s lone geographic boundary was that the participants’ institution be located within the United States, as they can pursue their education from any location that offers technological access to their courses.

Researchers must choose what, where, when, and whom to observe or interview, as there are many options within those categories that could be selected for the unit of analysis—the sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To do so, researchers must first decide what sample attributes are crucial to the study and then recruit people or sites that meet those criteria, also called criterion-based selection (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Identifying participants who met the criteria required for the study was achieved through purposeful sampling (Heitner & Sherman, 2014). The sample for the research was identified purposefully based on the study’s operational definition of a nontraditional doctoral student father. Additionally, snowball sampling—a form of purposeful sampling commonly used in qualitative research—was used to identify participants by asking current participants to supply recommendations for potential participants who met the sampling criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The sampling methods allowed potential participants to be recruited via email and social media platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, and X (formerly known as Twitter).

Traditionally, qualitative research does not impose a sample size requirement because it is determined by the amount of data collected to reach the data saturation point, where any additional information collected does not discover anything new or of value within the study (Patton, 2002). However, van Manen (2016) stated that data saturation should not be the goal

of phenomenological research and has no exact requirement for interview subjects. Furthermore, according to Fusch and Ness (2015) and Saldaña (2016), there is no agreement about adequate sample size in qualitative research methods. Qualitative data is often most informative based on small samples (Brinkmann, 2013), and researchers have recommended anywhere from three to 25 participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Thus, I interviewed participants as I was able to recruit eligible participants and continued the research process until potential participants were exhausted. Eight participants were sufficient to complete the data collection process according to the recommendations noted above.

Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative data collection methods such as interviews and observations are helpful when participants' social reality or experiences are to be understood in their context (McGrath & Nilsonne, 2018). As such, data sources included semi-structured interviews-with an embedded demographic survey completed verbally prior to the interview questions-and a reflexive researcher journal. The researcher journal was utilized to memo my observations of the participants' responses and personal reflections throughout the study. Participants who responded to initial recruitment solicitations were sent an electronic informed consent form for review and to provide an electronic signature to participate in the study.

The purpose of the qualitative survey questions before beginning the interview questions was to construct a demographic profile of participants. As this study was exploratory, a semi-structured interview format was used with an interview protocol, allowing for variation in participant responses (Yin, 2014). While the protocol provided structure and consistency to the interviews, the flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed for a conversational approach and was a productive way to collect open-ended data from participants (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

As a result of the ongoing global concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic at the onset of data collection, which continued to limit access to travel and ensure all parties' health and safety, the use of virtual and phone interviews was appropriate. Furthermore, as no research funds were available for this study, interviews via these technological methods minimized travel costs, the time needed to conduct the interviews, and the burdens imposed on participants' time.

The practical goal of data analysis is to find answers to the research questions, which is accomplished through organizing and simplifying the complexity of the data into meaningful and manageable codes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To fit the research design, I reviewed the literature on data analysis of three sets of prominent qualitative researchers and chose to utilize thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013) as the primary method for analysis. Thematic analysis is an iterative, recursive process of searching a data set for recurring patterns of meaning to identify themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Qualitative researchers can create rich descriptions that emanate from the data, using the participants' words to support the interpreted data (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Additionally, I embedded various strategies recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Merriam and Tisdell (2015) within their data analysis methods as they are similar to the concepts of the recursive phases of thematic analysis.

The recursive phases within thematic analysis include (a) collecting; (b) reading and familiarization; (c) generating initial codes; (d) theme development and refinement; (e) defining and naming; (f) producing the report. Within the data collection and analysis processes, the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability and their associated strategies were used to gauge this study's trustworthiness (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

When utilizing human subjects in a study, ethical considerations are necessary to address and mitigate potential risks associated with their participation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Confidentiality, the voluntary nature of participation, and the security of the information obtained from participants were all ethical concerns in this study. The consent form and ethical considerations are expounded upon in Chapter 3.

Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations

Assumptions

An overarching assumption of this study was that participants placed importance on their father role and actively attempted to negotiate their role identities and the expectations attached to establish a WLB. It was assumed that nontraditional doctoral student fathers' role bargaining decisions relating to their WLB are based on their most salient role identity in an attempt to lessen the level of role strain felt. Additionally, it was assumed that participants would share authentic, forthright, and unique experiences as they were all situated within the

distinct settings of higher education institutions, work environments, and family dynamics that shaped their worldviews.

Additionally, the study's design was integrated within the assumptions, or beliefs, associated with the philosophical worldview of social constructivism that I carried into the research. These assumptions provided the basis for the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological beliefs exemplified throughout the study, which aided in answering the research questions (Creswell, 2013). Social constructivism and its philosophical assumptions are discussed at greater length in Chapter 3.

Limitations

Limitations are potential drawbacks of the study, which may impact the study results and cannot be ignored. Several limitations within the study need acknowledgment. The participants' experiences were most likely not representative of all nontraditional doctoral student fathers, as operationally defined in this study, throughout the United States and globally. Participants likely had unique experiences than those who chose not to respond or move forward with an interview after initial communication. Therefore, an additional aim of the study was not to explore individual online doctoral programs but to understand how nontraditional doctoral student fathers enrolled in various programs experienced negotiating a WLB within their various role identities and unique settings and contexts.

Finally, another limitation was the concern of conducting interviews via Zoom and phone, as the capacity to build a rapport was limited compared to a face-to-face interview. Moreover, technological issues, such as connection issues, lags in sound or video, garbled or indistinct audio, or malfunctioning technology, may arise. Multiple participant interviews were conducted via phone and recorded via an electronic voice recorder due to connection issues or concerns with Zoom. These technological difficulties were barriers to developing rapport and the interview flow, creating opportunities for missed data (Hanna & Mwale, 2017). Additionally, online video interviews made certain behaviors and body language difficult to observe (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries of the study and are necessary to assist with the study's possibility. This study solely explored students' experiences who met the study's operational definition of nontraditional doctoral student fathers. Additionally, while full-time, online

doctoral student fathers have many similarities, removing their work role from the WLB equation was likely to alter their experiences regarding their role bargaining process. Finally, the study did not seek to investigate the experiences of doctoral student fathers enrolled in traditional or ground-based programs nor those not employed in a full-time position.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are operationally defined within the study:

Children

Though not exhaustive, may include biological, step, foster, and adopted, among other types (Internal Revenue Services, n.d.)

Fully Online Program

A program that requires no more than two visits to campus per year; also defined alternatively, as a limited residency requirement (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

Identity Role Salience

The importance that a person gives to a position they perform (e.g., work, family, and parental roles) (Greer & Egan, 2012).

Nontraditional Doctoral Student(s)

Student(s) who encompass one or multiple of the following characteristics: a parent; participate online; enrolled part-time; concurrently employed; over thirty years old; married; self-funded (Naidoo, 2015; Shepherd & Sheu, 2014).

Nontraditional Doctoral Student Father(s)

This term encompasses three distinct characteristics of the multitude of characteristics that exist for this population. Participants must (a) be enrolled part-time--less than nine credit hours per semester--in a fully online doctoral program (Naidoo, 2015; Shepherd & Sheu, 2014); (b) be currently employed full-time (40 hours per week); and (c) have children at the time of the study (Archbald, 2011; Offerman, 2011).

Online Doctoral Student(s)

A Ph.D., Ed.D., or other professional online doctoral student where at least 80% or more of the content is delivered online with limited residency requirements (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Allen et al., 2016).

Role Bargaining

The continuous process of selecting among alternative role behaviors associated with their often incompatible identities as a student, workers, and fathers to fulfill their role demands and to reduce the level of felt role strain (Goode, 1960).

Role Conflicts

Role conflict is experienced when demands from multiple roles rise simultaneously and when responding to one of the roles requires forgoing the benefits of other roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Role Strain

The “felt difficulty in fulfilling role obligations” (Goode, 1960, p. 483) and a consequence of role bargaining.

Work-life Balance

The achievement, enjoyment, and satisfaction with the amount and quality of time allocated to their various roles within school, work, and life (Martinez et al., 2013). “Work” includes coursework, research requirements, career and professional development activities, and other academic activities undertaken by graduate students. “Life,” on the other hand, encompasses non-academic, personal components of graduate student life, such as family and social life and work-related, non-school activities (Martinez et al., 2013). It refers to the capacity of individuals to effectively manage their professional and personal lives without one negatively impacting the other (Raiden & Raisanen, 2013).

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the topic of the study with a discussion of the background of the problem, particularly the challenges maintaining a WLB encountered by various higher education populations. The changing contexts of family responsibilities for women and men and the bargaining of their role identities were also introduced. Furthermore, an introduction to the theoretical frameworks, research methodology, data collection, and analysis was also provided. The study’s assumptions, limitations, and delimitations were discussed, and the terminology within the research was operationally defined.

The remainder of the dissertation is organized into four chapters. Chapter 2 provides further details about the theoretical frameworks used to interpret the study’s findings.

Following, the literature on fatherhood's recent history in American society and changing societal expectations is highlighted. Finally, various father identities and academic parents' experiences with the phenomena of WLB from the perspectives of faculty, graduate student parents as a whole, and with a focus on doctoral student experiences are discussed in greater depth. Chapter 3 details the study's methodology, including the research method and design chosen, sampling strategies, data collection and analysis, establishing trustworthiness, and ethical considerations for the study. Chapter 4 reports the research findings, including the overall themes developed from the participants' experiences shared during their interviews. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the results in reference to previous research, implications for policy and practice, and provides recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Most student-parent studies concentrate on undergraduates with dependents and single student parents (Brooks, 2013). Furthermore, studies tend to analyze the population as a whole rather than the potential variations in graduate and undergraduate parents' experience (Brooks, 2015; Brown & Nichols, 2013). While fathers within the academy may also struggle, work-life balance (WLB) literature usually focuses on the academic mothers' plight. Moreover, literature focusing on doctoral student fathers' experiences attempting to achieve a WLB is virtually non-existent.

A detailed literature search strategy is provided to enhance insight into the search strategy used for research relevant to the study. Next, the foundations of the frameworks utilized within the data analysis and subsequent interpretations of the study's findings are provided. Following this, an overview of fatherhood's recent history in American society and changing expectations is offered. Next, literature highlighting various father identities is explored. Afterward, academic parents' experiences from the perspectives of faculty, graduate student parents as a whole, and doctoral students are reviewed--the focus of the study. As the literature on doctoral student fathers is minuscule, doctoral student literature will be reviewed primarily from mothers' perspectives. Finally, nontraditional doctoral students and the characteristics relevant to this study will be addressed along with the changing demographics of doctoral education.

Literature Search Strategy

The search for literature relevant to this study included databases such as ProQuest Central, Academic Search Premier, and APA PsycInfo. Additionally, I utilized single search terms and concepts and advanced Boolean searching (i.e., fathers, fatherhood, doctoral student fathers, work-life balance, father identity). The subject-specific databases of the University of Idaho library were used to locate current peer-reviewed journal articles, books, reports, theses, and dissertations. Google Scholar and citation management tools such as Academic Search Premier (EbscoHost) to search for peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and dissertations using the title or author and for APA citation style were also used. The following section discusses fatherhood and its evolution through American history.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study of nontraditional doctoral student fathers' experiences utilized several related theoretical frameworks as the foundation to interpret findings. Role strain theory (Goode, 1960), Identity theory (Stryker, 1987), and Doctoral student socialization theory (Weidman & Stein, 2003) may be particularly applicable to individuals encompassing the multiple role identities of doctoral students, workers, and fathers. Furthermore, by exploring fathers' experiences through the lens of these distinct but interrelated frameworks, the study shed light on how nontraditional doctoral student fathers experience establishing a WLB while continuously engaging in the role bargaining process. These theories and their concepts will now be presented.

Role Strain Theory

Role strain theory addresses the perceived struggle in performing role-related duties. According to Goode (1960), each individual has specific roles in life, encompassing certain responsibilities and obligations (Goode, 1960). Role strain is defined as the difficulty felt in fulfilling one's role obligations as role-related demands, lack of resources, lack of support, and insufficient time make it difficult to perform all roles successfully (Goode, 1960). Individuals whose roles are challenging--nontraditional doctoral student fathers within this study--are likely to encounter role conflicts, leading to the unavoidable outcome of role strain (Goode, 1960). Decisions are made to reduce the level of felt role strain through role bargaining, which is the continuous process of selecting among alternative role behaviors to fulfill one's role demands (Goode, 1960).

Fatherhood requires ongoing role bargaining within and outside the family (Shezifi, 2004). Fathers have multiple roles, which may cause conflicts of allocation (Goode, 1960). Family members are one of the few who know about one's total role obligations. Thus, role strain theory posits that the family unit is a role allocation center and can be used as a vantage point for fathers to view their total roles in perspective (Goode, 1960). As obligations from being a father can change little daily, and escape from them is difficult, role alternatives can be evaluated against a reasonably stable background. Furthermore, fathers can be advised on balancing roles and mitigating role strain (Goode, 1960).

Nontraditional doctoral student fathers can choose strategies to reduce the strain felt from often conflicting role identities through strategies put forth in Goode's (1960) theory.

This theory uses strategies for easing felt strain, including role elimination, delegation, compartmentalization, and extension (Goode, 1960). Research on student parents has indicated that this group eliminates roles by neglecting friendships (Moreau & Kerner, 2015), decreasing role strain as fewer roles demand attention. Graduate student parents have discussed the value of delegating childcare to significant others and childcare personnel when they need to satisfy their graduate student obligations (Lynch, 2008). Compartmentalization refers to mentally setting aside one role while in another role (Goode, 1960) and has rarely been discussed in student-parent literature (Sallee, 2014). However, nontraditional doctoral student fathers may employ compartmentalizing strategies to move from student to parent roles and vice versa. Role extension includes expanding roles to facilitate other role demands (Goode, 1960). This strategy may apply to nontraditional doctoral student fathers, particularly regarding their role as a father.

Within academia, the use of role strain theory to guide and interpret recent research exists involving faculty (Barker, 2017; Yedidia et al., 2014), nontraditional students (McGraw, 2010), and student-parents (Draper, 2015). Notably, student parents are likely to experience conflicting role demands as each role is expected to be prioritized over the other (Chesser, 2015; Moreau & Kerner, 2015). Additionally, role strain theory concepts have been utilized in recent research in areas outside of academia, such as work-family conflict (Creary & Gordon, 2016). Furthermore, role strain theory is considered the theoretical underpinning for work-family conflict research (Mathis & Brown III, 2008), further highlighting the merits of utilizing this framework within this study.

Identity Theory

Initially developed by Sheldon Stryker, identity theory “emphasizes the way individuals construct their selves through the interactions of others” and “focuses on the relationship between identities, hierarchies, and behaviors” (Kaufman, 2013, p. 15). Stryker (1987) described identities as “internalized sets of role expectations, with an individual having as many identities as roles played in distinct sets of social relations” (p. 89).

Stryker and Burke (2000) argued that the framework within which identity functions operate equally between three uses. First, it serves as “a reference to a culture of people” (p. 284); from how one dresses to how one speaks, portions of identity signify their societal culture during that time. Second, they noted that identity is used as a “common culture

among participants” or group (p. 284). Acceptance into a group may require individuals to perceive their identity differently or alter their original self into something more universally accepted. Finally, they concluded that identity consists of definitions people assign to the multiple roles they regularly play in highly differentiated contemporary societies.

Early researchers noticed that particular identities within a person were more salient, allowing researchers to hierarchically identify those identities (Burke & Stets, 2009). Stryker (1968) defined the concept of identity salience as the “probability, for a given person, of a given identity being invoked in a variety of different situations” (p. 560). Ranking identities within oneself or through a social lens suggested that specific identities substantially impacted individuals. In contrast, others dissolved due to a lack of importance (Stryker & Burke, 2000). For example, a father who provides the sole income for his family might have a greater work identity role salience, representing the importance they place on their work role. Similarly, a father who places greater importance on their family role would have a higher family identity role salience (Frear et al., 2019).

Therefore, identity results from finding oneself within the social categories (Stryker, 1968), communicating with others based on those categories, and negotiating the corresponding meanings and behaviors (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). Identity theory points out the external and internal dimensions of identity salience, which govern role bargaining decision-making and affect WLB for a nontraditional doctoral student father. Identity theory served as a vital framework to interpret the study’s findings of their role bargaining experiences regarding their identities as students, workers, and fathers.

Fatherhood Identity Development. In the early 1990s, researchers started endorsing identity theory to inform fatherhood studies (Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1993; Marsiglio, 1991). By the end of the decade, the use of identity theory was recommended as a means to advance our understanding of fathering (Marsiglio et al., 2000). Identity and father involvement measures were included in the Developing a Daddy Survey (DADS) project, a coordinated effort to provide comprehensive information on father involvement for several national surveys (Cabrera et al., 2004). Scholars interested in understanding father involvement and other parental behaviors have utilized identity theory to guide interpretation and underlie much of fathering research.

Identity theory offers insight into how individuals interact, perform, and negotiate their various societal roles and, more recently, has taken a structural approach. Studies have emphasized the importance of social systems' rather than discussing internal processes that influence behaviors (Burke & Stets, 2009). In the context of fathers (status), those who expect to provide for their children (role = provider) and want to provide well (identity = good provider) are likely to spend more time engaging in activities related to being a provider, such as working longer hours to raise more money to meet children's needs. Associated assumptions are that identities provide a stimulus for action (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stryker, 1987). In the context of nontraditional doctoral student fathers, the salience of their roles as fathers and workers may affect their experiences within their role as a doctoral student.

Doctoral Student Socialization Theory

The socialization process helps students navigate their doctoral journey toward professionalization (Weidman et al., 2001), and graduate school serves as an important site for socialization (Sallee, 2015). Researchers have defined socialization as a series of processes that occur throughout a graduate student's experiences, resulting in the accumulation of skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary for academic and professional careers (Twale et al., 2016). Doctoral socialization has been described as an unusual double socialization, in which new students become socialized not only as graduate students but also as members of their professional identity (Sverdlik et al., 2018).

According to Weidman and Stein (2003), there are four stages of growth in graduate students' socialization: anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal. The anticipatory stage can be described as a student being conscious of the overall expectations for a graduate student's role. According to Roberts and Bandlow (2018), the doctoral socialization process occurs in stages, beginning with the anticipatory stage, where students observe senior peers and gain an understanding of the group's behavior and values. The formal stage is characterized by observation while learning about roles' expectations, and students are mainly concerned with tasks at this stage. Communication occurs primarily through course materials and an integrated approach through faculty and student experiences during the formal stage. The informal stage is where many standard cues for role expectations are received from the student's cohort. Through the lessons learned at this stage, the student will

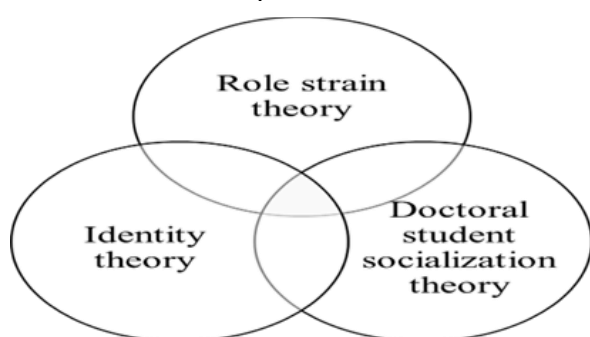
begin to feel more professional. In the personal stage, the scholar, personal, and professional identities merge into a cohesive state of mind (Roberts & Bandlow, 2018; Weidman & Stein, 2003). It is thoroughly documented that connection with faculty members allows doctoral students to feel a sense of belonging in a community of scholars (Burrus et al., 2019; Byrnes et al., 2019), which may be challenging for nontraditional doctoral student fathers.

Socialization focuses primarily on normative assumptions and behavior of individuals to be socialized and perhaps can be a challenge (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), specifically within the context of the nontraditional doctoral student father. As they do not fit into doctoral students' traditional characteristics, their socialization experience is not entirely normative due to differences in their under-represented status (Gardner, 2008). Furthermore, as parenthood responsibilities often clash with those of graduate students (Moreau & Kerner, 2015), the nontraditional doctoral student father socialization process can be significantly impacted. Inadequate academic and social integration is negatively correlated with student success and degree completion (Shea & Bidjerano, 2017). As approximately 50% of students who begin a doctoral program never finish their degree (Hill & Conceição, 2020), socialization is even more paramount for this subset of doctoral students as they bring a unique set of additional challenges to their doctoral studies.

Employing socialization as a framework to view the study's findings highlighted how their unceasing role bargaining affects the nontraditional doctoral student father's socialization process. By adding the voice of nontraditional doctoral student fathers' experiences, the study also responded to the calls for further research on the socialization experiences of nontraditional online doctoral students (Berry, 2017) and added to the inclusion of fathers' experiences regarding WLB in academia.

Figure 1

Interconnectedness of Theoretical Frameworks



Summary

The abovementioned theories can help scholars understand fathers' internal and external role conflicts and their unceasing engagement in role bargaining to fulfill their often conflicting role identities. By adding the role of a doctoral student to their multiple role identities, nontraditional doctoral student fathers add yet another role often viewed as mutually incompatible with work and family domains. This incompatibility can result in role conflicts (Goode, 1960; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020) and may lead to role strain as they attempt to establish a WLB (Goode, 1960).

Fatherhood

Over the past centuries of American history, the definition of fatherhood and fathers' primary role has shifted (Lamb, 2000; Pleck & Pleck, 1997). Fatherhood and the social context in which fathers live are multifaceted, dynamic, and deeply embedded in our society's cultural fabric. As a result, fathers' roles and definitions of fatherhood have been defined and redefined in different periods by society's cultural, socio-political, and economic values (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001).

In the American society of the 21st-century, where work is valued, and workers are needed, the traditional father's role has included being the head of the household, protector, financial provider, and primary breadwinner to the family (Lee & Lee, 2018). It has been argued that there has been an ideological shift in the orientation of men toward fatherhood with an emotional change in what fatherhood "should" look like (Dermott & Miller, 2015). Philipsen and Bostic (2010) noted that, just as younger generations of men face shifting responsibilities and divisions of labor at home and are increasingly engaged in domestic work, they are much more involved as parents than previous generations of fathers. Fathers' roles within their family life should no longer be solely that of a financial provider, as seen in the historical fathers' case.

This study positions fathers in a particular context and culture, 21st-century nontraditional doctoral student fathers--as operationally defined for this study--within the United States. Exploring the experiences of 21st-century nontraditional doctoral student fathers requires understanding the ever-evolving construct of fatherhood. It is crucial to have a basic knowledge of historical fatherhood as history can significantly inform how society conceptualizes fathers' roles in the past. This knowledge also helps us understand how

society continues to construct and shape the concept of fatherhood today. Roy (2014) stated that fatherhood is dynamic over historical and personal time, and it is a tug of war consisting of the push and pull between nurturance and provision. Fundamentally, our societal values and needs determine each member of society's roles at a given time. According to Pleck (1997), the last three centuries of American social history have featured distinct fatherhood eras.

The Earliest Known Roles of Fathers in American Society

The early phase of American societal history spans from the Puritan era of the 18th century to the colonial period of the early 19th century. Like mothers of today, colonial mothers provided much of the caretaking for their young children. However, colonial fathers were shown to have much greater responsibility for and control over their children (Pleck, 1997). As fathers were considered to have superior reasoning skills over mothers, they were the ultimate source of moral instruction and worldly judgment for the family. Due in part to this period in history, women were regarded as "bad" and more likely to be misled by passions and temptations (Pleck, 1997). From these views on women, fathers were also seen as spiritual advisors for the family (Pleck, 1997).

One of the most significant roles of fathers during this period was to ensure that their children could develop and maintain Christian ways. They were immensely interested in their children's education, not because education was respected but because children had to be literate to learn the Scriptures (Lamb, 2000). They were also intensely involved in many aspects of their children's daily lives, particularly their sons. Sons were often regarded as extensions of their fathers and were found working side by side in the fields, while fathers often counseled their daughters regarding impending marriages (Demo, 1992). However, since emotional behavior was considered a feminine trait, fathers were conditioned to refrain from expressing their feelings and preferred to express approval and disapproval (Rotundo, 1985).

In an age where social order and Christianity were highly valued, good fathers were defined as men who provided a model of "good" Christian living and whose children were well-versed in the Scriptures. Conversely, "bad" fathers were viewed as those who did not marry a young woman who became pregnant or did not provide moral and religious instruction for their children (Lamb, 2000; Pleck & Pleck, 1997). As history advanced,

fatherhood conceptualization and the societal expectations that followed it continued to evolve. One of the most significant changes to parental roles occurred due to the changing workforce demands within the United States during the early 19th to mid 20th-centuries.

Changing Parental Roles

Before the Industrial Revolution, mothers and fathers played an equal role in providing for their families through their shared responsibilities in agricultural labor (Lamb, 2000). With the Revolution's arrival, the importance of agriculture and the home industry was reduced, and a split between in and out-of-home work was forced (Lamb, 2000). This split resulted in the transformation of the conceptualization of fathers' roles within society. Economic reasons were the most compelling reason for this shift in the father's role.

During the Industrial Revolution, fatherhood's most important defining feature became being the "breadwinner" (Lamb, 2000). Now, the ideal father was a clerk or a businessman, not a farmer (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). It also caused a change in society's perception of what it meant to be a good father. Good fathers were now seen as those who provided money for their families. In contrast, bad fathers were depicted as squandering their wages and robbing their families of food and comfort (Pleck & Pleck, 1997).

While fathers remained the household's breadwinners and became more distant due to their labor force participation, mothers became more influential (Pleck, 1997). Mothers began to take on most of the child-rearing responsibilities during this time. According to Pleck (1997), parental role shifts were also associated with new ideologies about gender. The view of the woman as weak was no longer the social norm. The new gender ideology of females' "purity" and feminine characteristics such as unselfishness and nurturing was emphasized. Consequently, a woman's purity elevated her above men, making her more suitable for raising children (Pleck, 1997).

Between 1940 and 1965, during and after World War II, social conversations and criticism surrounded the increasingly imbalanced power of influence mothers had compared to fathers. This development of powerful motherly influence was primarily due to many fathers being away at war and many not returning home. Writers during this period argued that father involvement was good for their children's personal growth. Additionally, fathers provided a model of authentic manhood for their sons and an example for their daughters of

the right man to marry (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). However, very clear and established gender roles were established during these decades, limiting fathers' family involvement.

