2017

Parents enrolled in graduate programs and their experiences with faculty

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Parents enrolled in graduate programs and their experiences with faculty

by

Amber Lee Kreischer

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Human Development and Family Studies

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The student author and the program of study committee are solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The Graduate College will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2017
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A. IRB APPROVAL DOCUMENT</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW GUIDE</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parenthood and graduate school require significant investments of time and energy. Those who engage in both roles simultaneously are at risk for increased stress, feelings of guilt, and marginalization, which may impact their ability to succeed as parents and scholars. Faculty behaviors and faculty-student relationships are known to predict student academic and emotional outcomes, yet the influence of faculty on graduate student parents has been unexamined in the literature. Guided by role conflict and role enhancement theories, the current study explores graduate student parents’ experiences, with special attention to the ways in which faculty affect those experiences. Sixteen participants who were parents to dependent children while enrolled in a graduate program were recruited from four departments within a large Midwestern university. Because the present study seeks to describe the essence of a specific type of experience shared by a group of people, a phenomenological approach was chosen. Consistent with this approach, interviews were conducted and I recorded observation notes. In order to achieve trustworthiness, reflective journaling was used to bracket my own experiences as a graduate student parent and I created an audit trail to document the research process. During phases of data analysis, I attended meetings with my dissertation chairs to discuss coding, notable themes, and emerging findings, which contributed to the study’s dependability. Eight themes emerged from the full dataset, including “Time as a Source of Conflict,” “Where is My Tribe?” “It’s Not Their Decision to Make,” “Not in the Same Boat,” “Am I ‘Just a Graduate Student?’” “Face Value’ versus Sincere Support,” “Trust That They’re Doing the Best They Can,” and “Resources? What resources?” Nine less dominant themes were found specific to race, international students, children’s ages, participants’ gender, and marital status. Findings suggest graduate student parents experience varying degrees of role conflict and role enhancement simultaneously and that faculty and
graduate programs contribute to such experiences. Participants recommended improvement of family-friendly structures on campus, paid maternity and paternity leave, a “stop the timeline to degree clock” policy, cessation of unsolicited advice and decreased opportunities, and continued flexibility and empathy from faculty members.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Context

Parenting and academia are both described as “greedy institutions” (Coser, 1974), meaning they demand essentially endless time and energy from those who partake in them (Chesser, 2015; Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Raddon, 2002; Springer, Parker, & Leviten-Reid, 2009). Existing literature consistently highlights the tendency of both of these positions to expect ambiguous but intense amounts of involvement (Chesser, 2015; Correll et al., 2007; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Raddon, 2002; Springer et al., 2009). Parents in academia experience benefits and difficulties specific to their positions at the intersection of these roles (Estes, 2011; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Raddon, 2002; Trussell, 2015). Both role strain and role enhancement are described in studies of faculty members who are parents (Baker, 2010; Kinman & Jones, 2008; Raddon, 2002; Shope, 2005; Trussell, 2015) as well as in studies of parents enrolled in college (Brooks, 2015; Brown & Nichols, 2012; Markle, 2015; Moreau & Kerner, 2015). Graduate students who are parents of dependent children often face similar work and parenting expectations but are not often studied as a unique population (Sallee, 2015; Springer et al., 2009).

Graduate student parents experience multiple marginalized roles such as those of the graduate student (Grady, La Touche, Oslawski-Lopez, Powers, & Simacek, 2014) and the working parent (Correll et al., 2007). Graduate students are marginalized because like faculty, they are expected to contribute significantly to the university’s research, teaching, and service missions, yet they are not afforded benefits that faculty receive such as salary, retirement benefits, and professional development resources (Grady et al., 2014; Offstein, Larson, McNeill, & Mwale, 2004; TWIG Writing Group, 1996). Parents, particularly mothers, are also
marginalized at work as they have historically received less pay and been rated as less competent than their childless counterparts solely because of their parenthood status (Correll et al., 2007). Situated within two marginalized roles, graduate student parents may be at increased risk for negative personal and academic outcomes.

Studies of graduate students have found that they experience high levels of stress, time pressure burdens (Offstein et al., 2004), and financial struggles (Grady et al., 2014; Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2006). Students who are parents need to attend not only to endless graduate program requirements but also to the daily needs of their children. I posit that because they assume multiple demanding roles (Chesser, 2015; Crabb & Ekberg, 2014; Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Hays, 1996), graduate students with children may experience more intensified difficulties with stress, finances, and struggles unique to their intersecting identities, as compared to graduate students who are not parents (Grady et al., 2014). However, parenthood and graduate school may also provide benefits to graduate student parents in that these roles may buffer the stress of one another (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006) and allow students to gain new insights into parenting (Estes, 2011), research (Dillon, 2012), teaching, and service. Such instances of ways in which roles positively affect one another are referred to as role enhancement (Sieber, 1974), whereas the ways that these intersecting roles make one another more difficult are examples of role conflict (Goode, 1960).