The family finances were managed by men who provided the sole family income and established their identity to the world by working. Contrastingly, women managed the home, raised the children, and ensured that all of the family's unseen needs were met. During this period, there began a focus on the father's absence from family life. This focus led to a dichotomous view of a present versus absent father construct, which negated other ways fathers could be involved (Lamb, 2000). Even when fathers were physically present, there were growing concerns as they were passive and uninvolved (Pleck, 1997).

As shown up to this point in modern history, societal values and cultures have shaped how fathers are viewed and how researchers have studied fathers (Miller & Dermott, 2015). Research has led to many definitions and models of fatherhood over the past 70 years. A brief overview of some of the more well-studied models is now provided.

Historical Models and Definitions of Fatherhood

The discussion of fatherhood until the 1970s was centered around the model of "patriarchal fatherhood." In this predominant model, fathers served as ultimate authority figures, were expected to divide their responsibility as breadwinners with the caregiving tasks of mothers and saw their primary mission as their families' financial providers (Banchefsky & Park, 2016; LaRossa, 2004). As mothers entered the workforce increasingly, they spent less time in the home (Daipuria & Kakar, 2013; Gatrell et al., 2013). By the mid-1970s, the rise in working mothers contributed to the development of a vision for a new model of fatherhood, the "new nurturing father" (Lamb, 2000). Swiftly, fathers were encouraged--even expected--to assume equal roles in child-rearing and housework, primarily due to the increased power of maternal influence (Griswold, 2013).

As women moved out of the home and into the paid labor market in the 20th-century, changes began within families, such as the weakening concept of fathers as breadwinners and mothers as caregivers. In particular, the change in fathers' roles within the family was especially dramatic, as the fathers' role in caregiving was as fundamental as that of traditional breadwinning (Schoppe-Sullivan & Fagan, 2020). This new vision for fathers included societal expectations to serve as children's friends, playmates, caregivers,

protectors, and nurses. Fathers were no longer solely expected to provide for their families and be the authoritarian of the family.

The changing expectations described above were hastened by the feminist movement and the “gender revolution” of the 1960s and 1970s (Raley et al., 2012). The expectations for the new nurturing father led to the emergence of the “co-parent father.” The co-parent father was expected to be an equal participant with the child’s mother in their child’s overall care (Rotundo, 1985). However, the gender revolution’s aspirations never materialized as research found that men never reached the level of housework as their wives, and it was coined the “stalled revolution” (Raley et al., 2012). As the notion of the co-parent father arose, the term “deadbeat dad” became prevalent during the same period (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). Deadbeat dads were described as non-involved nor supportive fathers (Pleck & Pleck, 1997).

The deadbeat dad phenomenon, once perceived as a lower-class problem, increased among the middle class (Furstenberg, 1988). Furstenberg (1988) argued that the deadbeat dad and the co-parent father had come from a cultural decline in the male provider’s role. Ehrenreich (2011) argued that the Playboy philosophy of the 1950s also coincided with the period when men began to loosen their commitment to family, marriage, and fatherhood. Furthermore, family support was a burden men no longer desired to carry. Pleck (1997) anticipated that the tension would continue to increase between the breadwinner model and new fatherhood concepts, which called for increased involvement.

From this period until today, fathers’ call to active parenting and involvement in their children’s day-to-day care has become more widespread and culturally accepted, or even the norm of parenting for fathers (Doucet & Merla, 2007; O’Brien & Wall, 2017). However, the father’s role as breadwinner is still culturally dominant today due to its significant historical view, which holds that fathers have the ultimate responsibility for and influence on their children--and come second to mothers regarding routine caretaking (Fagan et al., 2016). This view of fathers is despite their desire to play a more prominent role and be emotionally invested in their children and their care (Goldscheider et al., 2015).

21st-century Fatherhood

Research from various countries (Bosoni & Westerling, 2018; Bosoni et al., 2016) reports the growing importance of the father figure in the family context globally. These studies reflect the general understanding that fatherhood is evolving from their sole role as

the family financial provider and combining with caregiving responsibilities, defining today's "good father" (Ladge et al., 2015).

According to Dermott (2008), the classification between the concepts of a breadwinner and an involved father as opposites is created by a societal predisposition to dichotomize truth and apply opposite categories, although the two elements can coexist. Fathers are now faced with the same clash of social ideals that mothers first encountered in the 1960s and 1970s--how can one be a good parent and a good worker? Furthermore, they face the additional challenge of understanding where they fit into the family (Griswold, 2013).

This challenge may be remarkably accurate for fathers within the United States, where there is a litany of ever-expanding views of fatherhood within specific societal and cultural contexts. Men's difficulty forming a parental identity seems firmly rooted in culture, as the mother's role is better socially defined than the father's (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2021). Furthermore, girls are socialized to perform caregiving functions from an early age, which makes them more able to explore the parental domain (Fadjukoff et al., 2016). As Lewis and O'Brien (1987) stated, men have a less precise "job description" as fathers than women do as mothers. As is the case with definitions and societal constructs of fatherhood, there is a lack of consensus about how best to assess fathers' role (Dermott & Miller, 2015).

The shifting dynamics between parental work have been highlighted in recent literature. Over the past 50 years, fathers have more than doubled their time in childcare and housework (Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020). Working-age women (ages 18-64) increased their average paid work hours from 15 to 25 hours per week in 1965, compared to 15 hours per week in 2010 (Parker & Wang, 2013). Working-age men (ages 18-64) decreased their average paid work week from 46 to 35 hours by 2011 over the same period (Parker & Wang, 2013). As a result, by 2011, women had cut their housework time in half, from 28 to 15 hours per week, and men had increased their housework time from four to nine hours per week, compared to the 1960s (Parker & Wang, 2013). Although there has been much attention paid to the shifting interaction of work and family from a gendered perspective, most research has remained focused on women's experiences.

Fathers in the 21st-century have a greater desire and willingness to be more involved in practical caregiving actions (O'Brien & Wall, 2017). Recent research by Frank and

Frenette (2021) found a 4% increase in reported contributions among heterosexual men from 2017 to 2020 with meal preparation, laundry, and housework. Nonetheless, mothers continue to do significantly more than fathers, particularly those actions aforementioned (Schoppe-Sullivan & Fagan, 2020).

In a study by Locke and Yarwood (2017), fathers were interviewed to understand how social discourses impacted parenting discourses and their careers. Some participants reported that their jobs or professions did not enable them to take more time off to be with their children. Others spoke about how masculinity is linked to employment status and how leaving work to care for children can damage that identity. The researchers discovered that fathers who were the primary caregivers did so for various reasons despite society's gendered parental expectations. Fathers in the study discussed how social expectations to be the breadwinner and to have a masculine persona kept them from becoming the caregivers they wanted to be for their families (Locke & Yarwood, 2017). Minnotte (2021) discovered this sentiment to be similar for academic fathers who find it difficult to be actively engaged with their children when combining the ideal-worker norm and masculinity expectations regarding their family role, further confirming previous research finding that men experience considerable work-life-conflict (Shockley et al., 2017).

While an increased interest in fatherhood research has occurred, some authors have questioned the idea of fatherhood transformation, questioning what is truly "new" in the parenting style of today's fathers. Furthermore, other studies have highlighted negative aspects of fatherhood or even questioned why fatherhood should matter to men (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). Male identity still seems strongly linked to the idea of being a breadwinner, a man who takes care of the economic support of the family through extra-domestic work, so that, alongside the desire to be a good father and a father involved in childcare, there is also a desire to be a good financial provider.

While studies have illustrated the emergence of a modern paradigm of fatherhood, it cannot be concluded that the breadwinner model has been radically overcome as many fathers continue to articulate financial provision as a hallmark of good fathering (Perra & Ruspini, 2013). Accordingly, the traditional versus new fatherhood models and changes in cultural expectations have led to a substantial debate on father roles in work and family life in many countries, including the United States.

In contrast to the prevalence of the quantitative paradigm in fatherhood research, the renewed sociological interest in the family in the last decades of the 20th-century was primarily based on qualitative research. The mothers' perspectives principally informed much of early qualitative research within this area, leading to a desire among some researchers to emphasize fathers' perspectives. However, only in the first decades of the 21st-century has qualitative work explored fatherhood from both fathers' and mothers' perspectives in greater depth (Schoppe-Sullivan & Fagan, 2020). Research methods that sought to explore fatherhood as both identity and behavior as told through their own words of their experiences and what that means regarding their identity development have come to be at the forefront of much current fatherhood research (Day et al., 2004; Dermott, 2008).

Fatherhood Identity Research

Lamb et al. (1987) presented a seminal conceptualization of fatherhood participation as fathers having a commitment, being accessible, and displaying responsibility for their children. Since then, this work has been criticized, highlighting the lack of attention to what fatherly participation could mean for fathers themselves and its emphasis on childcare activities, which excluded other elements of modern fatherhood (Dermott, 2008). Following this vital work, a proliferation of fatherhood studies in the 1990s employed quantitative methods, which was increasingly a cause for concern. Most critiques concerned the preoccupation with the division of paid and unpaid labor between mothers and fathers and what that meant regarding being a good father from the conceptualization of the new nurturing father ideal (Dermott, 2008; Lamb, 2000).

Following Marsiglio's (1992) use of identity theory to describe stepfathers' views of the role of parenting, Ihinger-Tallman et al. (1993) used identity theory to create a middle-range theoretical model to explain intrapersonal and interpersonal processes at work in fathers who had moved out of a marriage and how these processes had an impact on their continued relationship with their children. These early efforts have served as a foundation for subsequent work from well-known scholars (e.g., Marsiglio et al., 2000; Pleck, 1997), suggesting the potential use of father identity as a predictor of father behavior. Fatherhood research applying identity theory has increased since. Attention to identity and fatherhood also aligns with growing policy concerns about enhancing responsible fatherhood and emphasizing the new nurturing father ideal (Lamb, 2010).

A significant focus of scholarship that followed these foundational studies dealt with the role of “salience” in explaining fathering behaviors. Because individuals have multiple roles, they can take on any number of identities. The more salient identities are to an individual, the more likely they would influence attitudes and behaviors than less salient identities (Pasley et al., 2014; Stryker, 1968, 1987). Men who see being a father as their most salient identity may be more actively engaged parents than men with a less salient father identity (Goldberg, 2015; Hofferth et al., 2013).

For example, a nontraditional doctoral student father who sees their most salient identity as a father may spend less time with their academics to spend more time with their family. This may lead to role conflicts between their student and father identities, as fatherhood requires ongoing role bargaining within and outside the family (Shezifi, 2004). Moreover, nontraditional doctoral student fathers’ identity as workers must also be accounted for in their role-bargaining experiences. Therefore, fathers’ role identification, skills, and commitment influence fathering behaviors (Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1993; Pleck, 1997).

Identity theory does not just say individual identity is important; it tells the story of how identity is essential and how it ultimately determines fathering behavior. The theory speaks to how the father’s status is associated with their self-concept and to “who the father is” and “who he is as a father” in the process of emerging and developing as a father (Shockley et al., 2017). Furthermore, fathers’ demographics and cultural influences may significantly impact their identity and are essential to review. However, one of the most significant drawbacks in the fatherhood literature is the lack of distinction between father types (e.g., biological father, stepfather, single father). The following section will briefly discuss fatherhood identity within the literature that has resembled some distinction between types.

Father Types

More so than motherhood, fatherhood is shaped by contextual factors (Marsiglio, 1993). Prior research has shown that contextual factors such as family of origin, religion, culture, relationship with the child’s mother, incarceration, and social class affect various fathering aspects (Leath, 2017; Varga & Gee, 2017). With the continued diversification of the U.S. population, it is critical to be conscious of fathers’ various father statuses, ethnicities, cultures, and sexual orientations, which also shape their father identities.

The following review of father types is abridged due to this dissertation's scope and the limited space to discuss the complexities associated with various father identities. The following father types were chosen based on recent data indicating an increase in single fathers, stepfathers, and society's general emphasis on fathers participating in co-parenting. According to the United States Census Bureau (2016), 50.7 million children under 18 live within two-parent households, 17.2 million live within a single-mother household, and 3 million live with their fathers only. Additionally, fatherhood research on minority fathers was chosen to highlight the impact cultures and backgrounds have on father identity development and were selected as these populations represent the fastest-growing minority fathers within the United States.

Co-parenting Fathers. Co-parenting is a term that refers to the interaction and coordination efforts, or lack thereof, between two parents when it comes to child-rearing. The last 30 years have seen increased attention paid to fathers' involvement in their children's lives, which can be correlated with men's changing role and place in American society (Mazza & Perry, 2017). The traditional co-parenting structure, which entails a mother and father cohabiting and sharing parental responsibilities, has resulted in significant research on the gendered roles embedded within the context of two-parent heterosexual couples (Chesley, 2011; Dufur et al., 2010). Despite widespread agreement that co-parenting is a multidimensional construct, disagreements about which characteristics are more central or peripheral persist (Terry, 2020). Co-parenting conceptualizations described in research have primarily emphasized three dimensions (a) parental support; (b) parental competition or undermining; (c) parental involvement in the co-parenting relationship and child-rearing responsibilities (Adamsons et al., 2007).

Supportive co-parenting refers to the degree of mutual support, cooperation, unity, encouragement, and consensus expressed among parenting partners when involved in childcare. The supportive features of co-parenting have been associated with positive outcomes such as increased couple and parent-child relationship satisfaction, father involvement, and child adjustment (Murphy et al., 2017).

A form of parental undermining and a source of significant conflict in co-parenting relationships is the phenomenon of "gatekeeping." Allen and Hawkins (1999) first defined maternal gatekeeping as "a collection of beliefs and behaviors that ultimately inhibit a

collaborative effort between men and women in family work by limiting men's opportunities for learning and growing through caring for home and children" (p. 200). Gatekeeping is a pattern of interaction that emerges from co-parenting (Gaunt, 2008) and is most frequently associated with mothers (Sano et al., 2008). Gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors often obstruct cooperative efforts between parents. They may block a father's access to his child when these beliefs and behaviors limit the father's ability to engage in childcare (Tremblay & Pierce, 2011). Sano et al. (2008) argued that the concept of gatekeeping is skewed in favor of fathers and that only a small subset of a sample of women in their study described deliberate gatekeeping efforts to restrict or deny access to fathers.

Fagan and Barnett (2003) discovered a negative correlation between maternal gatekeeping and nonresidential fathers' involvement. The researchers found that the father's residential status directly correlated with mothers' gatekeeping behaviors in their quantitative study of 102 fathers—including 30 nonresidential fathers. The authors hypothesized that mothers may prefer to manage childcare tasks independently but are forced to rely on fathers out of necessity. Recent studies have also observed that the more salient a mother's identity is, the greater the chance it can lead to maternal gatekeeping (Hauser, 2015). Fagan (2021) found that nonresident fathers' perceived closeness with their children was affected by the degree to which mothers engaged in gatekeeping, which impacted how much they valued their status as fathers.

Other changes in fatherhood and family formation have resulted in the emergence of so-called "nontraditional" families, including nonresidential fathers, single fathers, and stepfathers (Coontz, 2015). Although many studies make no distinction between biological fathers and stepfathers, some studies have examined populations outside the "norm" of biological fathers who live with their children. For all fathers, particularly those who do not cohabit with their children's mother, cooperative co-parenting can positively impact father involvement and has been found to improve father involvement and strengthen father identity (Harper & Fine, 2006). The complexity of fatherhood is further magnified when stepfamilies are created.

Stepfathers. Stepfamilies are formed when at least one partner has a child from a previous relationship, resulting in enormous variability and complexity in the family structure (Raley & Sweeney, 2020). The number of stepfamilies has increased in earlier

decades, and stepfather-led families account for approximately 86% of all stepfamilies (Gold, 2019). According to previous research, enacting fathering behaviors has a transformative effect on men (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). Volling and Palkovitz (2021) echoed this assertion 20 years later when they found that fathering indeed plays a significant role in the lives of men, which impacts the salience of their father identity.

The salience of a fathering role varies according to its internalization, intrinsic reward, and extrinsic reinforcement. Stepfathers' role ambiguity and confusion have been well documented (Ganong et al., 2019; King & Lindstrom, 2016). Stepfather identity is critical in determining stepfather involvement, and various factors influence their identity development. Pettigrew (2013) used an instrumental case study to examine the development of a stepfather's identity. Interviews with the father and his wife about their lives were conducted, as was a semi-structured interview with his stepson. This study shed light on the father's transitions and subsequent changes as a stepfather. Additionally, this case study discovered the critical role of stepfather behaviors in developing a father's identity. Therefore, a father's identity significantly impacts how he enacts (step) fathering behaviors. According to Palkovitz (2002), the term "father" is inherently relational: "A father is only a father in relation to a child" (p. 3). Notably, one must remember that fathering is a relational act, not an autonomous one.

Regrettably, few men value their role as stepfathers. White (1994) summarizes Thoits' (1992) study on stepparenting this way: "Being a stepparent was about as important as belonging to a voluntary organization or having a hobby" (p. 111). This unimportance may be affected by remaining negative attitudes toward stepfamilies, same-sex stepfamilies, and all "untraditional" families, which are persistent in the 21st-century (Valiquette-Tessier et al., 2019).

As stepfathers also obtain the role of husband, they face significant challenges as they navigate the stepfamily. Lucier-Greer et al. (2012) and Mirecki et al. (2013) discovered that, compared to first-time married couples, stepfamily couples reported higher levels of marital instability, tension, disagreement, open criticism, and marital conflict. These studies posited that stepfamily husbands' feelings of spousal rejection and lower levels of integration into their stepfather role impacted the husband's overall satisfaction with their marriage, potentially impacting the role salience of their stepfather identity.

Single-Fathers. Single-parent families comprise 31.7 percent of all households in the United States today (United States Census Bureau, 2016). Since 1960, the percentage of single-father families has risen from 1% to 8% (Livingston, 2013). In 2015, single-father families accounted for about 2.3% of all single-parent families (United States Census Bureau, 2016). The majority of single fathers are non-Hispanic, white men in their 30s and 40s who earn more than the federal poverty line (Livingston, 2013). Additionally, single-father families may include widowed, divorced, separated, adoptive fathers, or those who have never married (Lewis, 1978). Each of these father characteristics carries a unique life story and experiences that cannot be minimized when comparing parental identities and roles.

The complex issue of balancing family and work, long viewed exclusively as a female concern, is increasingly seen as a concern for fathers (Bosoni & Mazzucchelli, 2019). Recent research suggests men and women report similar levels of work-life conflict, contrary to widespread beliefs that women experience more challenges with WLB (Shockley et al., 2017). This research strengthens Coles (2009) findings, which demonstrated that fathers also struggled with their identities as fathers and that in a single-parent situation, there is a desire to "prove" that they are capable of traditional "mothering" roles such as providing total care for their children. Additionally, it counters the conjecture made by Hilton et al. (2001) that single fathers do not face the same difficulties as single mothers in managing single parenthood's additional responsibilities.

Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2010) discovered gender-related differences in parents' roles and responsibilities in single-parent households. A more concerning effect on single fathers' involvement with their children is that after obtaining custody, single fathers spend less time with their children, possibly as a result of working more to compensate for the lack of a secondary source of income (Lin & Chen, 2006). These challenges may be exacerbated for single fathers who lack a partner's support. They must schedule childcare, care for sick children, and allocate their time and resources between work, school, and family, which can lead to unique responsibilities and felt role strain (Freeman, 2015).

Racial and Ethnic Minority Fathers

A factor that plays a crucial role in identity development is that of one's culture. An individual is part of the broader social context in which cultural factors shape stereotypes, attitudes, and conceptions of motherhood and fatherhood (Cabrera et al., 2000). In the United

States, there has been a growing emphasis on fathers of many racial and ethnic groups, particularly Black (African American and Afro-Caribbean) and Latino fathers (Cooper et al., 2021; Fagan, 2021; Planalp et al., 2021). The following sections highlight Black and Hispanic/Latino fathers. These father identities were chosen out of the many cultures and population demographics as they are two of the largest and fastest-growing populations in the United States, the geographic boundary for this study.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2019), individuals identifying as being of Hispanic/Latino origin account for over 60 million people, making them the largest minority ethnicity. The U.S. Black population is also growing. In 2019, 46.8 million people in the United States identified their race as Black, either alone or as part of a multiracial or ethnic background--up from 36.2 million in 2000 (Tamir, 2021). As these two demographic identities within the United States continue to increase, it is essential to continue research on fathers within these populations.

Finally, the cultural assumptions about families in the United States primarily reflect middle-class, white, heterosexual families' experiences (Townsend, 2002). These homogenous demographics have shaped much of earlier fatherhood and identity development research. As discussed above, parenthood, specifically fatherhood, is a complex, constantly expanding, intersecting synthesis of identities, roles, and societal expectations.

Black Fathers. Culture is significant when examining aspects of Black fatherhood because it can influence the level and type of involvement and the identities that fathers adopt (Hofferth, 2003). DeKanter (1987) described fathers' ongoing negotiation between three levels of meaning in one's identity (a) the father's person (i.e., the father's embodiment); (b) the father's position (i.e., the father's socio-cultural capital); (c) the father's symbol (i.e., the father's role in his child's life). These three levels are especially relevant for Black fathers, given their vulnerability to both individual and systemic racism (McAdoo, 1993).

McAdoo (1988, 1993) urged educators to approach their work with Black fathers from a systems perspective, recognizing how racism affects Black fathers' identity, mental health, and ability to perform roles. Historically, research on Black fathers before the 1980s portrayed Black men as dysfunctional, deviant, and having little or no involvement in their children's lives (Smith et al., 2005). As much research emphasized their absence rather than

their presence (Reynolds, 2009), McAdoo (1988) concluded that Black fathers are, at best, aloof and, at worst, absent. Additionally, Black fathers have frequently been portrayed as "deadbeat dads" or insufficient financial providers, creating a negative image of Black fatherhood and identity (Abdill, 2018).

Recent fatherhood scholars have sought to reframe the narrative of Black fathers to make it more representative (Abdill, 2018; Coles & Green, 2009). Several researchers have examined Black fathers' perceptions of fatherhood (Coles, 2002; Hammond et al., 2011). Coles (2002) explored why 10 single Black fathers chose to parent full-time and obtain custody of their children. Fathers reflected on their family-of-origin relationships and used their relationship with their fathers to guide their parenting and shape their family values. While this study demonstrated the importance of family on fathering motivations, it did not address how perceptions are constructed or shaped by a father's identity or involvement.

Since the last decade of the 20th-century, scholars have argued for increased research into how Black fathers conceptualize fatherhood to incorporate their identities (Connor & White, 2007). The perceptions of Black fathers' identity significantly impact their involvement with their children (Hammond et al., 2011). Cooper et al. (2021) discovered the central mediating role of Black father identity, which includes public regard (how others perceive Black fathers) and private regard (personally held beliefs about Black fathers), between stereotype awareness and involvement in children's homes and academic activities, as well as communicative support of children.

Media and societal representations of Black fathers frequently portray these men negatively as both absent from their children's lives and unimportant to family life, which is particularly true for nonresidential and unmarried Black fathers. Research has shown that Black fathers are keenly aware of these negative stereotypes (Cooper et al., 2021). Schwing et al. (2013) found that awareness of absent fatherhood stereotypes was related to more significant stress among Black men. These studies highlight that while broader fathering roles are salient, beliefs specific to their identity as Black fathers are commonly articulated and endorsed (Cooper et al., 2021; McDougal III & George III, 2016). Reynolds et al. (2015) noted that fathering role identities reflected a double consciousness, being aware of general fathering beliefs and holding beliefs about one's identity as a Black father.

Researchers have established that religiosity and spirituality are integral components of Black culture and significantly impact Black fathers and their parenting, serving as role models for the family Biblical compass (Murray & Hwang, 2015). While early father roles included being the spiritual leader of their families, it is demonstrated that this role has a more significant influence on Black fatherhood identity. Within Black family culture, the church is a primary agent of socialization in the father's role. The church serves as a space for community elders to impart their wisdom and knowledge of Black family values to younger members. As such, fathering practices, beliefs, and identities are passed down through generations (Brown et al., 2018). Mattis et al. (2021) found in their qualitative study of low-income residential Black fathers that fathers described a good father as providing a religious or moral foundation for conveying hope and a sense of peace in their children's lives.

Studies that have examined Black father identities revealed a consistent theme: father relationships with their fathers are a significant predictor of father identity salience (Gordon et al., 2013; Roy, 2006). Fathers either emulated what their fathers did or sought to fill emotional voids by being unlike their fathers. Murray and Hwang (2015) conducted a study that included eight married Black fathers, of which six experienced adolescent life with limited interaction with their fathers. The findings of this study suggested that the fathers chose to parent their children due to a lack of fatherly parenting they received growing up.

Hispanic/Latino Fathers. Hispanic or Latino is a term used in the United States to refer to Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Since 2000, the Latino population growth has accounted for half the population growth of the United States, and in 2016, Latinos made up 18% of the population, second only to white Americans (Flores-González, 2017). Today, those identifying as Hispanic/Latino number over 60 million, making them the largest minority ethnicity (United States Census Bureau, 2019).

Research on Latino fathers has focused on the many facets of men's lives that intersect with culture. Compared to the general population in the United States, Hispanic/Latino families are more likely to be working poor, two-parent families, and have responsibilities for immediate family as well as their extended families (Cabrera et al., 2004; Coltrane et al., 2004). Furthermore, Hispanic/Latino fathers are more likely than white

fathers to support traditional values in marriage, mothers' caregiving roles, and an egalitarian household and are most likely to be the breadwinners of the family (Hofferth, 2003).

Nonetheless, resident Hispanic/Latino fathers spend more time with their children (Yeung et al., 2001) and take on more caregiving responsibilities than white fathers. Most Latino men reside in the same household as their children and, consequently, engage in relatively high levels of involvement in caregiving with their infants and physical play compared to fathers from other ethnic groups (Zhang et al., 2020). In their study of low-income Mexican-American fathers, Coltrane et al. (2004) found that Mexican-American fathers were more involved in both masculine (hobbies, games, spectator events) and feminine (shopping, cooking, reading) activities with their children when compared to American white men. Furthermore, these fathers "exhibited high levels of commitment to family and spent considerable time interacting with their children in nurturing and emotional ways" (Coltrane et al., 2004, p. 185).

Research has found that Latinos born in the United States have different resources and views about their relationships than Latino parents who were born elsewhere and subsequently immigrated to the United States. Planalp et al. (2021) found that Latino resident fathers who had lived in the United States for a more extended period and had acquired more American-held beliefs about the more involved father had a higher identity salience (fathering role as core to identity) and a lower traditional gender role ideology.

These findings directly contradict the stereotypes of Hispanic/Latino fathers by the majority culture as macho, authoritarian disciplinarians, and uninvolved in family life (Planalp et al., 2021). González-López (2004) provided a warning that to continue to interpret Latino culture through culturally defined concepts such as machismo, hembrismo, familismo, Madonna/whore, etc., is likely to provide an inaccurate portrayal of Latino culture. "Besides the need to recognize not one but many 'Latino cultures,' an overemphasis on these categories of analysis may promote inaccurate images of Latinas and Latinos who live in the United States..." (González-López, 2004, p. 1128). However, Latino fathers who have a strong sense of family (familismo), who believe their role as a father is rewarding and has a high level of role salience may view themselves as strong supporters of and role models for their children, thereby increasing father involvement (Glass & Owen, 2010).

Summary

Defining fatherhood today is not an easy task. As shown, the role of fathers has changed tremendously and swiftly within the last 70 years. Researchers suggest there are numerous racial and ethnic differences in perceptions of fatherhood. There is insufficient space to discuss all the distinctions (the interested reader refers to Miller & Maiter, 2008). As research on fatherhood continues to expand and increasingly includes examining how fathers negotiate their role identities, additional analysis is critical to broadening our understanding of how all fathers negotiate their multiple identities, including that of a worker and student.

21st-century fathers are less likely to have a healthy WLB (Ladge et al., 2015). Gatrell et al. (2013) argued that the rise of “two-career couples” as a dominant lifestyle was the most crucial societal shift in recent U.S. history. This transition has and continues to affect all parents, maybe even more so within academia. The following section will address the literature on academic parents’ attempts to negotiate a WLB, including faculty, graduate students, and doctoral student parents.

Parents in Academia

Academic parenting literature most often combines mothers’ and fathers’ experiences (Myers-Walls et al., 2011; Sallee, 2014) or analyzes only mothers’ experiences (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Literature on doctoral student parents’ experiences is scarce, and even rarer are studies focusing on doctoral student fathers. Therefore, the following literature review primarily highlights faculty and graduate student parents’ experiences as a whole.

Faculty Parents

Work-life balance (WLB) discourse began around questions about how the rising number of working mothers in the workforce will affect home and life structure (Daipuria & Kakar, 2013; Wada et al., 2015). With that, it is essential to recognize that working parents have reported experiencing role conflicts in many career areas (Wortman et al., 1991). Role conflicts for faculty parents stem from their competing role identities, and research focusing on this group of parents has often highlighted the use of role strain theory (Kinman & Jones, 2008; Sallee, 2014). Over the last two decades, it has been argued that WLB has taken over an essential place in higher education literature (Sallee & Lester, 2017).

Research has found that faculty parents are adversely affected by the struggle to fulfill the ideal worker role and involved parents simultaneously (Kinman & Jones, 2008).

They must negotiate their roles in the "greedy" institutions of academia and the family (Coser, 1974). As both roles expect to be prioritized over the other, these institutions have unceasing demands for exclusive and undivided loyalty (Chesser, 2015; Moreau & Kerner, 2015). Unsurprisingly, Wolf-Wendel and Ward (2006) described parents within the academy as having difficulty finding time to perform the necessary parenting and academic work. Studies have concluded that elite occupations like higher education have too many demands leaving workers stretched far too thin (Wynn et al., 2018).

Faculty parents have reported several barriers as they've strived for a WLB (Kinman & Jones, 2008; Trussell, 2015). Using Marks and MacDermid's (1996) definition of WLB as the ability to participate in each role fully, Kinman and Jones (2008) found that almost half of the faculty parents in their sample conveyed that the universities in which they were employed were "not at all" helpful in their efforts to achieve a WLB. They discussed the lack of WLB among faculty members as partially related to the need for academics to work from home during the evenings and weekends, thus preventing faculty from fully attending to their parental roles (Kinman & Jones, 2008). It should be noted that the study consisted of a sample of 844 lecturers and researchers at 99 universities in the United Kingdom and that faculty within the United States may feel differently. However, academia's culture values the ideal worker (Wright et al., 2003). It suggests the results may be similar in both regions, leading to role conflicts within their competing identities.

Some researchers have suggested that academia and parenthood are incompatible, and the idea of balance is unattainable in that it assumes an "even balance" between work and life is possible (Sallee & Lester, 2017). While there is a lack of WLB for many faculty (Denson et al., 2018), the effects of being a parent on faculty mothers have been well documented. The COVID-19 pandemic has led women academics to face an increasingly disproportionate amount of work-life challenges affecting their academic work as they are more likely to have reduced their time spent conducting research than men (Myers et al., 2020)--compounding a litany of concerns for women academics.

The influence of a prominent body of family research within academia establishes the impact of social and cultural factors related to faculty mothers' parenting choices. Several articles and books on motherhood in academia have recently been published (e.g., Minnotte, 2021; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012). Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2012) discussed the trials and

tribulations of the academic mother and the interaction between faculty work and family life. They stated, “The general narrative suggests that both faculty life and parenthood are all-consuming and irreconcilable and that only a fool would attempt to balance a long-term academic career with a desire for children and family life” (p. 1).

Before Ward and Wolf-Wendel’s statement, Evans and Grant (2008) argued that while many assume that WLB is possible--perhaps even likely--on college and university campuses, it tends not to exist. Recent texts such as *Mama, Ph.D.*, argue that mothers of all professions and backgrounds have added responsibilities that men cannot understand (Evans & Grant, 2008). Even when a mother works in the academy where feminist qualities and logic abound, the literature highlights the ever-lasting concern in modern American society, including academia, that equitable distribution of parental responsibilities is lacking. Instead, it remains more likely that the academy will re-create gendered parenting structures that are already common in society.

Academic motherhood literature may help a father see things from a mother’s perspective and identify with her concerns. However, it falls short of discussing how the academic father identifies as a parent. Furthermore, it does not show how the social outlook of his WLB affects how he identifies success or failure as an academic father. Recognizing that scholarly works such as those mentioned above are vital to understanding faculty mothers, they do not include male faculty. Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2012) acknowledged this shortcoming in their work. They argued that “the focus here is intentionally limited to how academic women manage work and family at the early and mid-career stages of tenure-line positions” (p. 3).

Looking at literature focusing solely on the difficulties faculty fathers face in the academy, Marotte et al. (2011), in their book *Papa, Ph.D.*, collected 30 stories of male academics and their struggles with WLB. This primary text came out of response to the highly celebrated *Mama, Ph.D.* (Evans & Grant, 2008) and is one of the few written works that shows the similarity between mother and father faculty. While the majority of parental literature confirms mothers have more familial responsibilities than fathers, it is critical to read the narratives of fathers sharing stress and burden with their mother counterparts regarding achieving a WLB, nonetheless. Texts such as *Papa, Ph.D.*, show that balancing roles between family and academia is never easy, regardless of gender (Marotte et al., 2011).

While *Papa, Ph.D.*, was the first text to focus on academic fathers, faculty fathers' experiences and the ideal worker concept were brought to light in the text *Faculty Fathers* (Sallee, 2014). Like *Papa, Ph.D.*, this text is a collection of works from faculty fathers highlighting their experiences negotiating a WLB. These stories are a compilation of a series of empirical studies conducted by Sallee utilizing the conceptualization of the ideal worker norm within academia and the effects those expectations have on the experiences of faculty fathers regarding their roles as workers and fathers.

While fatherhood remains less researched than motherhood within academia, it is evident that tensions still exist. As a result, more research on the academic father is needed. One area that is completely neglected in this area of research is the doctoral student father. More research on the father, who is already an academic, and the father trying to become one would help unravel conflicting ideas about parenting and its relationship with academia.

Graduate Student Parents

Graduate student parents (GSP) are individuals responsible for children, whether biological, step, or adopted, while enrolled in a graduate program (Theisen et al., 2018). An adverse climate towards parenthood in academia contributes to student parents' invisibility (Kulp, 2016; Mason et al., 2013; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Trepal et al., 2014). This climate may lead this student population to experience negative attitudes and behaviors, making them feel marginalized (Grady et al., 2014). Perhaps for these reasons, GSPs have been underserved by institutions, and studies focusing on their experiences have been rare (Dolson & Deemer, 2020). Furthermore, the limited existing research tends to combine all graduate students' demographics versus focusing solely on fathers (Sallee, 2014; Springer et al., 2009).

The lives of graduate students are marked by high expectations (Moreau & Kerner, 2015), guilt (Sverdlik et al., 2018), and stress (Grady et al., 2014). There are several similar themes when comparing GSPs and graduate students without children; however, these themes have been experienced differently depending on parental status. For example, GSPs, like those without children, felt guilty because they struggled to meet high expectations (Moreau & Kerner, 2015). These expectations were seemingly never met due to their ambiguous and open-ended nature (Dillon, 2012; Grady et al., 2014).

According to Sverdlik et al. (2018), doctoral students often experience a guilt cycle. In their study, GSPs felt guilty about wasting their time on social activities as they were viewed as distracting to program progress. When they took time for family activities, they felt guilty about not working on their schoolwork, such as dissertations. GSPs' guilt from school concerns resulted in additional guilt due to spending less time with their family than desired or expected (Chesser, 2015; Sallee, 2014). This experience is particularly prevalent for graduate student mothers (Kulp, 2016; Lynch, 2008).

In addition to the idea that GSPs experience more intense feelings of guilt than childless students, researchers have suggested that they experience different forms of isolation (Grady et al., 2014; Sallee, 2014). In a qualitative study of 17 participants enrolled in master's, professional, and doctoral programs, graduate students without children reported feeling isolated because they did not have enough time to develop or maintain close relationships with spouses and romantic partners (Grady et al., 2014). Furthermore, GSPs may be at risk of isolation because they maintain fewer friendships to eliminate roles, which would lead to an increase in role strain (Sallee, 2015).

Sallee (2015) conducted a study to examine how graduate student parents carried out their various academic, professional, and family responsibilities. She interviewed 18 participants, 12 women, and six men, from 10 different U.S. universities. The interviews focused on the benefits and challenges that parents experienced while pursuing their degrees. The findings showed that time management, support from colleagues and faculty, strategic professional decisions, and prioritization of roles contributed to their ability to reduce role conflicts. Sallee (2015) noted that regardless of how their time was spent, participants reported their roles as parents were always put ahead of their other roles as students and workers.

When paired with the socialized expectations of being a graduate student, the addition of parenting and work creates a juggling act of considerable stress (Moreau & Kerner, 2015). WLB for graduate students may be considered in terms of achievement, enjoyment, and satisfaction with the amount and quality of time allocated to their various roles within school, work, and life (Martinez et al., 2013). "Work" includes coursework, research requirements, career and professional development activities, and other academic activities undertaken by graduate students. "Life," on the other hand, encompasses non-academic, personal

components of graduate student life, such as family and social life and work-related non-school activities (Martinez et al., 2013).

What does role bargaining look like for the nontraditional doctoral student worker, who has an additional role as a worker? This study aimed to fill the literature gap as WLB in higher education has been primarily studied in the context of faculty (Marshall et al., 2012; Moyer et al., 1999; Stimpson & Filer, 2011). Fewer studies have focused on graduate student parents' experiences of role bargaining to achieve a work-life balance. Faculty parents and graduate student parents have some similarities and significant differences to highlight--which can affect their WLB due to the impact of role strain.

Faculty/Graduate Student Comparison

GSPs' experiences are in many ways similar to those of faculty parents. Several key themes have been identified that link all types of academic parents (Grady et al., 2014) including time constraints and time management (Estes, 2011; Martinez et al., 2013; Moreau & Kerner, 2015), guilt (Brooks, 2015; Dillon, 2012; Sallee, 2015; Sverdlik et al., 2018), stress (Dillon, 2012), and childcare (Moreau & Kerner, 2015). Conversely, in some ways, their experiences are unique.

For example, financial concerns affect GSPs (Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Myers-Walls et al., 2011), while financial difficulties have not been reported in faculty-parent studies. As a result of limited finances, GSPs experience anxiety (Moreau & Kerner, 2015) and increased role conflict (Home, 1998). These students may need to choose between relying on student loans to fully cover their families for each semester (Brown & Nichols, 2013) and forfeiting school time so they can instead give priority to attending classes, caring for children, and working outside the home (Home, 1998).

As shown above, the literature highlights the unceasing challenges many GSPs have faced in their academic careers. While discussions focusing solely on graduate student mothers are rare in literature, the unfortunate truth is that "the voice of fathers is virtually absent from the literature on the conflict between education and parenthood..." (Estes, 2011, p. 203). Additionally, few higher education scholars have addressed the WLB of doctoral students as part of graduate education reform. Nontraditional doctoral student fathers offer a unique perspective on life as parents while negotiating their multiple role identities as

parents, workers, and students. This study aimed to begin a more meaningful discourse on the WLB experience of this subset of doctoral students.

Doctoral Student Parents

The ivory tower is where gender equality resides, or so many believe, but scholars have found evidence against this perception (Evans & Grant, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012). Although all parents within academia may struggle, literature typically focuses on the dilemma academic mothers face when attempting to negotiate a WLB. When it comes to which parent or spouse is enrolled in a graduate school or, more specifically, in a doctoral program, gender plays a significant role in much of the literature (Dyk, 1987; Gardner, 2008, 2009; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Thomas, 2014). Much research has been conducted solely on women's experience in doctoral education. When the literature includes men, the studies compare men's and women's experiences. As a result, most literature on doctoral student WLB primarily focuses on women (Brus, 2006; Haynes et al., 2012; Moyer et al., 1999; Stimpson & Filer, 2011).

Being a parent in graduate school has been shown to impact their experiences within their doctoral program. Studies have found that having children generally extends the time to graduation for female graduate students and contributes to part-time enrollment and a lack of persistence toward degree completion (Nettles & Millett, 2006). Nettles and Millett (2006) also found that having children can negatively affect graduate student peer relationships and participation in their career development. Research has found that students who are considering parenthood while enrolled in a graduate program tend to feel concerned about the reactions and levels of support they will receive from their faculty, who may have the presumption that having children hinders the successful completion of one's degree (Trepal et al., 2014).

The fear of not completing their degree may lead students to delay childbearing until graduation (Wertentheil, 2018). Additional factors affect the decision to delay having children while in a doctoral program, such as the ticking of a woman's biological clock (Martin, 2017) and personal and partner readiness (deMontigny Gauthier & deMontigny, 2013). However, delayed childbearing is becoming more socially acceptable, prompting more individuals to prioritize themselves and the achievement of their goals (Benzies et al., 2006).

Doctoral Student Fathers. Written out of the family equation of popular culture and now the academy, men might begin to feel like no one needs them at home (Kaufman, 2013). Still, most literature on parent academics tells their story after completing their doctorate and acquiring a job that explicitly utilizes their academic skills (Marotte et al., 2011; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012). Furthermore, academic parenting literature most often combines mothers' and fathers' experiences (Sallee, 2015) or solely analyzes mothers' experiences (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012). There is a concerning paucity of scholarship on the graduate student father. While specific discourse on faculty fathers' experience exists, as previously shown, there are differences between GSPs and faculty parents' experience--also discussed above. Specifically, doctoral student fathers have a minuscule amount written on their plight of negotiating their role identities, such as student and father. A single peer-reviewed article (Dillon, 2012) and recent dissertations (Billman, 2015; Garcia, 2018) were located after an exhaustive literature search seeking studies focusing solely on doctoral student fathers. Therefore, research on doctoral student fathers is rare (Dillon, 2012).

In a study by Crabb and Ekberg (2014), most graduate student fathers did not mention their families when asked about their future academic careers. However, several fathers described struggling to negotiate a WLB because they wanted more time to study and more time to take care of their children. Interestingly, one male participant in the study explicitly discussed the societal expectation that he would be the family breadwinner. This expectation led him to preemptively turn down any job choices that would have led to a decline in pay (Crabb & Ekberg, 2014). Unique to doctoral student fathers, research has suggested that this group may sometimes be concerned about their spouses because of a lack of health insurance for dependents and the intense workload for their spouses at home while they are away at school (Myers-Walls et al., 2011).

In the lone peer-reviewed article found during the literature review process, Dillon (2012) provided a personal account of managing his roles, including his experiences with time management and marital stress--ultimately recognizing that he inadvertently prioritized graduate school over family life. By choosing to multitask by working during his son's swim lessons and adhering to academic pressures to complete more work in small windows of time, he realized that he was adding stress to his own life and taking away time with his family (Dillon, 2012). Writing his autoethnographic manuscript thus enhanced his personal

life by allowing him to explore the meaning of family and doctoral studies (Dillon, 2012). As these examples of doctoral student father literature are the only known volume of works on this topic, this dissertation adds to the discourse of doctoral student WLB, particularly doctoral student fathers.

Summary

GSPs may experience similar events and emotions in their efforts to succeed in multiple roles. However, this group's subsets of parents face unique challenges. For example, mothers may be more "penalized" to work outside the home than fathers because of cultural expectations for mothers to provide the most care for their children (Correll et al., 2007). Although student fathers have been understudied (Dillon, 2012), work is expected to be prioritized over children at greater levels than women. Academic fathers have also reported criticism and penalties for their family involvement, such as having their dedication to academia questioned (Ecklund & Lincoln, 2016; Sallee et al., 2016). The ideal-worker norm and masculinity expectations can make it difficult for academic fathers to be actively engaged parents (Minnotte, 2021).

In addition to examining this group's experiences as a whole, it is essential to consider the needs of different subgroups of GSPs. Although a part of the fastest-growing student population (nontraditional students), nontraditional doctoral student fathers have been virtually silenced in academic parenthood discourse. The next section of this chapter will highlight nontraditional doctoral students and their unique experiences negotiating a WLB during their academic careers.

Nontraditional Doctoral Students

Nontraditional students enroll in higher education with several at-risk factors for not completing their degrees, such as age, employment, dependents, and lack of academic preparation (Fenty et al., 2016). Moreover, they can be enrolled part-time (Naidoo, 2015), be a parent, participate online, female, be over 30 years old, racially diverse, married, and self-funded (Eakins, 2019; Offerman, 2011). These characteristics starkly contrast with traditional doctoral students who are usually male, white, under 30 years of age, single and childless, enrolled as full-time students in face-to-face learning environments, and their academic endeavors are supported by scholarships (Offerman, 2011). Today's doctoral student

population has experienced a substantial demographic shift (Offerman, 2011). The following section provides a brief overview of changes within doctoral education through history.

Doctoral Education Evolution

According to Haskins (1923), the first form of academic degrees began in the Middle Ages. Students passed through various courses of study to obtain academic status from scholar to bachelor to master to doctor (Clark, 2006). However, the term “doctor” applied only to professions such as law, medicine, and theology. Beginning in the 11th-century, the concept of the university began to emerge (Cobban, 2009). The emergence was influenced by the need for a learned clergy and the nobility’s ability to read and write (Altbach, 2014). The next significant change in higher education was due to the age of science and the idea that science could be taught and applied to the state’s needs.

The Doctor of Philosophy was born in Germany after 1789 and slowly spread throughout Europe and America. As it became known, the German Polytechnic emerged in the late 18th and early 19th-centuries (Loss, 2015). This institutional type promoted research to create new knowledge and technology to provide practical applications to industry and government leaders (Shugart, 2013). The German university became a model for research universities in the United States (Loss, 2015). The first doctoral degrees were awarded in the United States in 1861 at Yale University. However, in 1876, Johns Hopkins University, located in Baltimore, Maryland, was established as the first American research university dedicated entirely to graduate education (Walker et al., 2008).

There are few known details about the nation’s earliest doctoral students, but Thelin (2004) describes these first graduate students as “serious and well-prepared” (p. 130), but also few. As the idea of graduate education had just begun to grow in the early 1900s, few stable graduate programs existed (Thelin, 2004). In one of the first comprehensive studies on graduate education, John (1934) reported enrollment of 44 students from five institutions in the 1870-1871 academic year. The doctoral students who did exist worked on specific study areas under faculty members’ supervision. However, due to their small numbers and serious nature, these students played marginal roles on campus (Thelin, 2004).

Graduate education continued to grow in the United States from the late 19th-century to the early 20th-century, particularly in large public institutions such as those in the Midwest and those established under the first and second Morrill Acts (Thelin, 2004). However, the

introduction of public historically Black colleges and universities through the second Morrill Act did not necessarily translate into more Black doctoral students. Their growth remained limited to private institutions such as Howard University. The number of doctoral degrees received by Black students in the United States was slow to grow during the early years of doctoral education. However, by 1939, 119 doctoral degrees had been awarded to Black students by predominantly white institutions (Lucas, 2006).

The role of graduate education in society and higher education continued to increase between the 1940s and the 1960s (Walker et al., 2008). The changing demographics of the enrolled students demonstrated this growth. Like that time's workforce demographic changes and the evolution of parental family roles, today's doctoral student population has experienced a substantial demographic shift (Brus, 2006; Offerman, 2011). Today's doctoral students have become highly nontraditional as the number of students completing their degree online has increased (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012; Offerman, 2011).

Researchers posit nontraditional doctoral students enjoy the flexibility and convenience of online education (Berry & Hughes, 2019). Program flexibility allows a nontraditional doctoral student to pursue personal, academic, and professional goals while maintaining family and financial responsibilities (McClendon et al., 2017). The rise of types and models of doctoral education reflects the variety in motives and interests of the expanding number of doctoral candidates, specifically due to non-academic career prospects (Padró et al., 2018).

Changing Doctoral Program Delivery. While distance education has been common since the late 18th-century, it has proliferated since the 1990s amid rapid growth in technological advances (Kentnor, 2015). This growth has shifted the nature of doctoral education as programs have begun to include online offerings, leading to more opportunities for nontraditional students to pursue their degrees. Historically, achieving a doctoral degree was limited to a traditional, primarily young adult student who could pursue a full-time academic career (Archbald, 2011). Students can now attend classes from the comfort of their homes, while traveling or from their place of employment (Archbald, 2011). Online programs are now widely available and one of few areas recently in higher education showing student enrollment growth, including at the graduate level.

Online education is one of the fastest-growing segments of higher education in the United States--and demand continues to rise (Seaman et al., 2018). As of Fall 2018, over 3.2 million students were enrolled in fully online education, representing approximately 17% of all U.S. college and university students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], n.d.). These numbers include post-baccalaureate students, of which 31% of all graduate students within degree-granting postsecondary institutions enrolled in a fully online program, and 9% participated in at least one online course (NCES, n.d.).

The National Science Foundation (2017) reported that more than 55,000 doctoral degrees were awarded by institutions in the United States in 2015. The exact number of online doctoral students in the United States is difficult to determine as the NCES does not distinguish between types of post-baccalaureate students, which means that existing data included master's, doctoral, law, medicine, and dentistry students combined.

Challenges Faced

Doctoral students face unique challenges, whether classified as traditional or nontraditional. Over their academic careers, nontraditional doctoral students experience a variety of adversities, including, but certainly not limited to, challenges of workload, isolation, difficulties with work-life balance (Jimenez y West et al., 2011), financial stress (McCloud & Bann, 2019), among others (Bawa, 2016).

Part-time Status. Nontraditional doctoral students often face unique challenges based on their typical part-time enrollment status (Byers et al., 2015). Doctoral education has considerably increased the number of part-time students enrolled. In total, 42.3% of all doctoral students enrolled part-time in the 2019-2020 academic year (NCES, n.d.). Gardner and Gopaul (2012) stated that while the part-time student population grew, there was still little research on part-time doctoral students' experience, and full-time graduate students continued to dominate research literature. The same sentiment could be made 12 years later as the part-time student experience continues to be understudied.

Part-time, nontraditional doctoral students must be able to juggle the demands of school, full-time work, raising families, and other responsibilities not typically required of traditional doctoral students. Hence, these students do not experience a traditional socialization process (Gardner, 2008) and have received little support due to their irregular availability (Jimenez y West et al., 2011). Researchers have emphasized the significance of

supportive relationships (faculty-student relationship, program culture or environment, and cohort/collegial support level) in determining a doctoral students' experience outcome (Devos et al., 2017). As a result, they may experience increased stress levels and frustration early on in their programs (Byers et al., 2015), and many students drop out after their first year of study (Jones, 2013). Furthermore, part-time students have traditionally lacked financial assistance during their doctoral studies (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012), which has been found to also affect their socialization process and overall success in their program (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Failure to complete their studies can result in significant personal and professional loss for the student (Devos et al., 2017) as they would have lost their considerable investment in time and effort and incurred substantial financial costs (Ames et al., 2018).

Peer and Family Support. Previous research has shown the importance of prioritization for online doctoral students to successfully balance their various role responsibilities. Additionally, researchers have found that the students' reporting of their ability to do so was highly attributed to their support systems during their programs (Collins, 2015). Collins (2015) demonstrated the importance of peer support in the doctoral process through qualitative data collected from nontraditional doctoral students over two years during meetings held once a month. Students freely discussed their experiences during these meetings, shedding light on the barriers they faced as full-time professionals with their families and other non-school obligations. Experiences shared included feelings of frustration over the lack of meaningful support from family and friends, difficulties working around other obligations, time management, and low motivation (Collins, 2015).

While literature focusing on online doctoral students is limited, more are beginning to emerge, and it is finding that family is salient to the success and persistence of these students (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2019). In 2012, Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw conducted a qualitative study of 619 doctoral students enrolled in 78 online doctoral programs. Many participants reported feeling guilty for taking time away from their family to focus on their studies. When they did spend time with their family, they felt intense guilt about not writing or researching. This affirmed the findings of earlier studies on traditional doctoral students, which found guilt, shame, and anxiety are often felt by doctoral students over not being able

to manage time for family, time for self, and academic expectations (Brown & Watson, 2010).