For a group of students who may be more susceptible to stressors, it is important to consider possible sources of strain and support, such as faculty members. I argue that faculty may significantly affect graduate student parents’ experiences of role enhancement and role conflict because the literature suggests that faculty have a strong influence on student lives (Tompkins, Brecht, Tucker, Neander, & Swift, 2016). Prior research has focused only on
advisors (Barbuto, Story, Fritz, & Schinstock, 2011; Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; Rice et al., 2009; Schlosser & Gelso, 2001 Schlosser & Kahn, 2007; Schlosser, Knox, Moskovitz, & Hill, 2003), but I hypothesize that because of their positions as instructors and committee members, other faculty members may impact graduate student parents, as well. According to recent research, faculty support more strongly predicted graduate students’ satisfaction with their program and with life in general than did support from family, friends, or student peers (Tompkins et al., 2016). Research also suggested that faculty members affect college students’ attitudes toward research (Schlosser & Gelso, 2001), motivation (Komarraju et al., 2010), effort (Barbuto et al., 2011), and overall satisfaction with life (Tompkins et al., 2016). It follows, then, that role conflict and role enhancement felt by graduate students who are parents may be significantly affected by faculty. However, apart from a single study on frameworks of negotiation (Medved & Heisler, 2002), no study of which I am aware focuses on graduate student parents’ experiences with faculty.

In addition to a lack of empirical studies about the part faculty play in the lives of graduate student parents, the literature base has seldom included investigations of other factors that may contribute to conflict and enhancement for this population. This concept has been previously unexplored apart from studies suggesting that romantic partners’ social support may ease role strain for graduate students (Grady et al., 2014) but may also add to the complexity of their responsibilities (Offstein et al., 2004). I argue that personal characteristics of graduate students and their children may lead to more or less strain, such as their general outlook on life and whether a child has a disability. It is also possible that role conflict and enhancement are affected by graduate students’ expectations of what parenthood will be like or, alternately, by parents’ expectations of what graduate school will be like.
Scientists have historically conceptualized role strain and role enhancement as opposite poles on a continuum whereby the presence of one means the relative absence of the other (Goode, 1960; Marks & MacDermid, 1996; Sieber, 1974) (See Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Role conflict/enhancement continuum. Historical representations of role conflict and role enhancement as poles on a single continuum (Tiedje et al., 1990).]

Tiedje and colleagues (1990) re-conceptualized the ways in which these constructs can be described. They posit that conflict and enhancement lie on separate scales and that people can and do experience varied levels of each simultaneously (See Figure 2). For example, though time spent with children may buffer the stress of attending to the graduate student role, it may also cause additional pressure as coursework and manuscripts beg for attention.

![Figure 2. Role conflict and enhancement as separate constructs. Representations of role conflict and role enhancement as constructs on separate continua (Tiedje et al., 1990).]

Prior studies of graduate students who are parents have considered the lives of this population through a lens of role conflict (Lynch, 2008; Myers-Walls, Frias, Kwon, Ko, & Lu, 2011; Sallee, 2015; Springer et al., 2009) and have occasionally referenced the ways that these
roles positively influence one another (Chesser, 2015), but no known research has examined these students’ experiences from the framework provided by Tiedje and colleagues (1990). The current study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how both role strain and role enhancement are experienced simultaneously for graduate student parents.

Additionally, of the empirical investigations about faculty-student relationships that do exist, many include samples of doctoral psychology or nursing students (Harrison, 2009; Schlosser & Gelso, 2001; Schlosser & Kahn, 2007; Tompkins et al., 2016). This limits the transferability of the findings because the experiences of students in other programs may differ greatly. The sample of the proposed study is made up of graduate student parents in four departments within a single college at a large Midwestern university. By examining the lives of students from multiple departments in a college other than psychology and nursing, this study contributes to a broader understanding of student-faculty relationships and interactions across program types. Additionally, the literature focusing on psychology and nursing programs includes samples of students with and without children (Barbuto et al. 2011, Schlosser & Gelso, 2001; Schlosser & Kahn, 2007; Tompkins et al., 2016), whereas the present study specifically aims to analyze the experiences of graduate students who are parents.

**Statement of the Problem**

Graduate student parents experience role strain and role enhancement as they navigate the responsibilities of fulfilling two demanding roles (Dillon, 2012; Reich, 2003; Sallee, 2015) and faculty are known to influence college students in a variety of ways (Harrison, 2009; Komarraju et al., 2010; Schlosser & Gelso, 2001; Tompkins et al., 2016). Faculty may have great influence on graduate student parents’ experiences of role strain and role enhancement, yet no known literature has examined this gap in the literature.
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to investigate graduate student parents’ (n=16) experiences of role strain and role enhancement, especially concerning their experiences with faculty. Using a qualitative approach, graduate student parents were interviewed to learn more about their experiences with faculty members related to: their status as a parent, how they believed faculty perceived their status as a graduate student parent, and how faculty expectations and parenthood influenced one another in their lives.