Furthermore, Schmidt and Hansson's (2018) literature review demonstrated that family and familial relationships are often a significant source of stress for doctoral students. Breitenbach et al. (2019) found that the student and family experienced stress when online doctoral students' families did not value the degree or think pursuing the degree was a responsible use of money. Conversely, their study found that when online doctoral students' families valued the degree, the students felt supported. This substantiated observations made by Gardner and Gopaul (2012) in their qualitative study of 10 part-time doctoral students that "family members were the most often discussed source of support in their lives" (p. 70). Their study also found that these students had more difficulty completing their doctoral programs than full-time students. Thus, it is essential to note that the interaction between family and academic domains is complex yet vital to doctoral student success.

Despite decades of research noting that the interaction between these domains is vital to student success (Schmidt & Hansson, 2018), limited research has sought to understand how students manage their academic and family domains satisfactorily while pursuing an online doctoral degree (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019). Therefore, this study added to the literature in these areas as the aim was to understand how nontraditional doctoral student fathers experience establishing a work-life balance.

Chapter Summary

Societal expectations of what is required of fathers and how to enact fathering behaviors continue to evolve. A consistent theme throughout the literature is the identity shift that occurs with parenthood and the conflict of multiple roles and responsibilities experienced by student parents (CohenMiller, 2014; Kulp, 2016; Moreau & Kerner, 2015). Role theory shows that people play several roles (e.g., student, worker, father), and each holds specific responsibilities, expectations, and pressures (Kahn et al., 1964). To meet each role's demands, people use resources such as time and energy, making it challenging to fulfill any role, which is normal (Goode, 1960). However, the lived experiences of nontraditional doctoral student fathers, as defined in this study, and how they attempt to meet their role demands are missing from the discourse on academic parents' efforts to create a work-life balance.

Role strain theory, identity theory, and doctoral student socialization theory are theoretical frameworks that aided in understanding how nontraditional doctoral student fathers engaged in role bargaining of their competing identities to meet their role demands. By better understanding nontraditional doctoral student fathers' experiences working towards finding a work-life balance, future nontraditional doctoral student fathers can gain a glimpse into the realities of simultaneously attempting to fulfill these roles. This study provides recommendations that may assist faculty and university administrators in understanding the needs of this subset of doctoral students and how they can best assist them in reaching the pinnacle of their academic journey, the doctorate, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Thus far, the study's background, context, and need have been presented, followed by a review of the literature relevant to the topic of inquiry, along with the theoretical frameworks that informed the data collection, interpretation, and analysis. This chapter provides a detailed account of the methodology used to conduct the study.

Initially, the characteristics and methods associated with qualitative research, determined to be the most aligned with the purpose and research questions, are reviewed. This includes the philosophical assumptions that are associated with the constructivism paradigm used during the interpretation of data collected. Next, I discuss my position within this study, including my interests and biases that I brought as the primary instrument of data collection (Patton, 2002). The chapter then thoroughly describes the research methods used in the study's design, including the characteristics of a hermeneutic phenomenological study, data collection, and data analysis methods. Finally, the chapter reviews the strategies utilized to ensure the study's trustworthiness and the methods undertaken to ensure the ethical conduct of the research process.

Research Questions

While work-life balance (WLB) studies exist examining role conflicts and the resulting role strain within the context of higher education, these studies primarily examined the experiences of faculty parents (Barker, 2017; Kinman & Jones, 2008; Sallee, 2014) and traditional graduate student parents (Dyk, 1987; Estes, 2011; Grady et al., 2014; Moreau & Kerner, 2015). Furthermore, the scant literature examining doctoral student experiences and WLB predominately focuses on women (Kulp, 2016; Mason et al., 2013; McCutcheon & Morrison, 2016; Prikhidko & Haynes, 2018). Additionally, limited research has sought to understand how students manage their academic and family domains satisfyingly when pursuing an online doctoral program (Markle, 2015; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019). Therefore, the problem is the absence of literature exploring nontraditional doctoral student fathers' experiences with WLB.

The following research questions assisted in bringing to light the experiences of nontraditional doctoral student fathers' attempts to establish a WLB through role bargaining within their various roles as students, workers, and fathers. They served as the foundation of the information sought within the study.

The central questions directing this study were:

RQ1: How do nontraditional doctoral student fathers experience establishing a work-life balance within their multiple role identities and the changing context of 21st-century fatherhood?

RQ2: What are the experiences of nontraditional doctoral student fathers in an online program?

Research Method

This qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study explored how 21st-century nontraditional doctoral student fathers--enrolled in various online programs within the United States--experienced establishing a work-life balance. Qualitative research is a form of social inquiry that focuses on how people interpret and make sense of their experiences based on the world in which they live (Creswell, 2014; Levitt et al., 2017). The use of this method is appropriate when the goal of the research is to gain insight into a phenomenon (work-life balance) by relying on the perception of a person's (nontraditional doctoral student fathers) experience in a given situation (Janak, 2018; Stake, 2010). Conversely, quantitative studies consist of meticulously worked-out procedures with existing rules and are highly systematic (Creswell, 2014).

As Creswell (2014) indicated, a quantitative study is appropriate when a researcher seeks to understand relationships between variables. These studies result in the statistical interpretation of data obtained from predefined, validated data collection instruments and large sample sizes that allow for the generalization of findings to a larger population (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Although there are similarities between these two research methodologies, Creswell (2014) noted that qualitative researchers "rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse designs" (p. 183).

Moreover, qualitative research employs a descriptive or interpretive design to study people or things in their natural setting, enabling the collection of rich data through interactions between researchers and participants and is appropriate for topics that have never been addressed with a particular sample or group of people (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Johnson & Christensen, 2019). This study aimed not to interpret data from validated research instruments or generalize findings to a larger population. The purpose was to explore the experiences and realities of nontraditional doctoral student fathers establishing a WLB. A

qualitative study was the most appropriate choice as the work-life balance phenomenon needs to be explored and understood more due to a lack of research on doctoral students' experiences. This is particularly true of the study's population, nontraditional doctoral student fathers, a demographic devoid of a voice within the discourse on doctoral students.

Research Design

In a qualitative research methodology, people's construction of reality--how they understand the world--is the quintessence of what is being studied. This study's design employed multiple sources of evidence to aid in providing descriptive detail for a rich, in-depth discussion and vigorous interpretation (Creswell, 2013). A research design provides a specific direction for the procedures to be used in a study, and it is a critical topic crucial to any research study in multiple fields (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018) as it focuses on the end product of answering the research question(s) (Gopaldas, 2016). Phenomenology was chosen as the research design as it strives to understand the "essence of the experience" (Creswell, 2007, p. 78) or "determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). A phenomenological study was appropriate as the research questions centered around the experiences of nontraditional doctoral student fathers balancing multiple role identities.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the study of phenomena, where a phenomenon is anything that reveals itself in an individual's conscious experience (Moran, 2000). Although numerous philosophers have contributed to the creation and growth of phenomenology, most phenomenological approaches are predominantly based on the work of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger (Gill, 2020). Husserl, the pioneer of phenomenological philosophy, refers to his descriptive method as "reduction," which serves as a framework for the analytical procedures of other phenomenological methods. In his previous writings, Husserl (1973, 2001, 2012) discusses various kinds of reduction, the first being phenomenological (or transcendental) reduction. This reduction requires phenomenologists to suspend their beliefs and preconceptions about a phenomenon. Husserl (2012) argued that phenomenological reduction offered a perspective of "transcendentally" purified phenomena. Husserl's student, Martin Heidegger, believed describing others' experiences was insufficient (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). He wanted to look beyond the everyday meanings of life to find the

deeper meanings of being, uncover hidden meanings (Cohen et al., 2000), and move beyond description to interpretation (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009).

Heidegger (1962) argued that “interpretation is never our assumption-free perception of something” (p. 141). Heidegger’s interpretive approach to studying human existence refutes the possibility of entirely detached reflection, contrasting Husserl’s notion of bracketing assumptions to articulate an essence. Instead, the researcher has preconceived notions that must be modified as new knowledge is added (Peoples, 2021).

Phenomenological researchers uncover the subject’s lived experiences through a spiraling process of revisiting and revising (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Alethia is meaning and meaningfulness (van Manen, 2017). It refers to hermeneutics or hermeneutic phenomenology, the interpretation of other people’s lived experiences to reveal their shared lifeworld about a phenomenon (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology. Specifically, a hermeneutic phenomenology design was utilized as coined by Max van Manen (1990). Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks understanding through interpretation and clarifies a phenomenon’s context (Hein & Austin, 2001). It describes a life-experienced phenomenon through phenomenological reflection and writing, resulting in an understanding of the experience’s meaning for the persons who have had the experience (Moustakas, 1994). In Heidegger’s (1962) view of hermeneutical phenomenology, consciousness is not separate from the world but is the formation of historically lived experiences. Heidegger (1988) stated that everyone lives in a culturally and historically conditioned environment. The individuals’ background is not evident, and their view of people and their world is rooted in cultural, social, and historical contexts (Lavery, 2003). Koch (1995) said Husserl focused on the experience and Heidegger on understanding the experience.

Hermeneutic phenomenology tries to be attentive to both terms of its methodology: it is descriptive (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, and it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena (van Manen, 1990, p. 180). To van Manen (1990), “the aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence” (p. 36). Like other researchers, van Manen seeks a phenomenon’s essence. Still, he considers phenomenology

an artistic endeavor and describes his phenomenology as a “poetic project” that seeks to speak to the world rather than of the world (van Manen, 1984).

Qualitative research, specifically hermeneutic phenomenology in the case of this study, gives voice and attention to individuals who have experienced a phenomenon in a way that quantitative data does not (Crowther et al., 2017). While nontraditional doctoral students have been studied from mothers’ worldviews, fathers’ lived experiences have rarely been told. Phenomenology was chosen as the methodology for this dissertation as this study aimed to explore the phenomenon of work-life balance within the context of 21st-century nontraditional doctoral student fathers. The research design for this study was positioned within the philosophical worldview of social constructivism and its associated philosophical assumptions, which are now outlined.

Research Paradigm

Research paradigms have been described in multiple ways, including as an individual’s worldview or interpretation of the world’s action (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), as a “loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 24), and as the fundamental belief system of the researcher(s) that guides research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Guba, 1990). Social constructivists believe that individuals learn and develop through participation in the world’s social activities (Moen, 2006).

This perspective relies on the understanding that the relationship between the participant’s experience and the surrounding interactions with others and society at large helps to ‘develop the subjective meaning of their experiences--meanings directed towards certain objects or things’ (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). Individuals’ reality is a mental construct in which many can exist and can be incompatible and conflicting (Creswell, 2013; Upadhyay, 2012). Constructivist researchers intend to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world, and they often address the processes of interaction among individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

According to Creswell (2014), researchers must reconcile their philosophical worldview with the research design that supports their research question. As Schwandt (2000) explained, social constructivists do not discover knowledge but co-create it with others through shared understandings. Moreover, domains of new knowledge generated

through the interpretation of meanings are developed through the interaction of our own lives as researchers and the construction of others' lives. Researchers cannot compose stories about others without reflecting on their histories, social and cultural contexts, biases, and beliefs (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). I positioned myself in the study within the philosophical beliefs associated with social constructivism to understand the world in which nontraditional doctoral student fathers live. I interpreted the constructions of meaning in the participants' explanations while consistently engaging in reflexive dialogue.

Philosophical Assumptions

Given that the philosophical assumptions of the researcher underpin the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological beliefs within different interpretive frameworks, it is essential to present each and how they were represented within the study. The first is founded on the ontological belief that multiple realities are constructed through lived experiences and interactions with others (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through purposive sampling, I aimed to recruit participants from diverse educational, employment, and family settings to report multiple realities by utilizing significant quotes within the themes developed.

The second assumption relates to the epistemological belief that the researcher and participant co-construct reality shaped by personal experiences within specific contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a result, this perspective asserts that results will vary depending on the context in which data collection and analysis occurred. Researchers who adhere to a contextualist epistemology are more likely to reject the straightforward transference of objective and reliable criteria to their work evaluation. Each participant shared a unique story about their experiences, including different childhoods and various beliefs about fathering, among other facets. Thus, this study's findings and the perspectives it shows are based on these particular participants and my own experiences through our interviews.

The third assumption relates to the axiological belief that researchers bring biases into the study within their role and the interpretative process of constructing meaning.

Constructivism considers the researcher a central and vital instrument in collecting and interpreting data (Yin, 2014). Participants were involved in the data analysis process and producing the final report to ensure their experiences were represented authentically. Through member-checking and data triangulation, participants' voices were "heard"

accurately through interpretations of the findings, which increased the credibility of the findings and the study's trustworthiness (Fusch et al., 2018).

Finally, the methodological assumption was demonstrated through the meticulously detailed presentation of the contexts of the study, including the use of qualitative research methods and research design using multiple data collection sources. The study focused on the contexts in which nontraditional doctoral student fathers live, work, and study to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants through interpretations of the complex meanings constructed by the accounts they provided (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Researcher Positionality

The use of qualitative research has garnered increasing respect as this methodology can impact systems and policies impacting individuals (Watkins, 2012). However, its' focus on "meaning-making" from experiences and perceptions has been commonly criticized due to the potential for researcher subjectivity (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). While this concern is valid, the investigator cannot disregard their experiences, personal values, and belief systems (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). One aspect distinguishing qualitative from quantitative research is the significance of the researcher's role.

In qualitative research, there is the implicit assumption that researcher bias is present (Merriam, 2009). According to Moustakas (1994), in phenomenological research, the research question(s) grow out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic. Furthermore, van Manen (2016) argued that personal experience is an excellent starting point for inquiry, and researchers should attempt to describe their lived relationship with the phenomenon of study. Heidegger (1962) emphasized that it is impossible to rid the mind of the background of understandings that have led the researcher to consider a topic worthy of research in the first place (Koch, 1995). Thus, personal knowledge is valuable and necessary in phenomenological research (Geanellos, 2000). Furthermore, van Manen (1984, 1989) rejects the idea of bracketing, which is used in other phenomenological methods, suggesting that researchers should acknowledge their assumptions, as presuppositions may "persistently creep back into our reflections" (van Manen, 1990, p. 47). To mitigate these concerns, the researcher brings biases to the forefront early in the process, aiming to make personal biases less problematic (Levitt et al., 2017).

As a qualitative researcher, I acknowledged my position in this research upfront during the initial recruitment of participants and again while obtaining informed consent. I informed all participants of my vested interest in the study as a nontraditional doctoral student father myself. It was important for the participants to see that I, as the researcher, also have human experiences and could empathize with their experiences of the phenomenon under study. Additionally, it was vital that I continuously be conscious of my biases from my personal experiences and engage in reflexivity.

Creswell (2013) portrayed the process of reflexivity as arriving to know the self within the process of research. Attention to reflexivity is the acknowledgment of personal influences and inevitable biases that are informed by past experiences with the issue of the study. Doucet and Mauthner (2012) suggested that reflexivity means “being cognizant and open about epistemological, ontological and theoretical assumptions which inform our work, and particularly as they shape our data analysis processes” (p. 134).

I recognize and acknowledge that having a similar background as the study participants, personal experiences, and a personal interest in exploring how nontraditional doctoral student fathers experience establishing a WLB created the potential for bias in the research (Levitt et al., 2017). From my upbringing to the present day, as a part-time doctoral student, worker, and father, I am predisposed to certain concepts, thoughts, and conclusions about nontraditional doctoral student fathers’ experiences with role bargaining and WLB as I live the reality every day. For the credibility of this study, I needed to isolate my personal bias regarding this research topic while at the same time understanding that specific components of my experience were beneficial to my research. This was the logic for utilizing a researcher journal to collect and engage in reflexive dialogue about the experiences shared by participants and how they correlated with my personal experiences to see any further patterns.

My interest in studying this topic stems from both personal and academic experiences. Growing up, my parents endured odd, long hours working in the retail industry to provide for our family. As a result, I spent considerable time with my grandparents and other extended family members. As my father often worked unreasonable 50–60-hour weeks, I could not spend as much time with him growing up as I would have liked to. The challenges of my parents’ work hours and having less time with them growing up have

informed my idea of fatherhood and my desire to be present as much as possible in the daily lives of my children. This experience is not what I wanted for my family or myself as a father.

As I started my doctoral journey, newly married with three kids, I made it a conscious point to attempt not to sacrifice family time for schoolwork. As I was also a full-time worker (at the beginning of this dissertation), and the children are in school during the day, this cannot be easy to avoid. This caused many trade-offs, unceasing role bargaining, and difficulty balancing my various role demands.

Throughout my doctoral program, being a father has never come up in discussion with faculty aside from my major professor. As a nontraditional doctoral student father, I am located three states away (or a 24-hour, non-stop drive), so relationships with other faculty are non-existent or surface level. Attempting to balance my role obligations has left no time to create in-depth relationships. Thus, I am not sure how many, if any, other faculty know that I am a parent--through no fault of their own.

While frustrating, this may be a point of privilege that I need to acknowledge. As a result of my research, I am now keenly aware of the challenges that all parents within academia face. Challenges are particularly true for faculty and doctoral student mothers who can experience challenges with their colleagues and faculty stemming solely from others knowing they are mothers. Fusing this with societal expectations and continued archaic ideas of what being a woman and mother means in the 21st-century, mothers within the academy also face a brutal fight.

During my studies, my wife began her master's degree, which caused an arduous amount of role bargaining on my part. Before beginning her academic journey, we had more traditional gender roles regarding household tasks. I needed to increase the time I helped around the house to give her time for her studies. Although I will never fully understand as a man, I earnestly empathize and appreciate more now the plight of women, specifically mothers, who attempt to meet the never-relinquishing demands of time and energy faced by mothers. I, too, have been impacted by the challenges of engaging in the process of role bargaining within my role identities and the unique and unceasing demands each of them provides while working towards my doctoral degree. Therefore, I greatly desired to explore

other nontraditional doctoral student fathers' experiences and provide a voice to their lived experiences and how they constructed their meanings of fatherhood in the 21st-century.

Participants

Population

The population for this study was nontraditional doctoral student fathers, as operationally defined for this study. The population's lone geographical boundary was that the participants' institution be located within the United States since they can pursue their education from any location that offers technological access to their courses.

Sampling

Researchers must choose what, where, when, and whom to observe or interview, as there are many options within those categories that could be selected for the unit of analysis--the sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To do so, researchers must first decide what sample attributes are crucial to the study and then recruit people or sites that meet those criteria, also called criterion-based selection (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Purposive sampling was used to recruit, select, and interview participants who met the following criteria to obtain multiple, information-rich data from which one can learn much about the central questions of the study's purpose (Gopaldas, 2016; Patton, 2015).

Criterion-Based Selection. The sample for the study was nontraditional doctoral student fathers who met the following three criteria:

1. Currently enrolled part-time in a fully online doctoral program within a university in the United States
2. Employed full-time
3. Have at least one child

Purposeful Sampling. Purposeful sampling can identify participants who meet the research criteria (Salkind, 2018). Purposeful sampling is the deliberate participant selection based on their characteristics (Etikan et al., 2015). This sampling technique assumes that the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and, therefore, must select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As data collection is critical in research, choosing the sampling technique is crucial for selecting an appropriate sample. Purposeful sampling provided the most appropriate data for the study, as well as snowball sampling, which is a form of purposeful sampling commonly used in qualitative

research (Cozby & Bates, 2011). Snowball sampling entails that current participants assist the researcher in identifying potential participants by recommending individuals who meet the sampling criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This was an appropriate strategy for recruiting participants in this study due to its sizeable geographic boundary. Moreover, it assisted in promptly completing the interview portion of the data collection process and obtaining an adequate sample size.

The sampling methods enabled initial participant recruitment via email, word of mouth, and social media platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, and X (formally known as Twitter). These platforms contain knowledge communities comprised of doctoral students and parents, which were beneficial in identifying study participants. Additionally, networking within my professional field of higher education helped recruit participants. The recruitment message described the study's purpose, eligibility requirements, detailed the benefits and any known risks for participation in the study, and provided my contact information. Information was posted to 34 Facebook groups.

Sample Size. Fusch and Ness (2015) and Saldaña (2016) state there is no agreement on a sufficient sample size in qualitative research. While van Manen (2016) stated that phenomenological research has no exact requirement for interview subjects and that data saturation should not be the goal, researchers have recommended three to 25 participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Brinkmann (2013) noted that qualitative data with small sample sizes is frequently the most informative, consistent with Fusch and Ness's (2015) assertion that small sample sizes enable rich data collection from each participant. According to multiple researchers, one to 10 participants are enough for phenomenological studies with interviews (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). Thus, I interviewed participants as I was able to recruit eligible participants and continued the research process until potential participants were exhausted. Eight participants were sufficient to complete the data collection process according to the recommendations noted above.

Data Collection

Qualitative research can collect data that emphasizes people's lived experiences and connects these meanings to the social world (Miles et al., 2014). The study's research questions explored how nontraditional doctoral student fathers experience establishing a WLB as a student, worker, and father. Through participant sharing of their lived experiences,

collecting their stories through multiple data sources provided detailed and rich descriptions of the phenomenon of study (WLB) (Salkind, 2018). Additionally, it allowed for data triangulation for consistency (Fusch et al., 2018). Furthermore, using multiple data sources boosted confidence in the study's findings, ensuring its overall trustworthiness (Salkind, 2018). Virtual interviews with a qualitative survey embedded and a reflexivity researcher journal were used for data collection.

Virtual Interviews

Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them, and it is also necessary for researchers to understand their experiences within their contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As this study was exploratory, a semi-structured interview format was used--with an interview protocol allowing for variation in participant responses (Patton, 2015). A protocol allowed for in-depth probing while keeping the interviews within the study's aim and increasing the data's dependability (Mohajan, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews were appropriate for this study as they allowed for responses to the interview at hand, the participant's emerging worldview, and new ideas on the topic of inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The phenomenological interview process usually consists of open-ended questions that align with the study's research questions in a casual and collaborative environment, facilitating the interview's flow (Moustakas, 1994). According to van Manen (2016), the art of a successful interview is to allow the questions to be open and keep the investigator and participant oriented to the phenomenon being explored.

According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), a research interview is a conversation with a structure and a purpose. It is where knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. From a social constructivist paradigm, meaning must result from co-creation between the researcher and the researched (Schwandt, 2000) rather than just the interpretation of the researcher, who may have different contextual factors or agendas influencing the descriptions (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). In phenomenological research, the interview is reflective (Munhall & Oiler Boyd, 1993) rather than observational, as seen in quantitative research.

Creating a setting where participants could openly share and disclose their inner feelings and thoughts were critical in establishing a rapport (Fusch et al., 2018). As noted by van Manen (2016), participants may struggle to describe a life experience, and the researcher may share a story to illustrate the kind of life experience the researcher seeks. I was open and transparent about the reasons and purpose of the research by sharing my experiences as a father and balancing various roles at the beginning of the interviews. As the researchers do not seek to bracket themselves in hermeneutic phenomenology (Peoples, 2021), this was an appropriate interview strategy that also helped build rapport.

As participants were located throughout the United States, all interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom video conferencing or phone and recorded electronically. Moreover, using these technologies was appropriate due to the ongoing health concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic and to ensure all parties' health and safety, as the majority of interviews were conducted in the midst of the worst of the pandemic. Additionally, there was no funding available for travel to conduct interviews in person.

The potential benefits of reaching participants where they are most comfortable, geographically or in a digital world, have been documented (Gray et al., 2020). Utilizing technology allowed the flexibility for individuals to participate in interviews from any geographic location without the participant leaving their homes or hosting the researcher in their homes, minimizing travel costs for the researcher (Lo Iacono et al., 2016). To account for potential technological issues, I conducted tests on the necessary equipment at least 15 minutes before the agreed-upon interview times. For those participants who could not access Zoom and needed to interview over the phone, participants informed me either via email or by calling to plan accordingly to ensure the completion of the interview.

Participants completing the interview were interviewed for between 45-60 minutes, depending on the depth of their responses and follow-up questioning. Because the interviews were virtual, Braun and Clarke (2013) warned that they tend to take longer to complete than face-to-face interviews, which provided the impetus for the length of the interviews. Upon commencing each interview, I formally introduced myself, explained the purpose of the study, and briefly shared my position within the study. I reviewed participants' signed informed consent forms to ensure they understood and acknowledged their voluntary participation in the study, they understood their right to withdraw at any time, and that the

video or phone interview would be recorded to aid in the transcription process for data analysis.

Following those steps, the interview began with the qualitative survey portion of the protocol. The survey information collected included educational, demographic, and open-ended questions relevant to the research topic. This information was collected to construct a demographic profile of the participants. The collected data was also used to compare the study participants' experiences in context to their demographic data.

Upon the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked if they could be contacted in the future for additional follow-ups as necessary. Participants were also asked if they would like to participate in verifying the interpretation of the data through member-checking by providing their feedback and validating the study findings and themes, which increased the study's credibility. Member-checking is a critical element of conducting a phenomenological study. Appendix F includes the interview protocol and accompanying guiding questions. Furthermore, Appendix G includes the embedded survey demographic questions.

Electronic Reflexivity Journal

Through reflective journaling, the researcher attempts 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). Reflexivity is the researcher's self-consciousness of their participation in the research. The work of hermeneutic phenomenologists is to convince the reader of the study's trustworthiness in part by clarifying their reflexivity (Cohen et al., 2000). Reflexivity is vital to the credibility of hermeneutic phenomenological studies as researchers inevitably bring their personal and cultural perspectives to bear into their studies and have unavoidable assumptions, beliefs, and lived experiences that produce preconceived ideas of the phenomenon (Peoples, 2021).

The use of an electronic reflexivity journal allowed for researcher reflexivity as I aimed to continuously reflect upon my personal feelings, observations, perceptions, and interpretations of the data collected throughout the recursive process of data collection and analysis (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; van Manen, 2016). This included during interviews and directly after each interview to ponder thoughts, emotions, and reflections (van Manen,

2016). The initial phase of familiarizing myself with the data allowed me to reflect on the experiences I brought to the data as the data that initially stands out often “reflect things that are salient to you as a person” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 205). The journal included data not obtained directly through questions posed to the participants but served as another source of data and is a crucial reflective component within research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013) was chosen as the primary method for data analysis to fit the research design. Creswell and Poth (2018) and Merriam and Tisdell (2015) offer similar analytic methods with slight variations in operational definitions of analysis concepts. Various strategies recommended by these researchers were also implemented to complete complex data analysis in later phases of the thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis searches a data set for recurring patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and allows for creating rich descriptions from data excerpts, using participants’ words to support the interpreted data (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Data analysis aims to answer research questions by categorizing and simplifying complex data into meaningful codes and themes of participants’ experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Data analysis should be done during data collection, not after (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Paul, 2017). Without ongoing analysis, novice researchers’ copious amounts of data can become unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To the best of my ability, I aimed to collect and analyze data concurrently to avoid being overwhelmed with the amount of data needing analysis after data collection. A limitation regarding the timing of data analysis is discussed further in Chapter 5.

It is important to note that data analysis is not a linear process of merely moving from one phase to the next. It is a recursive process that moves back and forth between concrete data and abstract concepts, inductive and deductive reasoning, and description and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Nowell et al., 2017). This recursive process is appropriate for phenomenological research because understanding the essence is always partial and growing as the researcher reads and revises their perception of the participants’ lifeworld (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is unique among qualitative analytic methods because it does not prescribe data collection methods, theoretical positions, or epistemological or ontological frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Therefore, it can be used within various theoretical frameworks and research paradigms, such as social constructivism, and allows for further focus on discovering socially embedded patterns of meaning and their implications and effects (Clarke & Braun, 2014). Many qualitative social science methods use some sort of “thematic” coding. In the 1970s, physicist and science historian Gerald Holton developed thematic analysis (Merton, 1975). However, it has only recently been recognized as a distinctive method within the social sciences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Braun and Clarke (2006) state that thematic analysis is widely used but not well-defined and is frequently misunderstood as a singular method with one set of procedures (Clarke & Braun, 2018). Before 2006, some qualitative researchers had written about “thematic analysis” (e.g., Boyatzis, 1998; Joffe & Yardley, 2004), “thematic coding” (e.g., Patton, 1990), or “template analysis” (e.g., King, 1998), and many authors performed thematic analysis--but called it something else (e.g., grounded theory or discourse analysis). Some thematic analysis phases are similar to other qualitative research phases, so they are not all unique to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Qualitative analysis guidelines are not rules and should be applied flexibly to fit the research questions and data (Elliott, 2018; Patton, 1990). Thematic analysis conducted within a constructionist framework cannot and does not focus on motivation or individual psychologies but instead seeks to theorize the socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions that enable individual accounts to be shared. Thus, it was appropriate to answer the research questions (Clarke & Braun, 2014).

Braun and Clarke (2019) categorized thematic analysis methods into three broad approaches based on (a) coding reliability; (b) reflexivity; (c) codebooks. For the study, I situated my particular form of thematic analysis within a reflexive approach while utilizing a codebook to map the developing analysis. Reflexive approaches entail later theme development, with themes derived from codes and conceptualized as shared meaning patterns underpinned by a central organizing concept (Braun & Clarke, 2014). The central organizing

concept for the study was establishing a work-life balance by nontraditional doctoral student fathers.

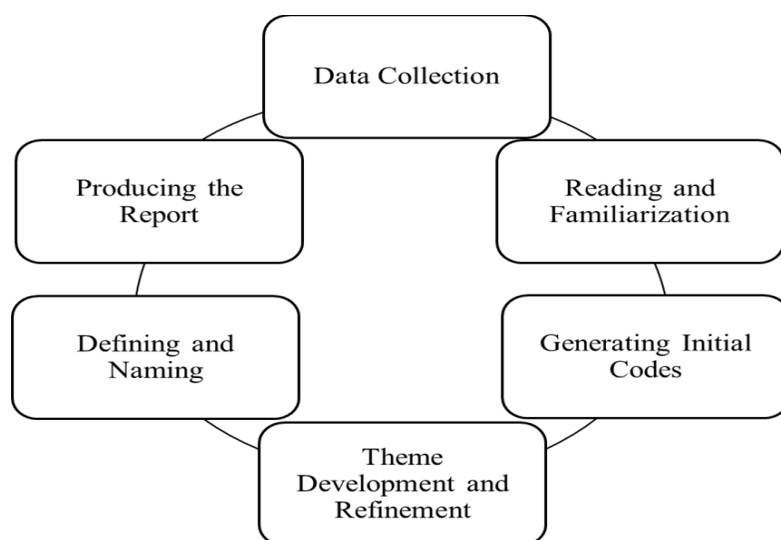
The use of thematic analysis within the study fits the following recommendations made by Braun and Clarke (2013, 2021) when (a) the study must lead to results that can be used and have clear implications for practice; (b) the analytic interest is on how personal experiences are located within broader societal contexts; (c) the goal is to identify patterns in data and then describe and interpret them, and/or provide a theoretically informed interpretation of them; (d) a researcher is new to qualitative research as thematic analysis offers much in terms of practical guidance (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013, 2014).

Some qualitative researchers believe thematic analysis lacks the substance of “branded” and theoretically driven approaches like interpretative phenomenological analysis and grounded theory. Without a theoretical framework, thematic analysis can have limited interpretive power. These concerns were addressed in the study's research design using the theoretical frameworks, research paradigm, and philosophical assumptions that underpinned the study.

These are the following phases of thematic analysis as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) (a) collecting; (b) reading and familiarization; (c) generating initial codes; (d) theme development and refinement; (e) defining and naming; (f) producing the report.

Figure 2

Thematic Analysis Recursive Process



Note. Thematic analysis process as presented in Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013).

Reading and Familiarization. Braun and Clarke (2013) stated, “familiarization is not a passive process of just understanding words (or images); it’s about starting to read data as data ... not simply absorbing the surface meaning...but reading the words actively, analytically, and critically, starting to think about what the data mean” (p. 205). As new data was collected, I recursively engaged and constantly compared it to all previously collected data. After each interview, I familiarized myself with the data by watching the recorded zoom interview multiple times, being alert for any changes in body language, voice patterns, and overall changes in demeanor that may aid in analyzing the participants’ words upon transcription. I listened to the recordings twice for phone interviews while taking memos and notes of my initial reactions.

Next, I used Microsoft Word to transcribe the recorded video interviews and voice recordings verbatim (Hesse et al., 2019). At a minimum, a verbatim transcription requires a rigorous and thorough account of all verbal expressions and utterances from all participants, as straightforward errors or mishearing in transcription can profoundly change the meaning of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Therefore, I also checked the transcription against the original recordings to ensure accuracy (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Upon reviewing the transcriptions for accuracy, I read and re-read the participants’ words from the interviews to think critically about their experiences. I analyzed their experiences through the precise words they used to describe their worldview.

Throughout the data collection and analysis, I created memos, short phrases, ideas, or key concepts of potential codes that stood out (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Analytic memos are an excellent way for researchers or doctoral students to record the research process. To compare data recursively, I continuously reviewed and analyzed responses and memos within Word documents for each participant. These memos described participants’ demeanors, insights, reflections, and contexts, allowing for thick, exhaustive descriptions of the phenomenon during reflection for analysis, which supported the study’s dependability (Peoples, 2021). This process of reflection allowed me to grow more aware of my preconceptions and how those may impact the interpretations of the data collected (van Manen, 2016).

Generating Initial Codes. Coding is a method of analyzing qualitative data by symbolically assigning summative, such as a word or brief phrase that captures the essence

of why you think a particular bit of data may be helpful to a portion of all forms of data (Saldaña, 2016). Coding is an inherently subjective process requiring a reflexive researcher who strives to reflect on their assumptions and how these might shape and delimit their coding (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

This phenomenological study was exploratory; thus, an appropriate strategy within thematic analysis was to engage in complete coding in which codes were identified and provided a label for a feature of any data that was potentially relevant for answering the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2019)--similar to the process of open coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In qualitative research, coding is not an exclusive process, and any data extract can and should be coded in as many ways as it fits the purpose of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

To begin the process of analyzing the data to answer the research questions, I utilized first-cycle coding methods of in vivo coding and values coding concurrently to develop codes from the participants' actual language used within all data that reflected their values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing their perspectives or worldview (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2021). Values coding is appropriate for qualitative studies exploring cultural values and belief systems, identity, intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences, and actions (Saldaña, 2016). By combining these coding methods, I derived latent themes that invoked the study's theoretical frameworks to identify implicit meanings (the assumptions and frameworks underpinning what was said) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013).

Coding can be performed manually or through a software program (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). I utilized Microsoft Excel and Word documents to serve as the databases for this study. I managed, coded, and categorized the large amounts of narrative text collected from the virtual interviews and reflexivity journal. After creating a final code list, I analyzed the codes for concepts, topics, or issues to which several codes related and how they may be combined to represent information and construct central themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013).

Theme Development and Refinement. While developing themes from coded data, the researcher examines the codes and coded data for differences and similarities to establish potential patterns (Gibbs, 2007). An account of themes "emerging" or being "discovered" is a passive account of the process of analysis, and it denies the active role the researcher

always plays in identifying patterns and themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the readers (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2021). Themes are developed as the final interpretation of all data to depict the participants' experiences and lifeworld, and they should be responsive to the purpose of the research--in effect, serving as the answers to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Whereas *in vivo* coding and values coding are ways to summarize segments of data initially, the second cycle method of pattern coding is a "way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of condensed categories, themes, or concepts" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 322). In this cycle, I began refining the identified themes by reviewing them to determine if any should be put aside, merged, or separated into distinct themes. At this analysis point, the less relevant themes and their corresponding codes were put into a "miscellaneous" category. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that such a category can be essential to keep within this study phase as the analysis is still very provisional, meaning themes may be radically altered and new themes developed.

This examination took place on two levels. Initially, I read all the coded data excerpts for each theme and considered whether they appeared to form a coherent pattern (Paul, 2017). It was necessary to consider the themes and participants themselves, as well as the relationships between them. Next, I re-read the entirety of the data collected to determine whether the themes accurately reflected the meanings evident throughout the data and if any additional data corresponding to the themes developed were missed during the earlier rounds of coding. To supplement the study's database, I used visual illustrations such as figures, tables, and mind maps to visually represent the data and see the evolving patterns as themes were developed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), these illustrations can be a vital tool for developing the final form of analysis.

At this point, I aimed to clearly understand the various themes, their connections, and the overall story the themes conveyed about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes that are to be deemed unique to the phenomenon being explored are up to the researcher to determine (van Manen, 2016). Therefore, themes discussed within the following chapters are not necessarily the most common (e.g., overall frequency, frequency within each data item); they tell a story about the data, a story that answers the study's research questions--it is not to

represent everything that is said in the data. Themes less relevant to answering the research questions were excluded (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013).

Defining and Naming. Within this phase of thematic analysis, I continued to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells by developing clear definitions and names for each theme. The naming of the themes aimed to be as sensitive as possible to what was in the data. An outsider should be able to read the themes and gain some sense of their nature (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The actual names of themes can come from at least three sources or a mix of these sources (a) the researcher; (b) the participants' exact words, (c) sources outside the study, most likely from relevant literature (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I utilized relevant and impactful participants' responses verbatim to contextualize and support the findings and themes (Elliott, 2018). How determinations were made for naming and defining codes and themes are provided in the codebook, which is added in Appendix H.

Producing the Report. Qualitative studies allow room to be innovative, creative, and produce reports in a literary-style writing (Creswell, 2014). Along with identifying the "story" each theme describes, it is critical to consider how they fit into the broader overall "story" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) stated the fewer the themes, the greater the level of abstraction, and the cleaner it will be to communicate the findings to others. The participants' experiences are shared, and the resulting themes developed are reported honestly and ethically to show respect for the participants and stakeholders (not limited to family, co-workers, and faculty) while avoiding the use of non-discriminatory language, as recommended by Creswell (2013). This dissertation serves as the final written report, which includes a detailed analysis of each theme developed within the research, which is provided in Chapter 4 (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is defined in qualitative research as answering whether the findings can be trusted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Due to subjectivity, the experience of meaning-making in qualitative research is ubiquitously criticized (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This study demonstrated credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability using rigor-assuring strategies (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell (2013) suggested that qualitative researchers use at least two strategies to establish validity

(trustworthiness). This study employed the strategies of member-checking and data triangulation, which are often used in qualitative research as they increase the credibility of qualitative research designs (Creswell, 2013).

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) exclaimed member-checking to be “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). Phenomenological researchers often choose this technique to strengthen their study’s credibility as they are aiming to ‘give voice’ to participants’ experiences, to ensure that there is a good fit between their interpretations and representation of their participants’ experiences of the phenomenon and their own understandings of their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I utilized member-checks to establish my credibility as a researcher by allowing study participants to test the findings, themes, and interpretations (Nowell et al., 2017). Participants who agreed to be contacted for further involvement in the study were provided a copy of their interview transcripts and a summary of the developed themes from data analyses.

Triangulation is often used in qualitative research designs because it increases a study’s credibility by countering concerns that its findings are based on a single method, source, or the researcher’s subjectivity (Patton, 2015). U.S. sociologist Norman Denzin (1970) first promoted triangulation in qualitative research. It involves using two or more data collection methods (sources of data) to examine the same phenomenon (Fusch et al., 2018). Data was triangulated from virtual interviews with an embedded survey, a reflexivity journal, and ongoing memoing. By engaging in the recursive practice of thematic analysis, I could constantly compare data from different participants over time and engage in the strategy of triangulation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Transferability

A study must describe the contexts, participants, settings, and circumstances so the reader can evaluate the results’ applicability to other contexts or participants to improve a study’s transferability. In Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) formulation of transferability, the onus of transferring results is placed on the reader. The reader must decide if their contexts and settings are similar enough to the original study to warrant a safe transfer (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The following chapters provide descriptions of authentic

participant experiences and the developed themes. The descriptions encompass abundant and interconnected details among participants' role identities.

It is important to note that human behavior is never static, and individual realities are socially constructed through participants' interactions with the world and their settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Tracy (2013) notes that because socially constructed understandings are fluid and unfinished, the context and participants would have changed even if a study were repeated (by the same researcher, in the same manner, context, and with the same participants). Transferability does not require outsiders to get the same results; instead, a researcher wants outsiders to agree that the results make sense--they are consistent and dependable.

Dependability

Morse (2015) recommended that researchers gather thick, rich data using triangulation to establish credibility and dependability in a phenomenological study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) were the first to conceptualize reliability in qualitative research as "dependability" or "consistency" versus reliability, which is utilized in quantitative methods. By the researcher providing thick, rich descriptions of the phenomenon along with enough of the transcripts so that readers can form their own interpretations, the dependability and overall credibility of the study are further strengthened (Cohen et al., 2000; Peoples, 2021). By utilizing a wealth of verbatim quotes from the experiences shared by the participants in this dissertation, readers should be able to form their own interpretations of the results.

Additionally, Yin (2014) asserts that the more operationalized the steps in the research process, the more dependable the results are. Dependability demands an audit trail as a transparent chain of evidence during data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). The dependability of this study is demonstrated by providing meticulous, detailed descriptions of all data collection and analysis processes employed in the study. Descriptions include the interview protocol, usage of the databases, and the final report (dissertation), which other researchers can use. The analysis process involved making auditable decisions, which were imperative to demonstrate clarity within the data collection and analysis processes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Confirmability

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) define confirmability as the extent to which qualitative interpretive research findings can be independently confirmed. Confirmability verifies that the study's findings and conclusions are rooted in participant experiences and researchers' neutrality (Savin-Baden & Howell-Major, 2013). Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that candor about the researcher's own preferences lies at the heart of confirmability.

To provide candor, I maintained a reflective researcher journal throughout this study to record my reactions, considerations, ideas, intuitions, prejudices, and assumptions about the research process and participants. This was done to the best of my availability, given the limitations described in chapter five regarding the timing of data analysis. This reflexivity technique examined the extent to which my experiences and biases influenced the data collection and analysis processes, of which member-checking was utilized as previously described to ensure overall trustworthiness.

Ethical Considerations

Utilizing human subjects in a study necessitates addressing and mitigating potential risks associated with their participation. According to Sanjari et al. (2015), qualitative researchers face multiple ethical issues that they must pay attention to during data collection. Confidentiality, the voluntary nature of participation, and the security of the information obtained from participants are all ethical concerns in this study. Three fundamental principles were considered throughout the study (a) maximization of beneficial outcomes and minimization of risks to participants; (b) protection of participants' confidentiality and ensuring that participants are adequately informed about the study's procedures; (c) ensuring justice (Creswell, 2013). Detailed study procedures are provided to ensure compliance with these fundamental principles.

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym for their name, school affiliations, and any other potential information that could be easily identifiable to aid with the concern of confidentiality (Saunders et al., 2015). These pseudonyms are utilized in the subsequent chapters, and a table highlighting participant demographic information is provided. Each participant had an electronic folder created for them, labeled with their pseudonym, to account for any potential data breaches that would affect confidentiality without these safeguards. All files containing participant data, including electronic files containing the

encoded data, video, audio recordings, transcripts of the interviews, interview notes, memos created, and the data from the electronic researcher's journal, are being kept on the University of Idaho One Drive and will be stored for at least five years.

IRB Approval

I obtained the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the University of Idaho to conduct the research study. The approval letter is added in Appendix A.

Participant Informed Consent

Before allowing interested participants to participate in an interview, an informed consent form, which included information about the study, risks and benefits of participation, the importance of confidentiality, and my contact information, was emailed to the potential participant. Additionally, the consent form explicitly stated their participation in the study was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without any consequences. Finally, participants were asked to provide their electronic signature via a .jpg or a pdf signature to acknowledge they had read and understood the form. Appendix E includes a copy of the consent form.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented comprehensive information on the research methods and design employed in the study, including the specific procedures utilized to identify participants. In addition, a detailed account of the tools employed for data collection, as well as a thorough explanation of the methods used for data analysis, was provided. In the subsequent chapter, the findings are presented, including the themes that were developed from the data analysis. Participant quotes are utilized to exemplify these themes and accentuate the participants' experiences.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore how 21st-century nontraditional doctoral student fathers--enrolled in various online programs within the United States--experienced establishing a work-life balance. Additionally, as no known studies of nontraditional doctoral student fathers' experiences were located, the research aimed to extend the conversation on doctoral students' work-life balance. This chapter presents the findings of the study. The developed themes from the data and the participants' experiences that support those themes are presented.

The following research questions directed the study and assisted in bringing to light the fathers' experiences regarding the research topic. These questions served as the underpinning of the research design, data sources utilized, and data analysis.

The central research questions directing this study were:

RQ1: How do nontraditional doctoral student fathers experience establishing a work-life balance within their multiple role identities and the changing context of 21st-century fatherhood?

RQ2: What are the experiences of nontraditional doctoral student fathers in an online program?

Multiple theoretical frameworks for data analysis were employed to interpret findings from numerous angles and lenses of identities that pertained to the participants and to answer the research questions. As no known studies have used the theoretical frameworks of role strain theory, identity theory, and doctoral student socialization theory collectively, this contributed uniquely to the findings and subsequent body of knowledge regarding fatherhood. When integrated within the data analysis process, these theories assisted in developing an understanding of how the fathers in this study engaged in unceasing role bargaining to meet their often-incompatible role demands to establish a work-life balance.

Role strain is defined as the difficulty felt in fulfilling one's role obligations as role-related demands, lack of resources, lack of support, and insufficient time make it difficult to perform all roles successfully (Goode, 1960). Fathers have multiple roles, which may cause allocation conflicts (time, place, or resources) (Goode, 1960)--leading to role strain. Notwithstanding role conflicts between their worker and father identities, their competing identities may also impact their doctoral student identity. Stryker (1987) described identities

as “internalized sets of role expectations, with an individual having as many identities as roles played in distinct sets of social relations” (p. 89). Goode (1960) advanced that individuals engage in role bargaining, which is the continuous process of selecting alternative role behaviors to fulfill one’s demands associated with that role identity to reduce the level of role strain.

Fatherhood requires unceasing role bargaining within and outside the family (Shezifi, 2004). As nontraditional doctoral student fathers do not fit into doctoral students’ traditional characteristics, their socialization experience is not entirely normative due to differences in their under-represented status (Gardner, 2008). The socialization process helps students navigate their doctoral journey toward professionalization (Weidman et al., 2001) and may be significantly impacted by being a nontraditional doctoral student father.

Participants

The population for this study was nontraditional doctoral student fathers who were part-time students, currently enrolled in a fully online program in the United States, concurrently employed full-time, and had at least one child. Participants were recruited who matched the sampling criterion through posts within Facebook groups of online doctoral students. Recruitment information was posted to 34 Facebook groups, and potential participants responded via email about their interests. Participants were also solicited through LinkedIn and X (formally known as Twitter). Through this purposeful sampling method (Heitner & Sherman, 2014), six participants were identified who met the criteria required for the study. An additional participant was recruited via snowball sampling via a previous interviewee. Finally, one participant was a convenience sample, as I knew him before the study.

All interested participants were emailed the consent form and asked to return an electronically signed form to consent to participation. Additionally, before the beginning of the interview, all participants were asked to reconfirm their consent to participate and informed of their right to withdraw from the interview voluntarily at any time with no repercussions. Due to these fathers’ conflicting time demands and technological issues encountered, six interviews were conducted via telephone. The additional two were conducted via Zoom. All interviews were also digitally voice-recorded via participant

consent for transcription and analysis. Table 1 includes interview participants' background information gathered during the interviews.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Data

Participant Pseudonym	Degree Type	Age	Ethnicity	Years of Study	Stage of Degree	Father Identity	# of Children
Luke	Ed.D.	45	Caucasian	3	Dissertation	Biological, Adoptive	3
Josiah	Ph.D.	37	Caucasian	3	Coursework	Biological	2
Joshua	Ph.D.	34	Caucasian	3	Dissertation	Biological	3
Paul	Ph.D.	36	African-American	3	Dissertation	Stepfather	1
Micah	Doctor of Occupational Safety and Health	33	Caucasian	<1	Coursework	Biological	3
Matthew	Ed.D.	34	African-American	4	Dissertation	Biological	3
Peter	Ph.D.	39	Caucasian	3	Dissertation	Biological	1
Jonah	Ed.D.	42	Caucasian	3	Dissertation	Biological	5

Developed Themes

While developing themes from coded data, the researcher examines the codes and coded data for differences and similarities to establish potential patterns (Gibbs, 2007). Themes are developed as the final interpretation of all data to depict the participants' experiences and lifeworld, and they should be responsive to the purpose of the research--in effect, serving as the answers to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The actual names of themes can come from at least three sources (or a mix of these sources) (a) the researcher; (b) the participants' exact words; (c) sources outside the study, most likely from relevant literature (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The following themes have been named through a combination of these three sources, which I believe best represent the overall essence of the participants' experiences. Three themes and sub-themes were created from the eight participant interviews designating how doctoral student fathers experienced their attempts to balance their father, student, and worker identities. The three major themes are (a) Balancing Multiple Roles; (b) Fatherhood Identity and Roles; (c) Support and Well-being. They are discussed in detail in the remainder of this chapter.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes Developed From the Data

Themes	Subthemes
Balancing Multiple Roles	Is it Possible, Flexibility, Negotiating Roles, Integration v. Balance
Fatherhood Identity and Roles	Defining a 21 st -century Father, Involvement with Children, Roles in the Family, Familial, Cultural, and Societal Influences
Support and Well-being	Faculty Support, Family Support, Peer Support, Well-being

Theme 1: Balancing Multiple Roles

This theme examines how individuals described their experiences with attempts to balance their roles as fathers, students, and workers. Many factors can impact one's perceived work-life balance, and it is a highly individualistic construct. The sub-themes developed were (a) Is it Possible; (b) Flexibility; (c) Negotiating Roles; (d) Integration v. Balance. The first sub-theme describes participants' perspectives on whether achieving a work-life balance is possible. Individuals described their experiences with navigating the challenges associated with balancing multiple priorities within their role identities, including various strategies they utilized to attempt to do so.

Is it Possible. This sub-theme explores how participants viewed the work-life balance construct and their ability to achieve it between their roles. The notion of having a work-life balance is very individualistic. It looks different based on many variables from the

experiences shared in the interviews. This was evident in how participants described their personal beliefs about whether they had created a work-life balance. Multiple individuals described their viewpoints on work-life balance as more challenging, if not non-existent. Josiah exclaimed that he “doesn’t think there is such a thing.” Furthermore, he stated that the higher he has moved in his career ladder, “the less work-life balance he has obtained.” In agreement with Josiah, Peter said,

Yeah, so I don’t believe it exists. I don’t think there’s anything, like, there’s no such thing as a work-life balance. I think I aim basically for work-life coexistence in a lot of ways; how can I shape these things and make them co-exist because part of my identity is what I do. I find that very important, so I work a lot on that. I’m just getting these two things to work together.

Matthew was more uncertain about the subject, stating he was “not sure if there is a healthy balance or not.” Paul had a viewpoint that straddled the lines between these thoughts and further defined how he viewed the work-life balance concept,

I believe in it; I think it’s important. I can’t say I live it right now, to be honest with you. And you know, I say that in defining it in a way that allows work to be work and simply a way to provide life versus it taking up time or energy to where it inhibits you from living. So yeah, that balance, just being able to do other things outside of work, that work just for provides from a time, from a financial standpoint, from a resource standpoint as well.

Flexibility. This sub-theme explores how participants described the importance of flexibility in managing their different roles. As these fathers told their stories of their lived experiences managing their roles, there were multiple examples of how they needed to be more flexible and adaptable and often adjust their schedules to ensure they met their role obligations. Flexibility included adjusting schedules and routines as needed. Nearly all participants declared that flexibility was “crucial” and “essential” in meeting commitments.

Most participants worked in some form of educational system ranging from elementary to higher education. Micah was the lone outlier and provided a different point of view as an individual who was away from his family during the week and had to create that balance more so on the weekend,

Um, it's challenging... the luxury I have of being on the road five days a week is at four o'clock, guys go home. Sometimes, it's earlier than that, like today. So that gives me five or six hours tonight that I can work on my stuff. And I think that's helped out a ton to help balance the workload and the workload for school. I think it's helped out a ton with helping free up some time with the kids when I'm home on the weekends. Typically, if I have to do schoolwork on the weekends, I usually try to do it when they're winding down at night. Or if they're napping or whatever, I try to move it around that. That's what's nice about doing an online school is that it's flexible. If I miss a live lecture, it's recorded; I can hop online and watch it.