Research Questions

R1: In what ways do graduate student and parent roles conflict with as well as enhance one another?

R2: What experiences have students had with faculty related to the intersection of parenthood and graduate school?

R3: How do graduate student parents believe faculty members perceive their status as parents pursuing graduate degrees?

R4: In what ways do graduate student parents suggest faculty and graduate programs could continue or improve upon providing support for graduate students who are parents of dependent children?

Research Design and Methodology

In order to investigate the experiences of graduate student parents, I chose a qualitative study design using a phenomenological approach (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology is a tradition that describes the essence of a specific type of experience shared by a group of people (Creswell, 2013), which coincides with the aim of the current study to explore graduate student parents’ experiences with role conflict and role enhancement,
particularly related to interactions with faculty. Consistent with phenomenological methodology, individual interviews were conducted using a semistructured format (Lichtman, 2010). Interviews, which lasted for approximately 60 minutes each, were held between April and June of 2016 in a private location off-campus in order to ensure participant confidentiality. I wrote analytic and descriptive field notes after each interview in order to supplement interview data by recording relevant displays of emotion, gestures, the setting, and my own research lenses (Glesne, 2011).

An undergraduate research assistant and a paid professional transcribed the audio-recorded interviews, which, paired with field notes, were the primary source of data. Interview data were analyzed by searching for clusters and themes within and across participants (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Because research has suggested that subpopulations of graduate student parents may experience distinct types of role strain and role enhancement (Crabb & Ekberg, 2014; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Myers-Wells et al., 2011), I also analyzed the data within and across groups such as mothers, fathers, international students, and single parents.

Aiming to include a broad group of graduate student parents, recruitment took place via graduate student and alumni list serves, discussions with personal contacts, and emails to students included in graduate student directories. Participants included 16 parents who were currently or recently enrolled in a graduate program in one of four departments within a single college at a large Midwestern university. All participants parented children who were 18 years of age or younger at the time of their graduate study.

**Rationale and Significance**

Graduate students serve universities by teaching undergraduate courses, performing research, and providing institutional service and support (Leath, 2016; Offstein et al., 2004).
Additionally, educational institutions strive to be inclusive of diverse populations and to support students from all backgrounds (Springer et al., 2009). It is therefore within the best interests of universities to find ways to continue and improve structures that support graduate students who are parents. Research highlighted several struggles common to graduate student parents, including stress (Dillon, 2012), financial difficulties (Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Myers-Walls et al., 2011), and time pressures (Dillon, 2012; Sallee, 2015). Additionally, research has suggested faculty influences students’ satisfaction with life, attitudes about research, and effort in their graduate programs (Barbuto et al., 2011; Schlosser & Gelso, 2001; Tompkins et al., 2016). Given the amount of work graduate students put into achieving university goals and educational institutions’ aims to support diverse students, it is imperative that research examines graduate student parents’ experiences with role strain and role enhancement, particularly as related to faculty.

Participants shared both positive and negative experiences that impacted their overall well-being. The first benefit of this study lies inherently in providing graduate student parents with a confidential space within which to share their experiences. The findings also shed light on how graduate programs and faculty can continue and improve upon efforts to support graduate students who are parents. This work highlights the experiences of an understudied, marginalized group (Grady et al., 2014) and provides information that can advise policy changes within colleges, departments, and graduate programs.

**Definitions of Key Terms**

Several terms used throughout this dissertation call for definition. The following definitions have been supplied by various sources of literature on academia and parenting.
Faculty parents: Parents who are employed as faculty members in colleges or universities.

Building upon similar terms referring to student parents in prior research, I created this term for the current study.

Graduate student parents: Individuals who are enrolled in graduate programs while simultaneously raising children (Myers-Walls et al., 2011; Sallee, 2015; Springer et al., 2009)

Greedy institutions: Institutions, such as the family and academia, that seek undivided and exclusive attention and commitment from those who take part in them (Coser, 1974)

Ideal worker/student: A societal or institutional expectation that refers to employees or students as ideal only if they work more than 40 hours per week and display undivided commitment, accessibility, and loyalty to the job (Chesser, 2015; Crabb & Ekberg, 2014)

Intensive parenting: Complete devotion of oneself to the tasks of parenting, such as teaching, entertaining, responding to varying developmental needs at different stages, providing for and socializing children during all waking hours. The term “intensive mothering” has been used in prior literature (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Hays, 1996); however, for the purposes of this study, the concept refers to all parents.

Role conflict/role strain theory: Theory that individuals have limited time and energy to perform unlimited role demands and therefore, role demands cause strain for one another (Goode, 1960).

Role enhancement/role accumulation theory: Theory that emphasizes benefits of holding multiple roles and posits that doing so may result in “net gratification,” meaning that the rewards of attending to multiple roles outweigh the costs of doing so (Sieber, 1974).
Student parents: Parents enrolled in college at either the undergraduate or graduate level

(Brooks, 2015; Estes, 2011; Moreau & Kerner, 2013)

Reflexivity Statement

Because the qualitative paradigm considers the researcher to be a tool in the data collection process, scientists performing qualitative studies must examine their own lenses in relation to the topic under investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 2005; Saldaña, 2015). Therefore, while seeking to understand my own influence on participant responses, how data are analyzed, and my biases and assumptions that could affect the research design, I created a reflexivity statement (Lincoln & Guba, 2005) to demonstrate a critical analysis of myself as a data collection tool. In this section, I discuss my experiences as a graduate student parent, my informal communications with graduate student peers who are parents, and ways that the study may have been affected by my position as the principal investigator.

In order to clearly outline who I am as a graduate student parent and how that may affect the direction of my research, I thought it worthwhile for me to answer some of the questions I asked participants. For example, what led me to pursue a graduate degree while parenting young children, and which types of strain and enhancement have I experienced? Additionally, who has provided me with social support in this journey, who has created barriers for me, and how have they done so?

I am a committed, hard-working doctoral student and a mother of two precious young children. I entered my doctoral program as a parent to a toddler and six months pregnant with my second child. I often say that if I did not have a child in utero when I began working toward my doctoral degree, my youngest child would not exist because the graduate program required a far greater commitment from me than I had expected. As a result, I experienced guilt resulting from
not tending to my children as much as I “should” as I wrote papers and designed lectures, which is a common occurrence for academic parents (Brooks, 2015; Moreau & Kerner, 2015). I recognized that my perception of how much I “should” interact with my children comes from external and internal sources. Society’s expectation of me to “intensively parent” (Hays, 1996) likely affected my feelings of guilt because I was not able to orient my day around promoting my children’s development. At the same time, my own desire to be a highly active parent contributed to my guilt. I felt that opportunities to nurture my young children socially, emotionally, academically, and physically, were being missed.

I also experienced stress and an inability to concentrate on graduate coursework while my children endlessly attempted to open the door to my home office, yelling “mama” and needing noses wiped, books read, and other tasks that they were convinced their father could not perform in that moment. While playing with my children, the same guilt, inattention, lack of time, and stress presented itself due to thoughts of work that needed completion. I found myself unable to pay attention to my son’s imaginative stories as I played with him, distracted by stress from research, coursework, and assistantship deadlines. I held and nursed my daughter but my mind could not stop mentally organizing the work I needed to get done. Regardless of whether I was acting as a graduate student or a parent, the other role called for me both literally and metaphorically.

Despite experiencing struggles in the academic and home spheres, I became gratefully aware of my children’s unparalleled ability to melt my academic tension and remind me of what I value most in life. My role as a student also enhanced my ability to parent my children because my program allowed me flexibility to work at nearly any time of the day so that I may also to tend to illnesses, breastfeeding schedules, and impromptu desires to go to the park. Similarly, it
was clear that graduate school added purpose to my professional life in a way that my children could not. Presenting my research at conferences and engaging in thoughtful conversations in courses provided me an opportunity to exercise my intellect between my hours of nurturing and teaching my children. In truth, I felt that each role buffered the other (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006) though I simultaneously experienced strain between the two roles, as well.

Through informal interactions with other graduate student parents in my program, I began to see the influence of faculty in our experiences of role strain and role enhancement. When the current study originated, my struggles with faculty held more weight than did my positive memories of faculty support. Difficult times were more vivid, such as a time when a group of faculty members told my seven-month-pregnant self that I “needed” to place my children in daycare once my baby was born, when a supervisor required an in-person meeting despite my newborn’s cluster feeding schedule and hatred of bottles, and when a faculty member told me they had been “waiting for” me to quit my assistantship after the birth of my baby.