The impact of choosing a flexible doctoral program to meet the needs of these fathers was paramount to the success they had achieved so far in meeting their role obligations. Luke stated he had a "preference for an online doctoral program due to its flexibility," contrasting it with the rigidity of traditional in-person programs that would have conflicted with their familial and professional obligations. The ability of these fathers to access their courses on their terms when they had the time away from their other responsibilities was vital. Multiple participants addressed this notion, with one stating, "If I can't make it for a class, then it's always recorded, and you can watch it later."

Josiah offered a story of his struggles with synchronously delivered courses, which have similar rigidity regarding time as an in-person course at a brick-and-mortar institution, My boss, at the time, when I was at a different institution, allowed me to take off like a half hour early or so--so I can get home, I can get on the computer, and do the classes synchronously. Since I switched jobs and I have to pick up the kids from daycare, class starts at 5 p.m. CST., 6 p.m. EST., so I'm not able to take off early because I still have to watch the kids. They get distracted and want to type on my computer when I'm on it talking to the professors, and they want to talk to them as well. At that point, I stopped doing synchronously and started doing asynchronously, and that has been helpful because I normally don't start anything asynchronously until after 9:30 p.m. or 10 p.m.

Negotiating Roles. This sub-theme explores how the participants identified and experienced obstacles in their attempts to balance their roles as students, fathers, and workers. All of these role identities come with their own unique and often stressful pressures

to fulfill their obligations. Participants highlighted their need to be proactive in scheduling and planning to accommodate the various commitments from work, school, and family. Joshua described his need for advanced planning due to the travel demands related to his position,

In my position with having to travel a lot, in order to keep that work-life balance, I have to make sure my schedule is planned out, about a minimum of 45 days in advance... have a big X through it [family event date] on my work schedule, basically a work blackout date. That way, I am home with the family.

Peter described the importance of deciphering how he will prioritize everything he juggles, from being president-elect of his state professional organization to pursuing his doctorate to traveling frequently to give training and presentations. He offered this vignette of a recently chaotic stretch in his life,

Yesterday, I drove four hours to the other part of the state to do a presentation. But the night before, my wife really wanted to go to a concert. Knowing that, okay, great, I am going to make the commitment that I'm not gonna drive up the night before and have a comfortable night of sleep. I'll just get up at six in the morning and drive the four hours, and that worked. And then, driving back today knowing that I have a few work commitments to do this afternoon to get done, but then we're leaving to go on our family vacation tomorrow. And so knowing that, okay, I gotta get everything done today, so that way, I can truly turn off when I go. That means like leaving the technology behind and not being tempted to kind of do that work.

While several participants noted employers who were flexible and felt they were in positions that allowed them to be successful in navigating their role responsibilities, Luke shared an experience that was not an easy one to make but felt necessary to fulfill all of his obligations,

I think you're always a parent first that, you know, you need to focus on your kids and that was part of the reason I made the change in my career. I was focused on my career, and while it was going well, I didn't have as much time as I needed for my kids. There's night meetings, and I was always on call a hundred percent of the time and just being pulled away, so I just felt like a change was needed, and I'm so glad I did it, and it's been the best change. To have a normal work life, um, it can be tough

to have that balance, but I think I found that balance now where I can do my adjunct professor stuff, all of that's asynchronous. I have no synchronous time with the students, so I can do that all after my kids go to bed.

Integration v. Balance. This sub-theme explores in further detail how participants worked towards creating a work-life balance. Multiple participants described experiences where they would have to integrate their studies and sometimes work into their time with their family and children. One father stated, "A lot of it is trying to stay organized. So every Sunday morning, I organize my entire week." As a continuation of Peter's nonbelief in a work-life balance, he posits that he "aims basically for work-life coexistence in a lot of ways and how I can shape these things and make them coexist." He further elaborated,

So, um, I am serving in my professional role as the president-elect of a state affiliation of our profession. To take on that role and to be doing this Ph.D. program, a lot of people were like, what are you thinking? Finding that balance between spending time with my family and meeting work demands has been challenging, but I've tried to integrate both as much as possible. Integrating my work and family life has been challenging, but finding ways to involve my children in my studies and work responsibilities has helped bridge the gap.

Some fathers found integration a little more challenging and must dedicate full attention to their studies in larger chunks of time. Josiah described how he attempts to meet the demands of his doctoral program deadlines,

Familywise, when there's a big assignment, I normally have to go away on the weekend, on Saturday afternoon. So Saturday evening to almost all Sunday afternoon to finish assignments before the 10:55 p.m. due date or due time for my assignment. So I'll have to sneak away to make sure that I'm all caught up on that, if I'm not able to finish it during Monday through Friday during that two-three hours that I get to work on it at night.

Jonah described the ebb and flow of work demands in which he can focus more on his studies and then also focus on his family throughout the year,

So, for example, this month, I normally get the month of July off. I really hit the family stuff and the doctoral work hard this month. I normally went in the office and worked between four and six hours almost every day on my doctoral studies. And

then we're loading up and we're going to the lake for the reservoir or whatever. So my family's using a lot of attention right now. Um and my doctoral studies have been getting a lot of attention where I haven't really logged on to work emails. I haven't done any ordering. I'm just kind of disengaged from that right now.

Theme 2: Fatherhood Identity and Roles

The next theme developed from the participant's shared experiences is related to the identity of a father and the role it plays in their work-life balance. The sub-themes developed were (a) Defining a 21st-century Father; (b) Involvement with Children; (c) Roles in the Family; (d) Familial, Cultural, and Societal Influences. The first sub-theme shares how these fathers describe fatherhood and their views on society's expectations of fathers today. As fathers are spending more time with their children, the emotional connection and levels of involvement described by the participants will also be shared. Finally, these fathers come from diverse backgrounds and do not always fit the mold of what a traditional father and their background may be. Various cultural and unique childhood upbringings and how they have shaped their experiences as fathers will be highlighted.

Defining a 21st-century Father. A simple question asked: What does being a father mean to you? The responses varied significantly, but Joshua said, "It really means everything." Other participants shared that "they love being a dad" and, according to Luke, "he could totally be a stay-at-home dad." To Josiah, "it's more about being supportive of the kids, teaching them about everything going on, but also making sure they understand that I'm there to help and support them the whole time." This sentiment was echoed but also expounded upon by Matthew, who stated,

Being a father to me, I guess it's just someone's going to be there for your kids, mentally, spiritually, socially, physically, having the best interest of heart, being a provider, being a safeguard, being the image of God on earth.

Involvement with Children. Identity theory does not just say individual identity is important; it tells the story of how identity is essential and how it ultimately determines fathering behavior. Men who see being a father as their most salient identity can be more actively engaged parents than men with a less salient father identity (Goldberg, 2015; Hofferth et al., 2013; Pasley et al., 2014). Most of these fathers expressed an innate desire to

be involved in their children's lives, including attending activities, but sometimes that was not possible due to work demands. Joshua described one such time,

So there's those times that it does happen... I had to fly from Atlanta to Jacksonville, then leave from Jacksonville to Kentucky, and then come back to Atlanta that week. And it was very chaotic and stressful. Um, but that changed my schedule; we communicated it as a family. My daughter, although she wished I was there, she still does; she understands that I do as much as I possibly can to be at activities with her; it may just be those one or two that get missed.

Luke stated that family is his top priority and offered advice to future doctoral student fathers on how to remain actively involved in their lives,

I just think devoting adequate time to your family and making them your first priority while also being successful and doing your job well, make the best use of your time while your kids are awake, make the most time you can for them to be involved in their life.

Peter echoed the importance of his family being the utmost priority to him, "Um, and then just in terms of obligation of duty, I have the biggest obligation of duty to my family. So when I'm kind of trying to prioritize, the family priorities will come first." He went on to describe how this was an essential factor in his doctoral program decision,

Um, so that shaped how I picked my program. I chose an online program that had that flexibility, so I had time with my family. But then, when I was selecting my classes, I would take my daughter's piano schedule and the basketball schedule, line those up, and make sure I picked a section that didn't align with that night and that she had those things.

Roles in the Family. As Lewis and O'Brien (1987) stated, men have a less clear "job description" as fathers than women do as mothers. As is the case with definitions and societal constructs of fatherhood, there is a lack of consensus about how best to assess fathers' role (Dermott, 2008; Lamb, 2000; Miller & Dermott, 2015). Micah, having older children in the house and physically being away from the family during the week, was one of the few fathers who explicitly focused on the role of being the financial provider for the family,

The father relationship with my kids is really, I think, more financial at this point. To be able to provide, you know, clothing, housing, utilities, and everything they need to

survive and thrive. Um, I really left the thriving piece for them and where they wanna be, even at this young age in their lives. You know, I'm there, I'm around, we talk a lot on the phone because I'm gone all the time. But that's the major piece of it, to provide them an opportunity.

A constant term utilized through the interviews with participants was being a "role model" to their children. Matthew discussed his desire to show his children and his students that an education is possible, "I want my students to see me excelling so that they know that they can do it... I want more; I want to better myself. I want to show them that it's possible." Micah described ways he hopes his studies are rubbing off on his children,

I think it helps my kids realize as well, like when they see me, you know, reading books and studying and stuff like that, that dad has been a lifelong learner, and it's important. I think that reflects in how they behave as well for their academics.

For Peter, he described his role as a father being a part of his identity,

I think being a father means a lot of things all in one. I think it's serving as a role model and as a guide to this kind of younger being. And so in a lot of ways, it is growing and learning, not only role modeling to that person, but I think for me it's been a lot of just understanding your identity of who you are as well, because that first moment they come in the world, you are now, that's a such a big part of your identity.

While fathering behaviors are essential influences on father role identity, those of an involved father can often be met with skeptical views from society as if a father is not supposed to be involved at that level. Matthew described the double standards he believes society holds on fathers, particularly Black fathers,

I have been the recipient multiple times of microaggressions. They will ask what are you doing here? But also, society wants me; it's a catch-22 because society wants me to do what I need to do to be a father, but when I do what I'm expected to do, they're blown away because I'm doing it or I'm doing it well. I don't need someone to come in here to teach me how to do my daughter's hair. I can do my daughter's hair myself. Oh, you could do your daughter's hair? Damn right, I can. Why can't I?

Societal expectations can also have an impact on how involved fathers get and can influence identity formation. Joshua described how he believed societal views of the father's role and the reactions received when he exceeds those,

The father doesn't necessarily become involved in getting the children to school, getting the children picked up from school, making sure that the kid, which child, gets to which extracurricular activity. The father tends to be just the one who goes to the office, home from the office, and gets the paycheck. From what I've seen is, the father doesn't really get to be that key player in what activities does the family play in? How does he be involved with the family? When my eldest was in Girl Scouts last year, she chose to switch to Boy Scouts, but I was the one who took my daughter to Girl Scouts. I was the one who did all the activities with her. And now that she's in Boy Scouts, I'm still doing that. She asked, the opportunity was available for being a den leader, and I let her make the choice of if I was going to be the den leader or not. Um, she's six years old, but I let her make those decisions of is my father going to be the one who's there helping me all the time, or is my father going to be just an extra partner, an adult leader to help everybody?

Matthew offered a view from the standpoint of a minority father when he stated,

Now, mind you, our counterparts relating to Hispanics and Whites doing it [being involved], they're like, oh, okay, he's just being a good dad. A Black guy does the same thing; oh, he is exceeding the odds. While there is some truth in that, it should not be an exceeding the odds situation. It should be, oh, that's just another father doing what he needs to do. But I think society wants me to level up, and then when I do, they're like, oh, you can do that? I don't think it's a normal expectation for fathers actually to do what is expected.

Familial, Cultural, and Societal Influences. This sub-theme explores how the participants' father identity has been influenced by their childhood, cultural, and societal expectations and influence. This group of diverse fathers offered stories of growing up in a traditional two heterosexual-parent household, with a single-mother, with a stepfather, multiple participants never knowing their biological father, and also a father who was adopted as a child. These experiences could not be understated when examining the participants' responses. Many of their beliefs about fathering and balancing roles either arose

from wanting to follow in their father's (or father figures') ways or wanting to change the experiences they endured for their children's childhood

Multiple participants stated they did not grow up with their biological father. They may never have known or met them or were not very involved in their life. One participant, Joshua, described how his single mother laid the foundation for how to parent, as he also had few father figures,

Um, I didn't really. I had a few family members who gave me ideas, but they weren't really the foundation. It was just the way my mother worked hard to provide for me, regardless of what we could do. She always tried to make sure that I was taken care of. Even if it meant we couldn't go do something else that I wish I could do. I always had food. I always had a roof over my head. Yeah. Um, I didn't really have any [male] role models, anything to provide a background. It was just more of I knew that I had to work hard to provide.

Luke described a more traditional home life growing up and having involved parents who set a good example for who he wanted to be a father,

I had a good example of parents that set good examples by being involved. And I remember asking as a kid, you know, why does so and so parents drop 'em off at church and then pick 'em up afterwards? And I think my mom's response was, uh, everyone does something different, but that's not how we do it. We're all involved."

Matthew shared that, "I didn't ever know my biological father, but my stepdad was there for me since I was six months old, and he basically brought us up in the church and was daddy for me. So other male figures who I saw as father figures all have plenty of roots in the church itself, and they lent an example of how fathers should love." These figures led him to want to be the best father he could be and to overcome societal expectations for Black fathers not to be involved in their children's lives, "I refuse to be another statistic. I refuse to have my kids be raised by somebody else or have my kids in a fatherless home because I couldn't just keep my crap together."

Participants further expounded upon how they believe societal expectations of fathers have been affected by 21st-century perceptions of what fathers should be. They used terms such as "unrealistic," "low," and "distant and non-emotional." According to Matthew, expectations of fathers are,

Unrealistic. They want fathers to be able to be the strength, take care of all the bills, do everything the father needs to do, and then more. They expect us; they want us to be emotional banks, but then they don't want us to be emotional banks. They want us to be self-sustaining, but they don't want to sound all the stress that's associated with high expectations. And while we try to be Superman for a lot of different things, we every day push the limit to exceed even our expectations because of conditions for those around us.

Expectations for fathers of color may go even further and deepen the challenges faced, as Matthew further elaborated,

But it's not only just the societal expectation of a father but society's expectation, especially for a father of color; you're looking at social norms. What does culture and society expect from me? As a Black father, I'm not expected to be with my kids. I'm not expected to be self-sustaining; I'm expected to live a welfare system. I'm expected to be not present in my kids' life. I'm expected not to have degrees. I'm expected not to fit God's characteristics of what a father should be able to do. I'm expected to be a low-down, disgusting piece of trash.

Paul, who also identifies as a Black father from a Nigerian background, described societal expectations as multi-faceted regarding his race and ethnicity,

In one breath, they're supposed to be, you know, Captain America. I'm African-American, and so the way fathers or just Black men, in general, are viewed by society is a lot different than what you would say a stereotypical father and how they're viewed. I would say an African-American male is viewed negatively, first and foremost, whether they're a father or not.

He went on to describe the adverse effects society and media have played in portraying Black fathers and where he believes they come from. "I think they come from ignorance. I think they come from systematic oppression. I think they come from mass media." Josiah, who identifies as Caucasian, agreed that the media has not put fathers in a good light when discussing what a father should be,

I think, for the most part, with some of the stuff dictating from either social media or movies or TV shows, normally times, the dads are not very emotional. I think it's

always been around that the male of the household would always be the provider for the family, final decision maker, anything like that. Need to make sure that if you have a son, you're making sure that you make him a man, you teach him how to be a man and do man-like things and all that as well on there, making sure that they are protective. But I think a lot of times, society sees male figures as sometimes violent instead of caring.

Luke stated that from his experiences as a principal, he believes that the expectations of fathers are meager. He described the majority of fathers as "very hands off" and that the majority would "have no idea who their kids' teacher was." He believes that being involved is essential not only for himself but also for the kids. He went on to state,

I think that might be part of the reason of what's wrong with society is some dads have to work long hours, and I get that, but I still think that you gotta be involved as much as you can. I see dads that do that; even if they work long hours, they make time for their kids. Um, whether that be, you know, coaching whatever sports or doing whatever, or just spending time with the family. You just need to take that time.

Theme 3: Support and Well-being

The next theme developed shares the participants' experiences with the support received from various sources and how their general well-being has been impacted through balancing their multiple roles. The sub-themes discussed are (a) Family Support; (b) Faculty Support; (c) Peer Support; (d) General Well-being. As these fathers discussed the challenges of balancing their roles of father, student, and worker, it became evident that needing a support system was vital to their success. They discussed their partners' essential roles in this support, including support with overall home life and how they also balanced helping them with household duties. The idea of well-being was also discovered to be vital in balancing their roles, which is attributed to some shared overall health concerns.

Family Support. It was evident through the interviews that these fathers did not take a backseat at home to complete their schooling and work role obligations. Participants described attempts to create an egalitarian home with their partners while highlighting how their partners assisted them with creating a work-life balance. Jonah shared that his wife was incredibly supportive when needing to focus on his studies. "I'll be like June; I'm really behind on the schoolwork right now. And she'll be like, I got you." He described the

assistance he received as vital to creating a work-life balance, “You have to have a work-life balance because you want to make sure that...your family will be there to stand and support and celebrate.”

With ever-changing roles and societal expectations for fathers today, as well as mothers, these fathers are attempting to find out how they fit into their role at home (Griswold, 2013). Luke described ways home life has changed over time and some of the delineations in roles within his home,

I mean, we’re not living in the fifties where the moms are staying at home. I mean, some do, and that’s great, but I think an equal partner, um, you know, my wife and I, she works, I work, we’re both in grad school, believe it or not. And, you know, we have our duties that, you know, we both do the cleaning, dishes, we both share that. I do all the laundry in the house. She does all the cooking in the house; I do the outside stuff. We just have our things that we do, but it’s all a team effort and I think it’s good for kids to see that. I think too many times, society just thinks the mom or the wife is doing everything, and I don’t agree with that. I think that in order for both of you to be able to spend time with the kids and to do everything you do, I think it requires both parents to be engaged and doing, taking part of that load on.

Jonah stated he believed some household duties are still gendered, though it’s getting better than what it was,

I do still feel like there’s some of the systemic, like, parent jobs; these are the jobs of moms, these are the jobs of dads, and I think society still kind of uses a little bit of that now. I think it’s getting better. It’s definitely not what it was when I was, you know, a young boy, where there were still some moms who would stay at home. I feel like there’s definitely more two-income families and equality in that way.

Support at home is vital to these fathers trying to balance their roles, but work support is equally important. Peter offered examples of when fatherhood and being an employee are not mutually exclusive and how he has been able to integrate those two roles,

But sometimes, they just bleed into it. Sometimes I think, I have a kid who gets sick; there’s some days during the school year she just gets sick. And so I’m very privileged to work at an employer that values family, and I could call in the morning and just explain that she’s sick, or we can take our kids to work, or we can bring our

kids to school with us. So, when her spring break doesn't align with my spring break, it's great that I can bring her to the office. So, not being ashamed to do that, because I think sometimes that shame or that guilt of, like, I'm gonna get in trouble at work if I to bring my kid or take her to the doctor's appointment. It's just kinda getting over that and embracing it.

Faculty Support. One participant shared the challenge of connecting with faculty due to time zone differences and their overall availability. They also acknowledged their own limited availability due to work and family obligations, which made it difficult to form those relationships with faculty. This finding was common among the participants as others described their interactions with faculty as “minimal,” “nothing outside of class,” and “not really anyone outside of my major professor.”

Micah shared how his professors have been active in attempting to keep communication lines open with him, “If my professor, and this is where I'm blessed, because if a professor sees that I haven't had any activity online, they'll actually call my cell phone, see if I'm ok because they know the work that I do.

Peer Support. Peter described attending events with his children where he was one of the few fathers there and attempted to make connections with them to garner peer fatherhood support, “trying to find ways to, you know, if there are other dads there, try to connect with them and talk and make those connections and do what I can.”

Luke discussed the importance of finding support within his doctoral program. Receiving support can be a challenge for online doctoral students since they are not physically located in the exact locations of their peers or faculty members. He described an online chat group encompassed of his doctoral cohort as a place where,

We can be real with each other, you know, and ask, not be afraid to ask the dumb questions. And we kind of, and we've never met obviously, we just encourage each other, ask questions of each other, and we all the time say, I don't know how we would do this, how everyone else is doing this without this group.

These experiences emphasize the importance of peer interactions in and outside of academia and support within their doctoral program. Participants discussed their experiences of forming a supportive group chat with peers, enabling open communication and the exchange of advice and encouragement.

General Well-being. Balancing multiple roles can be highly demanding on an individual's personal resources, such as time and energy. Numerous participants described broader well-being implications of juggling their responsibilities, including health and personal relationship concerns. Many participants also noted a lack of interaction with peers and faculty as not being helpful while trying to balance their student roles. Matthew described that while his physical health has not necessarily been affected, his relationships have been strained due to his multiple roles and their time demands,

I'm not talking about health just as it relates to physical health. I'm referring to relationship health. I think some of my relationships have. I've since worked on them and fixed them, but I think a lot of times they do get hit, and it isn't always healthy. Jonah went on to focus more on how his physical health has been impacted,

There's been things like, I've gained 20 pounds since starting this [doctoral studies]. I'm probably, you know, weaker than I've ever been. But again, because my priorities and my studies have taken place of me working out, I haven't really worked out in two and a half years. But that's, again, those are sacrifices you make; keep the priorities, the priority and the main things, the main things. And once I'm done with this program, I can always start working out again.

Josiah described how his sleep had been severely impacted while attempting to complete assignments for his courses, "... and there's sometimes I'm watching three-four-hour videos, so I'll be getting into bed about 1:30 a.m. or so, and I have to get up by 5:50 a.m. so that I can get my son up in time to catch the 6:30 a.m. bus to go to kindergarten. So my sleep has been affected by it."

Chapter Summary

Collectively, the participants exhibited a high degree of openness and honesty during their interviews, offering valuable insights into the distinct viewpoints of fathers' endeavors to create a work-life balance. The participants addressed the two research questions: (1) their experiences with work-life balance and (2) their experiences with an online doctoral program. Given the nature of a dissertation, the data analysis was limited to the specific scope of the two research questions. The findings may prompt further research, which is elaborated upon in the subsequent chapter. Furthermore, the next chapter delves deeper into the themes developed and explores how the findings relate to the current body of literature.

Moreover, the study's limitations are highlighted, and implications for policy and practice are examined. Lastly, suggestions for future research are presented.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study aimed to explore the experiences of nontraditional doctoral student fathers in the 21st-century enrolled in fully online programs in the United States, specifically focusing on how they establish a work-life balance (WLB). The study focused on the fathers' management of multiple role identities and their experiences in an online doctoral program. The study's findings will be discussed within the theoretical frameworks of role strain theory, identity theory, and doctoral student socialization theory. Finally, this chapter will discuss the study's limitations and suggest recommendations for future research areas. A brief review of the theories and their most salient aspects discovered within this study is now provided.

Theoretical Frameworks

Fathers' multiple roles can cause time, place, and resource conflicts (known as role conflicts) (Goode, 1960)--causing role strain. Role strain occurs when role-related conflicts make it difficult to perform all roles (Goode, 1960). Pertinent aspects of role strain theory found within this study included role bargaining, which is the continuous process of choosing between role behaviors to meet one's role identity's demands and reduce role strain. Additionally, participants utilized strategies to reduce strain, including compartmentalization and role elimination.

The roles of the participants within this study were also explored from the lens of identity theory. Identity theory "emphasizes the way individuals construct their selves through the interactions of others" and "focuses on the relationship between identities, hierarchies, and behaviors" (Kaufman, 2013, p. 15). Stryker (1987) described identities as "internalized sets of role expectations, with an individual having as many identities as roles played in distinct sets of social relations" (p. 89). A central tenant of this theory is known as "role salience." Stryker (1968) defined the concept of role salience as the "probability, for a given person, of a given identity being invoked in a variety of different situations" (p. 560). Associated assumptions of identity theory are that identities provide a stimulus for action (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stryker, 1980). In the context of this study, the salience of participants' roles as a father affected their other roles as workers and doctoral students, particularly their socialization within their doctoral student role.

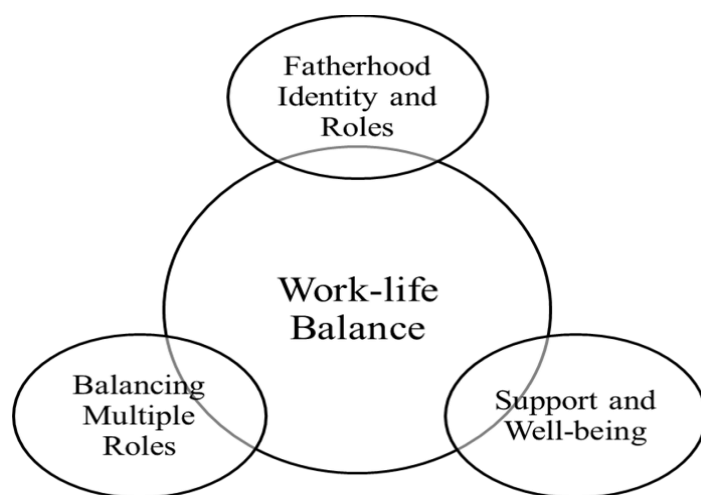
Researchers have defined socialization as a series of processes that occur throughout a graduate student's experiences, resulting in the accumulation of skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary for academic and professional careers (Twale et al., 2016). According to Weidman and Stein (2003), there are four stages of growth in graduate students' socialization (a) anticipatory; (b) formal; (c) informal; (d) personal. The anticipatory stage can be described as a student being conscious of the overall expectations for a graduate student's role. Findings within this study showed that lack of interaction among peers and faculty members was the most significant challenge to participants' socialization processes.

Discussion of the Findings

After a thematic data analysis, three distinct themes were developed from the participants' experiences and narratives. The themes included in the discussion are (a) Balancing Multiple Roles; (b) Fatherhood Identity and Roles; (c) Support and Well-being. The themes are examined in the identical order as Chapter 4 to enhance readability. The findings are also discussed in relation to prior research and the theoretical frameworks employed for data analysis.

Figure 3

Developed Themes



Note. Developed themes relating to the phenomenon of work-life balance

Theme 1: Balancing Multiple Roles

The initial theme developed shares the participants' experiences with balancing their multiple roles as students, fathers, and workers. The sub-themes discussed are (a) Is it Possible; (b) Flexibility; (c) Negotiating Roles; (d) Integration v. Balance. These themes

were examined in relation to the theoretical perspectives mentioned above and how they related to the participants' shared experiences.