Upon reflection, however, I realized faculty have supported me as a graduate student parent in several circumstances, as well. A supervisor who required once-per-week class attendance for an assistantship position allowed all of the graduate teaching assistants to choose which day of the week to attend, which greatly eased a childcare burden for me. Another faculty member provided emotional support by allowing me to describe my struggles as a graduate student parent, then encouraged me to perform an empirical study on the matter. During a faculty panel session in an orientation course, yet another faculty member vocalized her strong opinion that family came before academics, which she openly recognized as an unpopular opinion but one that she held to. In these ways, faculty support enhanced my ability to perform my roles as a parent as well as a graduate student.
For this research topic, my lenses, filters, and angles (Saldaña, 2015) affected data collection and may have affected data analysis. My personal lenses (Saldaña, 2015), such as my female gender identity, may have created circumstances that caused me to refract (Saldaña, 2013; Saldaña, 2015) data and inadvertently focus on elements of participants’ experiences that emphasize motherhood. However, my feminist values act as filters (Saldaña, 2015) through which fatherhood is viewed with utmost importance, as well. Because I prioritize family over work, this filter may have colored data analysis processes as I sought to examine the ways that faculty affected graduate student parents in their pursuits to balance work and family. Conscious awareness of this filter aided me in bracketing my beliefs (Creswell, 2013), which consisted of consciously working to recognize and separate my beliefs from the analysis process.

Several benefits were derived from the angles (Saldaña, 2015) through which I viewed this research, such as being allowed access to data that other researchers may not have been able to collect. Because I am a parent in a graduate program and therefore have an “insider” angle (Saldaña, 2015), I connect easily with other graduate students who are parents and recruitment was therefore relatively uncomplicated. Many graduate student parents have similar emotional and academic battles and, in some ways, similar lifestyles, and that makes us drawn to one another at times because we seek support from others who understand and we are more able to support others when we are able to empathize. People who know me well describe me as passionate about standing up for others and emotionally invested in others’ happiness. It is probable that these angles (Saldaña, 2015) assisted me in creating an atmosphere in which participants cried, laughed, and disclosed information that could potentially harm their graduate careers if their identities were to become known.
I also have informally discussed this dual-role position previously with people who became participants in the study. These informal discussions were a catalyst for my decision to conduct this study. Graduate students confided in me about difficulties with faculty such as being asked whether they “even want to graduate,” being required to adjust to meetings that were rescheduled several times by faculty without regard to the fact that securing childcare can be difficult, and being consistently provided no scheduling options, almost dominating students’ schedules to the point that they missed important parenting experiences such as recitals. For these reasons, I believe participants in the study who knew that I was also a graduate student parent felt comfortable describing their lived experiences and trusted me because I empathized with their journeys.

Because of my prior relationship with and inclusion in this group, it is also possible that the experiences participants shared were more likely to be negative. For example, participants may have been more inclined to share difficult or conflicting experiences than those that were positive and supportive because they had a safe space in which to disclose information. It is also likely that my own experiences may have altered the types of experiences the participants were likely to share; because some participants knew some of the struggles I had but were not as likely to know about times that faculty supported me as a parent attending graduate school, those negative experiences were more likely to be understood as experiences that made us similar and therefore may have been expanded upon during interviews. For these reasons, I built in specific interview questions to address those positive, supportive experiences. In order to truly discover information that would benefit graduate students who are parents and the departments in which they were enrolled and to present an accurate description of graduate student parents’ experiences with faculty, I ensured that the interview focused on both “negative” and “positive”
experiences in order to highlight possible methods for continuing and improving upon supports for this group.

This study connects with my broad scholarly goals because I believe research is meant to move humankind forward, and understudied populations are in the most need of empirical evidence to show what can be done to continue and improve upon supporting them. I also study experiences of individuals who identify as gender nonconforming and children who are homeschooled, two groups that are often stigmatized and under-supported. Upon completion of the current study, I plan to share my findings with graduate education leaders at the university where I attend so that faculty methods of support for graduate student parents may continue to be utilized and to progress. Additionally, this work will be submitted for publication with ProQuest, and a shorter manuscript will be authored for submission to the *Journal of Higher Education*. 
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Life in academia is notably stressful (Hyun et al., 2006; Kinman & Jones, 2008; Offstein et al., 2004). Ambiguous but lofty performance standards and limited time combine to create incredible pressure for faculty and graduate students alike (Kinman & Jones, 2008). Academic culture expects “ideal workers” who commit countless hours to their work and prioritize their academic roles above all others (Wright et al., 2004). Similarly, Western culture has defined ideal parents as “intensely” involved in their children’s daily lives, committed to them above all else (Hays, 1996). Graduate students and faculty members who are parents may experience tension as they navigate through expectations of acting as “ideal workers” and “intensive parents” simultaneously (Chesser, 2015; Raddon, 2002; Springer et al., 2009).