Is it Possible. Role strain denotes the challenges that arise when an individual tries to fulfill their role obligations (Goode, 1960). The challenges arise from the presence of role-related demands, limited resources, inadequate support, and insufficient time, which hinder the effective execution of all roles. The complex challenge of balancing family and work, traditionally regarded as a concern exclusive to women, is now being recognized as a concern for fathers (Bosoni & Mazzucchelli, 2019). The study's findings indicated that fathers who balance doctoral studies and full-time jobs encounter role strain as they face time constraints resulting from their multiple role obligations (Sparkman & Doran, 2019).

Previous research indicated that time management skills are paramount to balancing multiple roles (Isacco & Mannarino, 2016), including purposefully managing time (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Herring Watson, 2020) and setting boundaries around time (Sallee, 2015). Findings showed that being purposeful to enhance the quality of time spent with their family was as important as the time itself. Jonah discussed his view on time regarding a work-life balance, "when you're talking about balance, [overall] time isn't necessarily as important; it's more about the quality of time that you're spending with your family."

Flexibility. The participants in this study frequently emphasized the importance of flexibility in achieving a healthy work-life balance. This discovery validates prior research demonstrating the importance of flexibility in roles for students to effectively allocate time for their various responsibilities (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019). According to Kim and Gong (2017), flexible work arrangements can effectively address the challenges of balancing professional and home responsibilities, increasing career satisfaction and reducing employee stress. Jonah outlined the strategies employed by his employer to establish a work environment that accommodated his need for flexibility, enabling him to fulfill his academic responsibilities successfully. His supervisor told him, "If you need to spend the day writing, don't use your vacation time. Use your sick time...I really think he tries to keep my plate relatively manageable because he knows how much work I'm doing."

The results of this study revealed that many participants opted for online doctoral programs primarily due to the flexibility and convenience they offer in completing the degree. Paul stated, "I knew I still needed to work, to be quite honest. I knew I wasn't in a

place where I could drop everything and just do school. I also knew I wasn't moving my family for it." This finding supports previous research indicating that many doctoral students are drawn to distance programs due to flexibility and convenience (Berry & Hughes, 2019; Bolliger & Halupa, 2012).

Negotiating Roles. Role conflicts frequently arise when individuals face time, energy, and resource constraints, leading to incompatible role pressures and obligations (Pluut et al., 2022; Sarwar et al., 2021). Matthew described these pressures when discussing work-life balance within his roles, "So I don't think there's a healthy balance, especially for me. I think this entire process pushes and pulls. It's like while I try to be the perfect dad, the perfect son, the perfect cousin, the perfect this, and the perfect child of God, I also am trying to be the perfect husband." This statement supports a fundamental principle of role strain theory, which asserts that individuals are unable to fulfill all their role obligations completely and must consistently make decisions about their roles through a process known as role bargaining.

Role bargaining enables individuals to adjust to their role demands and alleviate the level of strain experienced (Goode, 1960). Peter also described a time when he needed to engage in role bargaining, "When I was selecting my classes, I would take my daughter's piano schedule, the basketball schedule, line those up, and make sure I picked a section that didn't align with that night that she had those things. Or how could I book her piano lesson and basketball on the same day? We just go back and forth."

Prior research has found that graduate students who intentionally prioritized their time reported greater satisfaction in balancing their various roles (Castelló et al., 2017; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Herring Watson, 2020). Peter stated, "It is trying to think about how I'm gonna prioritize everything in what order... my family, I have the biggest obligation of duty." Matthew described the importance of intentionally "making time to just spend with my kids and just to be dad." Here are two instances where fathers prioritized their roles as fathers. This concept is known as role salience in the context of identity theory. In identity theory, salience refers to the likelihood of identities and their associated behaviors being demonstrated in various situations (Stryker & Serpe, 1982).

Integration v. Balance. A study by Sallee (2015) discovered that parents effectively handled their academic and non-academic obligations by employing various strategies such

as time management, decision-making regarding assignment completion, and prioritization. Sallee (2015) described the strategy of compartmentalization that parents may use to manage their role conflicts. Compartmentalization, as defined in role strain theory, is the act of mentally separating one role task while in another role (Goode, 1960). Although this strategy has received little attention in literature focused on student-parent relationships (Sallee, 2015), several participants in this study mentioned using this strategy. Peter stated using this strategy within his student and worker roles,

Last spring, I made sure I took two personal days, and I just used those as writing days and giving myself that permission to do so... I'm not gonna feel guilty about giving up work time to do this because there's gonna be sometimes, I'm gonna give up family time to do work emails.

Furthermore, multiple participants described needing to go away for weekends to ensure they could complete their assignments on time. While this may be an effective strategy for students, it may harm the student's partners. Sneaking away on weekends may increase the level of role strain on their partners and cause conflicts within the home for that student. Moreover, this highlights the need for flexibility from faculty if multiple events coincide with assignments, such as a child's event, family events, such as a wedding, or any last-minute assignments or deadline changes that would increase the level of strain felt.

In their study, Dolson and Deemer (2020) observed that graduate student parents frequently implemented stringent schedules and displayed heightened awareness of time management due to their parental obligations. This level of time management entailed establishing limits regarding time, such as exclusively dedicating evenings to completing their homework after their children have gone to bed for the night and prioritizing their parental responsibilities by allocating specific daytime hours for their families (Sallee, 2015). These findings are supported by multiple participants who reported that they either completed their schoolwork in the morning before their children woke up or in the late evening after their children had gone to bed; occasionally, even when children were resting in the afternoon, as noted by one participant, "I have a picture of every single one of my kids as newborns perched on my shoulder while I'm sitting there on a computer, and they're just passed out on my shoulder while staring at a laptop."

The findings of this study showed that participants did not express feelings of guilt when attempting to balance their roles. This is contrary to Sverdlik et al. (2018) who found that doctoral student parents often experience a guilt cycle. They would feel guilty about wasting time on social activities as they were viewed as distracting to program progress. When they took time for family activities, they felt guilty about not working on their schoolwork, such as dissertations. The guilt led them to work on schoolwork and experience more guilt for not spending time with family. However, within this study, only one participant mentioned guilt and was hesitant to use the word. This finding may go back to the level of father identity salience participants expressed and lower levels of student and worker identity salience.

Theme 2: Fatherhood Identity and Roles

The next theme shared the participants' experiences negotiating their father identity in various roles. The sub-themes discussed are (a) Defining a 21st-century Father; (b) Involvement with Children; (c) Roles in the Family; (d) Familial, Cultural, and Societal Influences.

Defining a 21st-century Father. Historically, fathers have been regarded as the household's predominant earners or financial contributors. Silverstein (1996) ascribed this view to the cultural interpretation of the father's role being linked with work rather than caring for others. Luke created a painting from his childhood that expressed his family's roles as they have been described for decades, "My mom stayed home, didn't work outside of the home until my brother and I got into our middle school and high school years. And my dad worked for a pipeline, a very blue-collar sort of job."

However, the results of this study demonstrated that these fathers are adapting their understanding of the ideal father figure and displayed significant levels of commitment to their role as fathers. It is crucial because fathers who consider fatherhood significant and salient to their identities demonstrate greater engagement, challenging conventional beliefs that fathers are only responsible for financial support and commitment to their children's lives (Pasley et al., 2014). Findings substantiate this claim, as most of the participants' father identity was deemed the utmost significant identity, as evidenced by their use of phrases such as "being a father is everything" and "my most important job." This finding further supports the findings by Sallee (2015), showing that fathers do find their roles as fathers important.

Interestingly, some participants expressed that they did not consider their student role as significant as their roles as fathers or workers. One father shared, “When it comes to being a student and then working, working obviously kind of takes precedence.” Another described his doctoral program as a “side gig” based on the importance he places on his father and work roles. It is crucial to acknowledge that the degree of connection to their student identity may influence whether these students will complete their programs, depending on the level of role strain they experience. They may reduce the strain felt by employing a strategy known as role elimination, as suggested in role strain theory, by stopping out of their academic program.

Involvement With Children. Men who view fatherhood as a core aspect of their identity are likely to be more involved and committed parents than men with a less salient father identity (Goldberg, 2015; Hofferth et al., 2013; Pasley et al., 2014). The findings of this study indicate that the participants considered their role as fathers to have a high level of salience and demonstrated a higher level of engagement in their parenting activities. In addition, Joshua expressed the profound emotional bond he shares with his children, “I look at my kids, and I just feel whole. It provides just a sense of joy.” This finding further underscores the significance of nurturing an emotional bond with children for modern-day fathers (Ladge et al., 2015).

Friends and family play a crucial role in providing essential support to doctoral students as they manage multiple responsibilities (Denman et al., 2018; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Herring Watson, 2020; Scott & Takarangi, 2019; Sverdluk et al., 2018; Wilton & Ross, 2017). According to Park et al. (2021), engaging in activities with family members can help graduate students promote a balance between their work and personal lives. Social support is crucial as a source of strength and a coping skill for graduate students (Charles et al., 2021; Tompkins et al., 2016). The study revealed that allocating time to spend with their families was crucial to achieving work-life balance. Andrew stated his weekends at home were “our time, you know, from Friday night to Monday morning is our time, and that’s special time... and I can tell it definitely brings them [his family] a lot of joy.”

Roles in the Family. Identity theory suggests that a collection of identities is constructed through social interactions within which individuals occupy different statuses,

such as students, fathers, and workers. Individuals attribute significance to these statuses by forming identities characterized as "internalized sets of role expectations" (Stryker, 1987, p. 90). Identities provide individuals with information on fulfilling the responsibilities associated with specific social positions.

According to Dermott (2008, p. 27), the notion that a "good father is responsible for financially supporting his children through employment in the public sphere" remains applicable and has some merit. Andrew noted how he believed society viewed the father's role, "most fathers are really judged on their family unit, on how they can provide financially and physically for the family. And not necessarily on what they provide emotionally and support to the family; that's always kind of been more of the mother's role." Past research has shown that when individuals try to negotiate their role identities, such as being the primary provider for the family and a co-parent, it often leads to role conflicts (Thompson & Walker, 1989). This study discovered no conflicts between these fathers regarding their financial status as breadwinners and household roles. This likely is due to the household having two incomes and being employed full-time. While participants did mention taking out student loans, there were no concerns about doing so or paying for school affecting the rest of their household budgets. It should be noted that this study's interviews took place before the rampant inflation we have seen over the past year. The increased cost of living may have changed their views about financial concerns.

Contrary to previous studies conducted by Bianchi et al. (2012) and Rhoads and Rhoads (2012), the current findings challenge the notion that fathers generally exhibit reduced involvement in childcare and household tasks. Luke stated, "I think too many times society just thinks the mom or the wife is doing everything, and I don't agree with that. It's all a team effort, and I think it's good for kids to see that." Others stated, "I'm the one dropping the kids off at school and picking them up after school or aftercare," and another, "I tend to cook all the meals."

The supportiveness of their spouses plays a crucial role in fathers' ability to balance work and caregiving responsibilities effectively (Harrington et al., 2011). Fathers in this study resided in co-parenting family units. Co-parenting is the term used to describe the level of interaction and coordination, or the absence thereof, between two parents in raising their children. The factors included in this are the agreement or disagreement between parents

regarding childrearing, the division of household labor between parents, the support or undermining of co-parental roles, and the handling of family tasks (Feinberg, 2003). This is also important to these fathers' success within their doctoral student roles. Joshua shared, "My wife finished her bachelor's degree, but when we were working on both classwork at the same time, we had to balance days who had what days to do homework so that the other one of us could watch the kids." Participants noted their alliances with their partners helped with their feelings of work-life balance, confirming similar findings by StGeorge and Fletcher (2012).

Given the limited knowledge about couples who defy traditional gender roles in the household, this study revealed a fascinating finding--several fathers emphasized that household responsibilities were reversed compared to the typical division of tasks between mothers and fathers. Participants shared that "our house, it's a little bit more reverse. I tend to cook all the meals, so that's something I think a little more atypical in the traditional world." Another stated, "She's actually the breadwinner; I actually do a lot more of what you would consider household things because she actually just doesn't like doing them... I do laundry because she hates laundry; she doesn't iron if we ever need to iron anything. I'll take care of that, and it doesn't bother me."

Familial, Cultural, and Societal Influences. The assumption that identities serve as the driving force behind behaviors is a fundamental principle in the study of fathering, as supported by the works of Burke and Stets (2009), Stryker (1980), and Pasley et al. (2014). Paternal parenting styles can be influenced by a man's perception of himself, which is shaped by his family background, the media, or ideas generated by his peers (Wiltshire, 2012). Josiah shared how his father's style of relaxing when he got home has informed him, "he worked pretty hard, and when he got home at night, he wanted to relax and hang out and watch TV. Right now, I still want to relax, but I tend to relax afterward, after the kids go to bed, rather than when I get home. I want to spend time with them, play with them, hang out with them..."

More specifically, Black fathers have encountered unique difficulties in developing their self-identities due to the adverse portrayal and stereotypes perpetuated by the media and society as a whole. Like all individuals, Black men possess internal and external identities (Cooper, 2013), which are influenced by various factors, including public and private

circumstances, personal experiences, and communal interactions. Furthermore, the transmission of fathering practices, beliefs, and identities among Black fathers occurs across successive generations (Brown et al., 2018). Paul states that his Nigerian culture is not as much of his identity as he would've liked it to be, "it's not as much as I would like it to be or as my parents probably envisioned it to be...it didn't just quite stick in a way that I wish it had internally."

Jessee and Adamsons (2018) found that the experiences Black men have with their parents have a significant impact on their beliefs, effectiveness, and perspectives on parenting their children. Both Black fathers in this study expressed a desire to parent differently. Paul described "a lot of torment" that came from his Nigerian father through various forms of abuse during his childhood. These experiences have led him to "knowing what not to do as a father, definitely try to be a lot more understanding... if tempers are raised, rather than act, I remove myself from situations." Matthew, who grew up never knowing his biological father, shared with his wife that he "refuses to be another statistic. I refuse to have my kids be raised by somebody else or have my kids in a fatherless home because I couldn't just keep my crap together."

Several participants were either brought up in a household with a stepfather or personally identified as a stepfather. Stepfamilies are created when one partner has a child from a previous relationship. The blending of families leads to a wide range of different stepfamily structures, which can be quite complex (Raley & Sweeney, 2020). Identifying the dynamics, key figures, and decision-making influences within a stepfamily poses a significant challenge (Cann-Milland et al., 2021). Paul was the sole father who exclusively fulfilled the role of a stepfather. Paul provided a distinct perspective on his role within the household regarding disciplinary conversations, "I often let her [his wife] have the final say and just kind of gave my input on a lot of things, especially if I didn't think it was that big of a deal."

From this study, those identified as stepfathers did not experience role conflicts solely based on their stepfather identity. This finding contradicts the results of various studies claiming that men experience role conflicts and ambiguity due to the extra layer of stepfather to their father role identity (Ganong et al., 2019; King & Lindstrom, 2016).

Theme 3: Support and Well-being

The next theme developed shares the participants' experiences with the support received from various sources and how their general well-being has been impacted through balancing their multiple roles. The sub-themes discussed are (a) Family Support; (b) Faculty Support; (c) Peer Support; (d) General Well-being.

Family Support. According to a study by Tompkins et al. (2016), graduate students with children and partners may receive support from their family members. Goode (1960) stated that the family is the main center of role allocation and thus assumes a key position in solving role strain. Findings confirmed that participants frequently sought support from their families, particularly their spouses, to alleviate their perceived role strain. Their family also acted as a guide to determine if they were devoting excessive time to one role and neglecting others. Several individuals recounted instances where their partners confronted them regarding their lack of family time. Jonah stated, "My wife is a really good communicator; she will be like, hey, we need some time [with you]. I then put everything else on hold and provide that need for them." Matthew shared the pitfalls of not spending enough time with his wife due to his conflicting roles, "Me and my wife have gone through some dark waters because of where and how I am pulled." These findings support the assertion that doctoral student fathers must make inevitable tradeoffs to achieve a work-life balance, as the demands of a doctoral program necessitate it (Yusuf et al., 2020).

Faculty Support. In contrast to the findings of Davila (2022), which revealed that faculty's lack of understanding of their circumstances was a significant challenge for student parents, participants in this study consistently expressed that their faculty were highly supportive of their multiple roles. One participant stated, "Faculty, for me, have been pretty understanding, and I guess they just, they've been humans." The study revealed that faculty members understood their situation regarding fatherhood and employment, and they frequently alleviated their level of role strain by demonstrating flexibility with deadlines and accommodating family events. This finding supports the assertion of Brown and Nichols (2013), who stated that faculty members who teach graduate courses could either increase or decrease the level of role strain experienced by students by deciding whether or not to allow flexible deadlines for reasons such as children's illnesses, recitals, and other family events.

Findings confirmed previous research showing the importance of doctoral students' connection with faculty members on their feeling of belonging to a community of scholars (Burrus et al., 2019; Byrnes et al., 2019). Roberts and Bandlow (2018) outlined that the doctoral socialization process unfolds in various stages, beginning with the anticipatory stage. During this stage, students acquire an understanding of the behaviors and values of the group. Findings showed that participants had limited interactions with their professors with responses to their interactions such as “minimal,” “nothing outside of class,” and “not really anyone outside of my major professor.” This finding is worrisome for doctoral students' socialization process as the initial, anticipatory phase can be hindered due to a lack of interaction with individuals (faculty members and peers) from whom they should be acquiring knowledge about the general expectations for a graduate student's role (Weidman & Stein, 2003). Furthermore, research suggests that support from faculty mentors is one of the most influential factors in predicting their success (Tompkins et al., 2016).

The absence of student-faculty interactions significantly impedes the anticipatory stage within the online learning environment. Several individuals expressed difficulties with socialization in their respective programs. Joshua shared, “I would've had an increased level of socialization in the program if I did more in-person residencies... I speak with two classmates out of the coaching, and the one person I speak the most to, I met her at my very first residency.” Matthew described having difficulty getting clear expectations from his program administrators and faculty, “I've had different dissertation chairs, different student advisors. And then it's like the directions aren't clear all the time, and they expect you to just get it. And I'm like, no, I don't get it.”

Peer Support. According to Wilhelmi et al. (2019), peer support and positive role models in the doctoral program positively affected students' perceptions of their experiences in the program. This was mainly seen in how they observed and learned from others how to manage the difficulties of balancing multiple responsibilities. Findings in this study provide evidence to support the claim that discussing and observing others facing similar challenges during their doctoral program helped alleviate feelings of isolation. Jonah described his experience with one of his residencies with other students in his cohort in combating the sense of isolation, “The residency was a really good experience because that, that was kind of

like your first time, um, you know, being in a room full of people kind of doing the same thing more and kind of noticed the same struggles.”

An important finding from this study emphasized the significance of student interactions and peer support in promoting a work-life balance. Peter shared, “The other thing that really stood out to me was there was a Facebook group for people in the program. I joined it early and just to read from other people who talked about how they were able to do it working full time, having kids, that was really reassuring.” This finding backs up the study conducted by Denman et al. (2018), in which participants advocated for the development of a cohort to address the stress and anxiety associated with pursuing a doctoral degree and to promote a healthy work-life balance.

Although findings indicated that interactions with peers benefited the participants, they were limited in extent. Jonah stated, “With it being all online, there was really not very much interaction with peers,” while another indicated their program can feel “lonely and isolating.” This finding is worrying, given that previous research has demonstrated the significance of these interactions and support in promoting connection and a sense of belonging among peers and preventing feelings of isolation (Isacco & Mannarino, 2016).

General Well-being. Galdino and Martins (2019), as well as Frydman et al. (2019), discovered that their subjects experienced a decrease in the amount of time available for leisure activities, such as socializing with family and friends, because of the demands associated with pursuing a doctoral degree and working. Findings in this study validated their findings, as participants stated, “I’m balancing work and my doctoral work. But I don’t have a social life... if I wanted to hang out with friends or do things like that, it would get tougher.” While this finding of role conflicts can have negative consequences, such as impacting their psychological well-being (Park et al., 2021; Sverdlik et al., 2018), these participants chose to decrease their time for leisure activities to lessen their felt role strain. This finding supports previous studies showing that student parents reduce their role strain by abandoning their friendships through role elimination (Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Sallee, 2015). Role elimination allows them to focus on their more salient roles as fathers, students, and workers (Goode, 1960; Pasley et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the results of this study indicate that efforts to fulfill one’s role obligations have resulted in health and work difficulties for several participants, significantly

affecting them. Prior research has observed that men encounter less severe and widespread challenges compared to women when it comes to managing role conflicts while striving for a work-life balance (Beckett et al., 2015). One could argue this point based on findings within this study showing the concerns as it has impacted employment decisions, personal identity development, and mental and health problems. Paul described the tiredness of attempting to negotiate his role identities, “You gotta be real with yourself and know that there’s a fatigue aspect to it or, or aspect of just wanting to do nothing at times.” Others noted sleeping issues arising from role conflicts, “A healthy balance would be, number one, me getting more than four hours of sleep a night,” suggesting bouts of insomnia (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019) and other psychological distress (Park et al., 2021) may occur due to conflicts experienced by participants.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations emerged during the execution of this study. One of the constraints was the timing of the research. Immediately following the defense of my dissertation proposal in March of 2022, I received a diagnosis of myasthenia gravis--a rare neurological disorder. This condition necessitated four separate hospitalizations in the intensive care unit, each lasting several weeks, over the next two years. While recovering at home, the disease severely impaired my muscular abilities, making it extremely difficult for me to perform basic household tasks, let alone attempt to work on my dissertation. Two of these hospitalizations occurred immediately after completing most participant interviews, which prevented me from thoroughly analyzing the participants’ transcripts until several weeks later. The gap in time likely resulted in a limited ability to convey the full depth and breadth of participant experiences due to poorer recall of information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Another limitation was the challenge to gather a group of fathers who did not fit the typical stereotypes based on their demographic characteristics. It has been a long-standing belief that it is difficult to involve fathers in research studies, as noted by Day and Lamb (2004). As a result, the findings of this study may not apply to a broader population. I could not locate any participants who self-identified as Hispanic/Latino, which is worrisome, and disheartening given that they are the fastest-growing demographic in the United States and should ideally make up a more significant proportion of doctoral programs in the future. Moreover, all participants were from a heterosexual household with a male father and a

female mother. In addition to being a study limitation, this is a topic that merits further investigation in the future.

Finally, a limitation is present in the study's exclusive emphasis on fathers residing in the United States. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be extrapolated to similar findings that may be obtained in comparable studies conducted in other countries. While this was also a delimitation of the study due to the scope of a dissertation, it is essential to acknowledge that societal expectations significantly influence fathers' identities, and these expectations vary across different countries.

Implications of the Study

This study has several implications for various stakeholders. These implications pertain to future doctoral student fathers, faculty members who work with this specific group of students, academic program administrators, and doctoral student family members. These implications offer a further resource for these parties to effectively support doctoral student fathers in their attempts to manage their various obligations within their roles.

Implications for Future Online Doctoral Student Fathers

Fathers considering starting their doctoral studies online may be affected by the findings of this study. According to this study, managing multiple role identities can be challenging. Nevertheless, there are various methods to mitigate the level of role strain. This study emphasizes the significance of relationships in alleviating role strain, including familial, peer, and faculty relationships. These relationships can also facilitate the socialization process in their academic programs, thereby aiding their persistence in completing their degree. However, many doctoral students who study online face difficulties forming enduring connections with their academic peers in the online environment (Ivankova & Stick, 2007). This feeling of isolation can ultimately result in students abandoning their studies (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017).

Implications for Faculty Members

Within this study's findings--and a plethora of previous research--connection with faculty members is crucial to doctoral students' success. As participants described their experiences as often lonely and isolating, their sparse interactions with their faculty members appear to have been influential and important to them. Faculty members working with this subset of the doctoral student population should be keenly aware of the time constraints on

these students due to balancing their multiple, often incompatible roles. Should a student disclose they are a father and time is a concern, it would be vital to have upfront conversations regarding those time constraints and how flexibility acceptable to both parties (student and faculty) could be met.

To aid in the socialization process, faculty should create opportunities for collaboration for these students to aid in building connections with peers. According to Warren et al. (2016), many students learned to conduct research collaboratively, working with fellow graduate students, advisors, and other faculty at their institutions and other universities. This may include promoting conducting research with fellow students and providing other opportunities to get published as a doctoral student. Additionally, if faculty work primarily with online students, it could be beneficial to organize various meeting times with their online students, individually or as a group, to mimic the experiences of being in person as a cohort. Given the capability of technology in the 21st-century, this should be an expectation for working with students at a distance.

Implications for Institutions/Academic Program Administrators

An essential part of the socialization process for doctoral students is understanding the expectations of being a doctoral student. It is vital for programs to set out the time commitments that the specific academic program may require from students. Findings from this study show that time is scarce, but these students can balance their time if they can plan strategically. Administrators should begin outlining the expectations for future online doctoral students throughout their recruitment processes. It is critical to express the expectations regarding publication requirements, a/synchronous class options, and time to completion, among other things. Within recruitment, the institution must be keenly aware of who they are attempting to serve. Is the program developed more for nontraditional doctoral students who understand that being a doctoral student is not their only role, or do they wish to be seen as a more traditional program where students are solely dedicated to their studies?

One opportunity that administrators can review is providing funding for online doctoral students. This may be in the way of research or teaching assistantships. This allows for further socialization and could eliminate one of the roles these students must keep, that of a worker. If they can still complete their doctorate online but receive funding, this could also increase the completion rate among online doctoral students.

Implications for Family Members

The third group of individuals this study's findings may impact are family members of nontraditional doctoral student fathers. Successful online graduate students reported significant support from employers, family, and friends (Ivankova & Stick, 2007). Findings from this study show the importance of having family member support, particularly from the student's partner. Family members must be open and honest in their communication and with time commitments needed for family matters so that students can plan their time accordingly. Findings also showed the importance these fathers placed on their identity within the home. Family members should allow fathers to have a place in the household, emphasize how household chores may be divided, and allow for time to complete doctoral study work.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study identified several areas for further investigation that would benefit online doctoral student fathers, academic programs, and future scholarship. The areas below would help to expand the understanding of the experiences of this specific group of students and develop strategies to support them in managing their multiple roles:

- Future studies should include the use of validated role strain scale instruments. This will allow researchers to quantify the levels of role strain felt to add to the qualitative data.
- Future research may concentrate on doctoral student fathers residing in the United States but were raised in a different country. This subset of students would offer an additional societal perspective and allow for examination of how it might influence their fatherhood identity and behaviors due to various societal and cultural expectations regarding fatherhood.
- As mentioned in the limitations section, future research should encompass more participant diversity. Possible suggestions could encompass fathers belonging to marginalized ethnic groups, same-sex couples, and single fathers, among others. Studies might concentrate on fathers enrolled in Hispanic-serving institutions, historically Black colleges & universities, or other minority-serving institutions. Researchers may need to earn potential participants' trust while navigating a sensitive topic such as personal identity to gain a broader scope of participants.

- An exciting area for further investigation that could arise from this study would involve obtaining the responses of the participants' spouses to the questions posed within this study. Do the experiences these fathers describe align with their spouses' beliefs about their ability to manage their multiple role identities, considering that mothers have different worldviews and societal expectations?
- Considering that most of the students involved in this study were enrolled in an education-related program, it is crucial to examine students enrolled in various programs, fields of study, and educational institutions. Specific individuals may be drawn to particular fields of study, which could lead to similar responses within the study.
- As many faculty members complete their doctorate within the traditional means of in-person and often full-time, research to find out the experiences of faculty members who have completed their doctorate in traditional settings when working with online doctoral student fathers could be beneficial.

Prioritization vs. Hierarchy of Needs

Theories such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the four burners theory, which address the motivation for behaviors and prioritization of roles, warrant further utilization in future studies to explore fathering behavior. These theories--along with identity and role strain theories--use terms like salience, hierarchies, and prioritization, which can have different meanings depending on context. The scope of this dissertation limited its examination of how these fathers made basic needs decisions to fulfill their role behaviors and suggests using the additional aforementioned theories as a lens to understand their experiences.

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory examines human motivation for fulfilling needs and achieving goals (Ştefan et al., 2020). The theory identified five basic human needs. Table 3 presents the hierarchically organized needs, each influencing the subsequent level. Maslow (1943) theorized that an individual's highest level of motivation occurs when their hierarchy of needs is fulfilled, termed self-actualization. Maslow's theory assesses an individual's needs without considering specific role identity needs. This dissertation

examined fathers as students, workers, and fathers. To meet the needs of each hierarchy, one must make decisions based on prioritization.

Table 3

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Motivational Level	Description of Level
Self-actualization	Seeks fulfillment of personal potential, desire to become the most that one can be
Esteem needs	Seeks esteem through recognition or achievement from self and others, belief in oneself, feeling independent
Belongingness and love needs	Seeks affiliation with a group, such as roles in the family, belonging to a peer group
Safety needs	Seeks security through order and law, such as safety of the neighborhood, trust in the community, safety of employment
Physiological needs	Seeks to obtain the basic needs for survival, such as housing, food, sex, and healthcare.

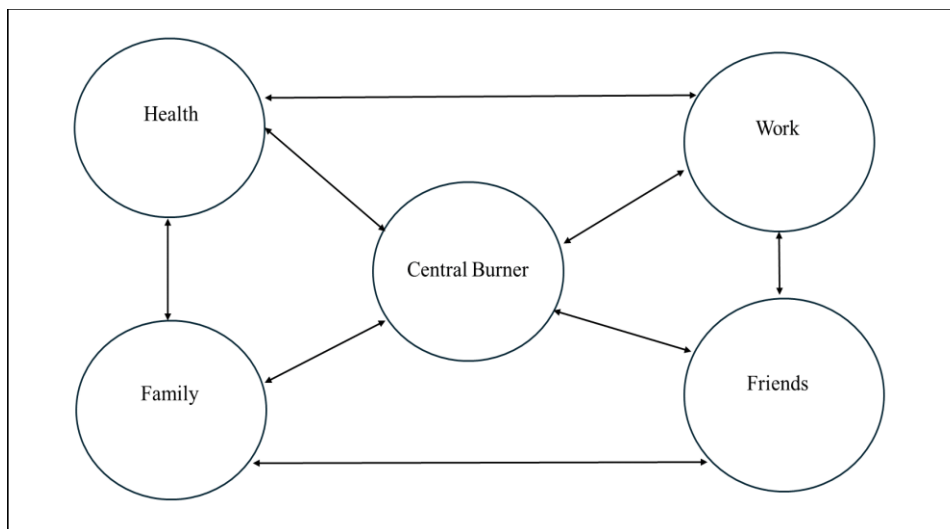
One must prioritize tasks to meet competing role identity obligations and needs; it does not just happen. While it is not entirely sure where the four-burner theory originated, Clear (n.d.), Richardson (2017), and Sedaris (2009) share a metaphor of a four-stove burner, with each burner symbolizing four essential areas of a person's life to think about work-life balance and prioritization (Figure 4). The burners represent health, work, family, and friends. According to Sedaris (2009), everything in life is a trade-off, so to achieve work-life balance, one must choose which burner can survive at a lower level to keep all four going without conflict or burnout. While an individual's father role may be the most salient to them and impact fathering behaviors, prioritization of needs must be accounted for.

To succeed in creating a work-life balance, they suggest reducing one or more areas to prioritize others. Clear (n.d.) suggests outsourcing small tasks, embracing limitations, and

dividing life into seasons to keep all four burners running and reduce work-family balance issues. Richardson (2017) also suggested adding a fifth burner and changing burner sizes to give users more options. The fifth burner, the central burner, distributes heat evenly to other burners (Richardson, 2017).

Figure 4

Representation of Four Burners Theory Stovetop



Different hierarchies can meet different role needs at different times through evolving priorities. For example, an unemployed father must prioritize work until he finds a job to meet his physiological needs. Fathers may also struggle with relationships or singlehood, which affects their sense of belonging and needs and hinders self-actualization. Furthermore, the central burner concept could represent nontraditional doctoral students' family and support units, which Goode (1960) found to be an essential resource allocation source. They can help fathers identify when they prioritize one role over another too much, leading to role conflicts and burnout from trying to fuel all burners simultaneously.

By employing Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and the four burners theory in future research on fathering behavior, researchers can gain a clearer understanding of the needs and motivations of fathers as they choose to enact their various role identities and how they then choose to prioritize their times and ensure all role obligations are met.

Conclusion

Multiple frameworks guided this hermeneutic phenomenological study to analyze and interpret the experiences of nontraditional doctoral student fathers. The semi-structured individual interviews undertook the two primary research questions: (1) How do nontraditional doctoral student fathers experience establishing a work-life balance within their multiple role identities and the changing context of 21st-century fatherhood? (2) What are the experiences of nontraditional doctoral student fathers in an online program?

The study's results showed how this set of doctoral student fathers experience negotiating their various role identities and how it has impacted their socialization experience in their academic program. The findings of this study showed that attempts to create a work-life balance are challenging for online doctoral student fathers and create levels of role strain. Additionally, fathers in this study reported high father role salience. Participants engaged in consistent role bargaining between their roles as father, student, and worker while sharing experiences of integrating roles at various times to ensure all their role obligations were met. Moreover, findings showed that these fathers are challenging the stereotypical societal understanding of what modern fatherhood should look like, including increased involvement within the household.

Furthermore, fathers in this study shared various experiences in their online doctoral programs. Many participants shared the support they received from their peers and faculty members in an attempt to balance their roles. However, this support was limited due to time constraints on these fathers and the online nature of their studies. Participants engaged in compartmentalization of roles and sometimes role elimination to alleviate time constraints and role strain felt. The findings within this study were consistent with existing parenting literature. This study highlights the need to include doctoral student fathers in conversations with doctoral student mothers and faculty parents, on which work-life balance literature primarily focuses. The study also strengthened the need for further discussions on this issue and the continued call for more investigation on doctoral student parents because of the challenges balancing multiple roles has on fathers. This study's findings can assist future doctoral student fathers, program administrators, faculty members, and family members in better understanding the challenges of balancing these often-incompatible roles.

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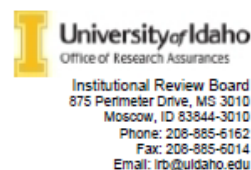
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Appendix A. IRB Approval Letter



June 27, 2023

To: Sydney Freeman Jr.

Cc: John McAvoy

From: University of Idaho Institutional Review Board

Approval Date: June 27, 2023

Title: 21st- Century Nontraditional Doctoral Student Fathers: Negotiating Competing Role Identities as Fathers, Workers, and Doctoral Students

Protocol: 23-145, Reference: 022993

Exempt under Category 2 at 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2).

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Idaho, I am pleased to inform you that the protocol for this research project has been certified as exempt under the category listed above.

This certification is valid only for the study protocol as it was submitted. Studies certified as Exempt are not subject to continuing review and this certification does not expire. However, if changes are made to the study protocol, you must submit the changes through [VERAS](#) for review before implementing the changes. Amendments may include but are not limited to, changes in study population, study personnel, study instruments, consent documents, recruitment materials, sites of research, etc.

As Principal Investigator, you are responsible for ensuring compliance with all applicable FERPA regulations, University of Idaho policies, state and federal regulations. Every effort should be made to ensure that the project is conducted in a manner consistent with the three fundamental principles identified in the Belmont Report: respect for persons; beneficence; and justice. The Principal Investigator is responsible for ensuring that all study personnel have completed the online human subjects training requirement. Please complete the *Continuing Review and Closure Form* in VERAS when the project is completed.

You are required to notify the IRB in a timely manner if any unanticipated or adverse events occur during the study, if you experience an increased risk to the participants, or if you have participants withdraw or register complaints about the study.

IRB Exempt Category (Categories) for this submission:

Category 2: Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is



met: i. The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; ii. Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or iii. The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by .111(a)(7).

Appendix B. Call for Participants

Are you currently a part-time, online doctoral student within the United States, concurrently employed full-time, and a father? I would welcome the opportunity to speak with you about your experiences of negotiating your multiple roles as a student, worker, and father. Establishing and maintaining a work-life balance for nontraditional doctoral students can be a daunting and unceasing act, wrought with time constraints and often conflicting demands. As fathers continue to increase their roles within the family, it's vital to understand and hear how doctoral student fathers experience the negotiation of their role identities within increasing societal expectations. This study will explore how nontraditional online doctoral student fathers experience establishing a work-life balance within the context of 21st-century fatherhood.

Participating in this study would involve participating in a virtual interview, which will take place via Zoom and last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Email follow-up for further clarifications may be asked for upon your consent.

If you are interested in voluntarily participating, or if you have a peer or colleague who meets the criteria for the study, please contact John McAvoy, Ph.D. candidate, at mcav6793@vandals.uidaho.edu. Questions regarding this study may also be directed to my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Sydney Freeman, Jr., at sfreemanjr@uidaho.edu.

John P. McAvoy, Jr.

Adult, Organizational Learning & Leadership

Department of Leadership & Counseling

University of Idaho

Appendix C. Email to Potential Participants

Hello [Name],

Thank you for your response and interest in participating in this research study. As I mentioned in my call for participants, the purpose of my research is to explore the experiences of nontraditional doctoral student fathers' negotiation within their everyday decision-making regarding their role identities as students, workers, and fathers to establish a work-life balance. The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of how this subset of doctoral students balance their often-conflicting roles and to add the voices of fathers to the limited literature on doctoral student work-life balance.

To participate in the study, you must meet the following criteria:

1. Currently enrolled part-time--less than nine credit hours per semester--in a fully online doctoral program within a university in the United States
2. Employed full-time in a 40+ hour a week job
3. Have at least one child

Participating would involve participating in a virtual interview, which would take place via Zoom and last approximately 45-60 minutes and would be scheduled at your convenience. In the interview, you will be asked about your experiences with and perceptions of work-life balance within your roles as a student, worker, and father. Various questions will focus on your experiences within these roles, individually and collectively.

I have attached an informed consent form for you to read, complete, and return signed electronically. Upon receipt, I will send you further information regarding the interview. You may choose to opt out of the study at any time with no penalty. Should you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to ask by replying to this email.

Additionally, if you have further questions about this study, you may also contact my major professor and dissertation committee chair:

Sydney Freeman, Jr., Ph.D.
 Professor
 Adult, Organizational Learning & Leadership
 Department of Leadership & Counseling
 University of Idaho
 sfreemanjr@uidaho.edu

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Idaho Institutional Review Board. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Office of Research Assurances, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID. 83844-3010. Phone: 208-885-6162. E-mail: irb@uidaho.edu

Sincerely,

John P. McAvoy, Jr.

Appendix D. Snowball Method Recruitment Script

Hello [Name],

My name is John McAvoy and I am a doctoral candidate seeking my Ph.D. in the Department of Leadership & Counseling at the University of Idaho. I was recommended by your colleague to reach out to you as a potential participant in my research study. The purpose of my research is to explore the experiences of nontraditional doctoral student fathers' negotiation within their everyday decision-making regarding their role identities as students, workers, and fathers to establish a work-life balance. The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of how this subset of doctoral students balance their often-conflicting roles and to add the voices of fathers to the limited literature on doctoral student work-life balance.

I am seeking online doctoral students who meet the following criteria:

1. Currently enrolled part-time--less than nine credit hours per semester--in a fully online doctoral program within a university in the United States
2. Employed full-time in a 40+ hour a week job
3. Have at least one child

Participating would involve participating in a virtual interview, which would take place via Zoom and last approximately 45-60 minutes and would be scheduled at your convenience. In the interview, you will be asked about your experiences with and perceptions of work-life balance within your roles as a student, worker, and father. Various questions will focus on your experiences within these roles, individually and collectively.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have about the study. Please feel free to forward this message and request to others you feel meet the research criteria.

Kind regards,

John

Appendix E. Informed Consent Form

Research Topic: Nontraditional doctoral student fathers' experiences with establishing a work-life balance

I, _____, agree to participate in research being conducted by John McAvoy, Doctoral Student, in the Department of Leadership & Counseling at the University of Idaho.

1. Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my research is to explore the experiences of nontraditional doctoral student fathers' negotiation within their everyday decision-making regarding their role identities as students, workers, and fathers to establish a work-life balance. The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of how this subset of doctoral students negotiate their everyday decision-making regarding their various role identities. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a nontraditional online doctoral student as defined operationally for this study and identify as a father.

2. Subject Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you choose to participate in this study, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequences. Additionally, you may refuse to answer any questions at any time without penalty. Finally, you may conclude your participation at any time without penalty.

3. Description of the Research

Participating would involve participating in a virtual interview, which would take place via Zoom and last approximately 45-60 minutes and would be scheduled at your convenience. In the interview, you will be asked about your experiences with and perceptions of work-life balance within your roles as a student, worker, and father. Various questions will focus on your experiences within these roles, individually and collectively. With your permission, the interview would be recorded and transcribed verbatim. Additionally, you are consenting that quotations from the interview may be implemented into the study. If additional information is needed, you may be asked to schedule a brief follow-up interview (by phone or videoconference).

4. Confidentiality

Your identity as a participant in this study will be kept confidential and is of utmost importance to me. Information such as your name, family members' names, place of employment, university affiliations, or other potential personal identifiers will be assigned pseudonyms. The pseudonym associated with your information will be known only to me. All reasonable steps will be taken to protect your identity. All recordings, video, and audio will be reviewed only by the researcher and a professional transcription company that uses both file encryption and confidentiality agreements. Once the information has been transcribed and the transcription reviewed for accuracy, the recorded video will be kept on the University of Idaho OneDrive for five years. Any information relating to your responses via the interview or notes recorded by me as the researcher that may identify you by name will be kept secure on OneDrive as well.

5. Potential Risks and Discomforts

Risk and discomforts for your participation in this study are expected to be minimal; however, since the topics of fatherhood, doctoral studies, and work-life balance can be deeply personal experiences, it is possible that participants may feel mild discomfort answering certain questions. You may refuse to answer any questions at any time without penalty during the duration of your participation in the study. You may also choose to end your participation at anytime.

6. Potential Benefits

Participation in this study will help to inform future research regarding doctoral student fathers, as research is extremely limited highlighting their experiences. It will also help faculty and program administrators within higher education working within doctoral education to gain a better understanding of how nontraditional doctoral student fathers balance their role expectations. This may lead to a greater understanding of how to best assist them with the completion of their degree. Results of this study will help not only doctoral student fathers but also doctoral student mothers in that the research regarding doctoral student parents and work-life balance remains limited and may assist all parents.

If you have any additional questions or concerns throughout the duration of the study, please contact me at the below information:

John P. McAvoy, Jr.
 Ph.D. Candidate
 Adult, Organizational Learning & Leadership
 Department of Leadership & Counseling
 University of Idaho
 mcav6793@vandals.uidaho.edu

You may also contact my major professor and dissertation committee chair with any questions or concerns about this study:

Sydney Freeman, Jr., Ph.D.
 Professor
 Adult, Organizational Learning & Leadership
 Department of Leadership & Counseling
 University of Idaho
 sfreemanjr@uidaho.edu

By signing this form:

1. You acknowledge that you have read the information above, and any questions you have asked have been answered to your satisfaction.
2. You authorize the use and disclosure of your records, any observations, and findings found during the course of this study for education, publication and/or presentation.
3. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study and are aware that if you are selected for a video interview, your interview will be recorded and transcribed verbatim.
4. You are aware you may withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without any penalty or consequences.
5. You understand a copy of this form will be provided to you for reference and contact information.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Date

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Idaho Institutional Review Board. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Office of Research Assurances, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID. 83844-3010. Phone: 208-885-6162. E-mail: irb@uidaho.edu

Appendix F. Interview Protocol

Date/time of Interview:

Method of Interview:

☐ **Zoom** ☐ **Phone** ☐ **Other**

Participant Pseudonym:

I. Introduction/Researcher Background

- a. Brief overview of study's purpose and interview flow
- b. Review and reaffirm signed informed consent to participate in interview
- c. Researcher Positionality/Rapport Building

II. Interviewee Background-Brief

- a. What is your current position and job responsibilities?
- b. What is your educational background?
- c. How many children do you have, and what are their ages?

III. Survey Demographic Questions

IV. Interview Questions

- a. How do you self-identify as a father? (e.g., I identify as a biological, stepfather, and soon to be an adoptive father).
- b. Do you have an active partner who also engages in caretaking responsibilities for your children? If so, is there perceived to be a primary caregiver.
- c. What does being a father mean to you?
- d. What roles do you believe a father should have with their children and family overall (e.g. provider, protector, caregiver)?
- e. Please describe your involvement with household duties.
- f. How would you describe your experiences balancing your student, worker, and father roles?
- g. How would you describe your satisfaction with your level of balance between these roles?
- h. Please describe any strategies you may take to establish a balance between school, work, and fatherly responsibilities.
- i. Please describe your motivation for pursuing an online doctoral degree.

- j. Are there any challenges you face as a nontraditional doctoral student father?
- k. What are some of the emotions you have experienced as a result of conflict between school, work, and family life?
- l. Describe how you view societal expectations for fathers today?
- m. Are there any questions that I haven't asked that I should've asked?

V. Conclusion

- a. What kind of advice do you have for other nontraditional doctoral student fathers? Current or potential?
- b. Is there anything that we discussed that wanted to elaborate on more?
- c. Is there anything that I asked about that surprised you? Please explain.
- d. Is there anything else about negotiating your various roles that you wish to share that you think might be valuable for my research?

Guided Questions/Potential Follow-Up Questions

I. Work-life balance

- a. How do you define work-life balance?
- b. How would you describe your experiences balancing school, work, and fatherhood?
- c. Do you believe it is possible to balance work and life? Please explain
- d. How would you describe your satisfaction with your work-life balance?
- e. What are some of the emotions you have experienced as a result of conflict between school, work, and fatherhood?
- f. How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your WLB?
 - i. Working from home?
 - ii. Children's' activities?

II. Doctoral Student Identity

- a. Please describe how you came to choose pursuing an online doctoral degree.
- b. What impact did prestige, cost, flexibility of program or university play into your decision?
- c. How would you describe your overall doctoral program experience?
 - i. Socialization into the program, peers, faculty, field?
- d. How many courses do you take per semester on average?

- e. What have been your experiences regarding financial decisions while pursuing your doctorate?
- f. Have you had to borrow student loans to pay for your education?
- g. How have faculty responded to you attempting to balance your roles?
- h. Have you observed or experienced a difference in work-life balance issues depending on factors such as child-rearing or caregiving? [If yes to child-rearing: Have you noticed or experienced a difference depending on the age(s) of the children?]
- i. Do you plan to graduate on time?

III. Worker Identity

- a. How has full-time employment affected your role as a father?
- b. How has full-time employment affected your role as student?
 - i. Please describe any strategies you may take to establish a balance between school, work, and fatherly responsibilities
- c. What has been the most effective thing you have done to maintain balance in your life?
- d. What are your worker and father roles like?
- e. Describe management of household tasks, Any caregiving roles – e.g., for dependent children, disabled or aging relatives, or other family members?]
- f. Are you the breadwinner in your family?
- g. How do you view the societal norm of fathers being the breadwinner of the family?

IV. Father Identity

- a. How has your experience been being a father?
- b. What does being a father mean to you?
- c. How do you believe fatherhood should be defined?
- d. Most important role of a father?
- e. Did you have children before or after you began your graduate work?
- f. How have you adjusted to pursuing your doctorate along with having children?
- g. Please describe challenges you face as a nontraditional doctoral student father.

- h. Have you ever worried that these challenges might prevent you from completing your degree?
- i. What steps have you taken to overcome these challenges?
- j. What kind of support system do you have? Who helps you in terms of advice, childcare, finances etc?
- k. What is the role of the child's/children's mother? What is her involvement with your children? (helpful or stressful)
- l. How has your experiences with your father shaped your view of this role?
- m. How does your view align with your perception of what society says a father should be?
- n. When you miss class, how often is it because of your children? (daycare conflicts, financial reasons, children are sick, etc)
- o. When you miss class because of reasons mentioned above, how understanding or considerate are your professors?

Appendix G. Embedded Survey Demographic Questions

Introduction:

For the purposes of this study, a nontraditional doctoral student father is one who meets the following criteria. Please respond to the next three questions to determine your eligibility to continue with the interview.

Are you enrolled part-time (8 credit hours per semester or less) in an online doctoral program?

Yes ___ No ___

Are you employed full-time in a 40 hour a week job?

Yes ___ No ___

Do you currently have children (Children are defined as all legally dependent children (biological, adoptive, step, foster, etc.)

Yes ___ No ___

If yes, how many children?

Educational Background:

What type of degree are you seeking? Professional___ Ed.D. ___ Ph.D. ___

University location: (State Only) _____

Program/Area of study: _____

Number of years completed in your program: _____

Current Stage of Degree:

Coursework___ Preparing Dissertation Proposal___ Conducting Dissertation Research___

What percentage of your program is classified online?

100% Online (no residency requirement)___ 80% online (at least one residency required)___

Demographics:

Age:___ Prefer not to answer___

Gender:___ Prefer not to answer___

Race:___ Prefer not to answer___

Ethnicity:___ _ Prefer not to answer___

Marital/Partner status:_____ Prefer not to answer _____

Occupation: _____ Prefer not to answer _____

Years of occupational experience: _____ Prefer not to answer _____

Appendix H. Codebook

Themes	Subthemes	Definitions	Example from Transcripts
Balancing Multiple Roles	<i>Is it Possible</i>	Strategies for managing time effectively. Prioritizing tasks and responsibilities.	"I had to learn to prioritize my tasks, you know, what needs to be done immediately and what can wait." "Setting clear priorities and managing my time effectively has allowed me to fulfill my responsibilities as a father, student, and worker."
	<i>Flexibility</i>	Being adaptable in managing different roles. Adjusting schedules and routines as needed.	"Being flexible with my schedule was crucial, especially when unexpected things came up with the kids or at work." "Being able to adapt to changing circumstances, whether it's unexpected family commitments or work demands, has been essential in maintaining balance."
	<i>Negotiating Roles</i>	Identifying and overcoming obstacles to balance roles.	"Juggling multiple roles comes with its own set of challenges, but finding solutions and seeking support when needed has been crucial in overcoming obstacles."
	<i>Integration v. Balance</i>	Finding ways to integrate work and family responsibilities. Creating boundaries between work and family time.	"Finding that balance between spending time with my family and meeting work demands has been challenging, but I've tried to integrate both as much as possible." "Integrating my work and family life has been challenging, but finding ways to involve my children in my studies and work responsibilities has helped bridge the gap."
Fatherhood Identity and Roles	<i>Defining a 21st-century Father</i>	Understanding what it means to be a father. Perceptions of societal expectations and personal beliefs about fatherhood.	"I've had to redefine what it means to be a father in today's society, taking into account both traditional expectations and my own values." "Defining fatherhood on my own terms, rather than conforming to societal expectations, has allowed me to embrace my role with confidence."

	<i>Involvement with Children</i>	Expressing emotions and being involved in children's lives. Developing strong bonds with children.	"Expressing my emotions and being actively involved in my children's lives has been central to my identity as a father." "Building a strong emotional connection with my children and actively participating in their lives has enriched my experience as a father."
	<i>Roles in the Family</i>	Fulfilling various roles within the household.	"Balancing the responsibilities of providing for my family and being a positive role model for my children has been central to my identity as a father."
	<i>Familial, Cultural, and Societal Influences</i>	Reflecting on one's own upbringing and its influence on fatherhood. Learning from past experiences to shape fatherhood. Navigating societal expectations and cultural influences on fatherhood.	"Reflecting on how my own father raised me has influenced the way I approach fatherhood now, learning from his example." "Navigating societal expectations and cultural norms around fatherhood has required me to challenge stereotypes and redefine my role within my cultural context."
Support and Well-being	<i>Support</i>	Receiving support from family members, partners, and friends. Building a network of support for navigating challenges.	"Having the support of my partner and family has been invaluable in managing the challenges of balancing work, studies, and fatherhood." "Connecting with other doctoral student fathers has created a sense of community and belonging, allowing us to share experiences and support each other through similar challenges."
	<i>Well-being</i>	Finding ways to overcome various health challenges arisen from balancing multiple roles.	"Finding healthy ways to cope with stress and frustrations has been crucial for maintaining my emotional well-being." "Prioritizing self-care and finding healthy outlets for stress has been vital for maintaining my emotional well-being while juggling multiple responsibilities."