Though parenting in academia has been explored in various contexts in the literature, faculty members have received the bulk of this empirical attention (Baker, 2010; Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006; Raddon, 2002; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004), perhaps because research is primarily performed by faculty who are sometimes inspired by their own lived experiences (Raddon, 2002; Trussell, 2015). Studies that have included samples of graduate student parents tend to mesh this population with undergraduate student parents (Brooks, 2015; Brown & Nichols, 2012; Medved & Heisler, 2002) or with childless graduate students (Hyun, et al., 2006), which limits our understanding of experiences unique to graduate student parents. Others limit sample demographics because their autoethnographic methodology necessitates that the researcher is the sole participant (Dillon, 2012; Reich, 2003). Furthermore, results of studies of graduate student parents may differ due to regional beliefs and values related to work and family. Therefore, studies performed in locations such as Australia (Crabb & Ekberg, 2014), South
Florida (Dillon, 2012) and universities near New York City (Lynch, 2008) may not be transferable to populations of graduate student parents in the Midwestern United States. This suggests a need for scholars to investigate this population further in order to increase transferability. Finally, when researchers have analyzed the subset of graduate student parents specifically, research questions have often centered on participants’ abilities to manage multiple roles or their experiences of times in which roles conflicted with each other (Dillon, 2012; Myers-Walls et al., 2011; Sallee, 2015) without much focus on faculty’s impact on the ways roles intersected for graduate students who are parents.

However, faculty members may play a key role in how graduate student parents maintain work-life balance. Drawing from personal experience, faculty comments and expectations have positively and negatively impacted my own efforts to balance the demands of multiple roles. My graduate student peers have also informally discussed with me the ways that faculty have affected their lived experiences of role strain and role enhancement. Though no known research directly examines this relationship, studies of faculty’s influence on students provide support for this assertion. For instance, Schlosser and Gelso (2001) suggested that the emotional bond between a graduate student and advisor influences the student’s self-efficacy and attitudes toward research. Student-faculty interactions have been positively related to students’ academic self-concept and motivation, as well (Komarraju et al., 2010). Conversely, graduate students have described feeling that their difficulties in academia were intensified by their perceptions that faculty were unconcerned about their personal or academic development (Nerad & Miller, 1996).

Despite research suggesting faculty may play a highly important role in students’ lives, no known literature has focused on relationships, perceptions of, or interactions between faculty
and graduate student parents. The purpose of this study is to explore graduate student parents’ experiences with faculty and to investigate graduate student parents’ suggestions for continuing and improving upon supports within their programs. Role strain theory (Goode, 1960) and role enhancement theory (Sieber, 1974) are foundations for this study. Role strain theory posits that roles naturally cause conflict for one another (Goode, 1960) whereas role enhancement, or role accumulation, theory purports that people benefit from holding multiple roles more than they experience conflict from doing so (Sieber, 1974). Both theories will be discussed at length near the end of this chapter.

**Chapter Organization**

In light of the significant gap in research pertaining to graduate student parents’ experiences with faculty, the literature review for this study begins with two broad foci: the graduate student experience and parents in academia. Within the literature on academic parents, I begin by discussing faculty parents. Next, I narrow in on the literature about student parents, which includes research that has analyzed undergraduate and graduate students within the same sample as well as research that has specifically focused only on the undergraduate population.

After laying out the research on graduate student experiences and parenting in academia, I narrow the review topics further to describe the population and processes that are the focus of the current study. I synthesize the literature on graduate student parents specifically, including sections about demographic subpopulations such as mothers, fathers, single parents, and international students. Because the focus of the current study involves graduate student experiences with faculty, I continue with a review of the literature about faculty influences on students and perceptions of relationships between students and faculty members.
Before concluding the literature review, I frame my research questions within Goode’s (1960) role strain theory and Sieber’s (1974) theory of role accumulation. Within these theories, I position faculty members’ contribution to the role strain and role accumulation of graduate student parents. This chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the interpretivist research paradigm.

**Graduate Students**

Many parents acknowledge difficulty in balancing the demands of work and family. However, the unique position of graduate student parents warrants further study about this specific population. Graduate students operate within institutions that researchers often describe as “greedy” because academia expects undivided and exclusive attention and effort (Chesser, 2015; Coser, 1974; Grant, Kennelly, & Ward, 2000; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Raddon, 2002; Shope, 2005). Additionally, an image of the “ideal student” persists as unmarried and dedicated solely to graduate coursework (Estes, 2011) and Springer and colleagues (2009) say “academics are trained to be monkish in their devotion and slavish in their pursuit of knowledge” (p. 438). Master’s and doctoral students themselves recognize the expectation to devote themselves to their programs “at the expense of one’s life” (Grady et al., 2014, p. 10). In addition to a strong dedication to one’s studies, graduate school expectations consist of open-ended work with no formal division between working hours and leisure time, which may add pressure to constantly perform better, complete more work, or volunteer for additional tasks (Moreau & Kerner, 2015).

**Graduate student stress**

Qualitative researchers examining the overall graduate student experience discovered a central theme of stress (Offstein et al., 2004), which is unsurprising given the competing demands of this population. Hyun and colleagues (2006) stated that almost half of their sample
of 3,000 full-time graduate students reported stress that significantly affected their academic performance or emotional well-being, whereas only 10% of the general population had reported similar levels of distress in a survey that had recently been completed by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC, 2004). Per the findings from interview and focus group data, graduate students also commonly reported guilt (Grady et al., 2014; Offstein et al., 2004), anxiety, depression, isolation (Grady et al., 2014), and feeling overwhelmed (Hyun et al., 2006).

For these students, feeling alone, guilty, and stressed appears to stem partially from endless work expectations, the seemingly impossible nature of finding time for self-care, leisure, or significant others (Offstein et al., 2004), financial insecurity (Hyun et al., 2006; Offstein et al., 2004) and factors such as relocating to attend the graduate program (Grady et al., 2014). Of 166 domestic graduate students, females reported more stress than did males, citing their perceptions of less support within their departments as well as in the home (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Also, graduate students experienced increased stress if they were international students, owing at least partially to long-distance familial responsibilities and additional pressure related to a lack of time to complete work that requires translation (Offstein et al., 2004).

In many ways, graduate student stressors are similar to those of faculty members who are also expected to engage in long work weeks (Kinman & Jones, 2008) and whose careers include open-ended duties (Moreau & Kerner, 2015). However, graduate students experience unique stressors. With tenure-track faculty positions come prestige and increased income, which stands in contrast to the marginalization (Grady et al., 2014) and financial struggles (Grady et al., 2014; Hyun et al., 2006) often experienced by graduate students. Graduate students are also expected to complete much of the same work as faculty members, such as intensive research, teaching, and
service (Offstein et al., 2004) but without the resources, respect, and power that are often afforded to faculty (Grady et al., 2014; TWIG Writing Group, 1996).

Adding to the impact of lower status and less financial support offered to graduate students as compared to faculty, Grady and colleagues (2014) argue that the unique position of graduate students as somewhere “between” learners and instructors may cause increased role conflict for this population. Master’s, professional, and doctoral students (n=17) described perceiving a need to prioritize university and faculty needs over their own needs. For example, one participant’s adviser requested that they register for an unnecessary course in order to ensure that the class would meet the minimum enrollment requirements and therefore avoid cancellation (Grady et al., 2014). Similarly, graduate students have previously described their perceptions of faculty who are distracted during meetings as not prioritizing the students’ needs (Offstein et al., 2004). Within an environment where individuals are expected to be endlessly dedicated to their own work, perceptions of needing to prioritize the needs of the institution and faculty members rather than one’s own academic needs may intensify stress.

In order to cope with high levels of stress, graduate students employ a variety of strategies that tend to be directly related to the causes of this strain (Offstein et al., 2004). For example, in order to cope with stressors related to limited time, graduate students (n=16) discussed creating rigid routines for themselves and holding themselves accountable to manage their time wisely (Offstein et al., 2004). Graduate students also coped with stress by seeking social support from advisors, peers, and family members (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Offstein et al., 2004), which may lessen feelings of isolation and being overwhelmed.

Despite varied informal attempts at decreasing levels of distress, many graduate students refrained from seeking formal mental health services (Hyun et al., 2006). In a study of more than
3,000 full-time graduate students, 50% of participants reported considering counseling services to assist them with emotional distress, but only 31% of the participants utilized those services (Hyun et al., 2006). Those who sought counseling were less likely to be married, which may be because partners were a source of stress relief or that single students had more time to allot to mental health than did students with families. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, participants reporting a positive, functional relationship with their advisor were also less likely to use counseling services. Perhaps faculty-student relationships perceived as negative contributed to additional stress for the student, which led them to more strongly desire counseling. Alternatively, positive relationships with advisors may have aided in decreasing the amount of stress felt by graduate students, thereby easing their sense of urgency to visit a counseling professional.

**Parenting in Academia**

Stress, loneliness, guilt, and feeling overwhelmed have been common for people attending graduate school (Grady et al., 2014; Hyun et al., 2006; Offstein et al., 2004). Graduate students reported seeking support from many networks, including family, in order to allow them to cope with such emotions (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Offstein et al., 2004). However, research showed that for graduate students, positive relationships with family eased struggles and also added unique stressors such as scheduling conflicts between school-related events and childcare responsibilities (Grady et al., 2014; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Because research is scarce about the process of parenting during graduate school, a discussion of parenting in academia follows, including a review of the literature on faculty parents and student parents in general.
Faculty parents

It is important to begin by noting that working parents in many career fields have reported difficulty attending to multiple roles (Wortman, Biernat, & Lang, 1991). Wortman and colleagues (1991) performed a study to investigate the amount of role strain felt by working mothers in a variety of careers, including law, banking, academia, accounting, and advertising. In their sample of 200 women who were employed at least 30 hours per week, academic mothers reported more spillover problems than did women in the other four career types. Such problems included objective conflicts (e.g., a work function preventing a mother from attending a child’s performance) as well as subjective emotions (e.g., distress felt at work due to the perception that she should be tending to responsibilities at home). This finding suggested the need for additional research aimed at understanding the experiences of parents in academic careers specifically.

Faculty parents reported encountering several types of barriers as they worked to balance their roles (Baker, 2010; Kinman & Jones, 2008; Raddon, 2002; Shope, 2005; Trussell, 2015). Using Marks and MacDermid’s (1996) definition of work-life balance as the ability to fully attend to each role while assuming that role, Kinman and Jones (2008) found that nearly half of the faculty parents in their sample reported that the universities where they were employed were “not at all” helpful in their attempts to achieve work-life balance. The researchers discussed faculty members’ lack of role balance as at least partially related to academics’ need to work from home during the evening and on weekends, thereby keeping faculty from fully attending to their roles as parents. It is important to note that the study by Kinman and Jones (2008) consisted of a sample of 844 lecturers and researchers at 99 universities in the United Kingdom and that academics at universities in the United States may feel differently. However, the culture of
academia as one that values the “ideal worker” (Wright et al., 2004) suggests that the results may be similar in both regions.

Faculty parents also reported difficulty juggling schedules related to teaching, research seminars, childcare hours, and breastfeeding. Trussell (2015), in an autoethnographic study of navigating the world of “pinstripes and breast pumps” (p. 160), highlighted her guilt and tension in response to not feeling like she had enough time fulfill her responsibilities at home or at work. Research sometimes discusses such problems in light of a lack of institutional flexibility in managing these schedules (Baker, 2010). Universities may lack family-friendly policies to support parents, especially fathers, who require scheduling and other accommodations (Baker, 2010; Reddick, Rochlen, Grasso, Reilly, & Spikes, 2012). Raddon (2002) describes this as essential if universities wish to be truly inclusive of parenting academics.

Time is a recurring theme in much of the literature on parenting in academia across nations such as the United States, Canada, and New Zealand (Baker, 2010; Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006; Crabb & Ekberg, 2014; Raddon, 2002; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). Academic calendars and requirements for tenure track positions greatly influence faculty members’ decisions to conceive children (Armenti, 2004; Baker, 2010). Regardless of the institution type in which they work (e.g., community college, research university), faculty often discuss the May baby phenomenon, which refers to the planning of pregnancies to coincide with summer break to avoid disrupting one’s progress at work during the academic year (Armenti, 2004; Baker, 2010; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). Results of a study of 602 academic parents in the United States suggested that many female academics face a battle between tenure clocks and biological clocks, sometimes choosing to delay parenthood until tenure has been achieved, and other times forgoing parenthood altogether (Grant et al., 2000).
Though academics progress through graduate school and the tenure process at different ages and paces, many who decide to put off parenthood until they achieve tenure risk losing the chance to conceive a child because fertility often declines near the same time as tenure is granted (Jacobs & Winslow, 2004). However, faculty sometimes take this risk, likely because they have been advised that parenthood harms academic careers, specifically related to achieving tenure (Armenti, 2004). Other versions of anti-family messages have been reported by faculty, such as: there are many inappropriate times to become pregnant in academia (Shope, 2005); academics have dogs, not children (Shope, 2005); and academics who are parents are taken less seriously (Armenti, 2004). These messages may be particularly strong at research intensive institutions, where there are fewer faculty mothers, thereby reducing the number of academic parents who could serve as role models (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). Research also provides some merit for warnings about mixing tenure and parenthood because higher-ranking faculty members are less likely to have children (Baker, 2010). Some of the negative consequences of being a parent in academia may be limited to mothers, as research has suggested that faculty fathers receive a “fatherhood premium” in the form of a 5.4% increase in pay compared to childless, unmarried male faculty members (Kelly & Grant, 2012, p. 869).

For faculty who choose to become parents, time continues to influence how many children they have and how they manage parenthood (Baker, 2010; Mason & Goulden, 2004). Difficulty balancing the demands of these roles leads some faculty to parent fewer children than they had originally planned (Baker, 2010; Mason & Goulden, 2004). For example, among 3,500 University of California ladder-rank faculty, 38 percent of women and 18 percent of men reported having fewer children than they desired, which Mason and Goulden (2004) related to
the fact that academics were less likely to be granted tenure if they became parents within five years of earning a doctoral degree.

Additionally, heavy workloads cause faculty to be distracted and stressed at home (Kinman & Jones, 2008). Academic parents’ psychological unavailability for their children may be related to their reports that they have difficulty finding the time to accomplish necessary parenting and academic tasks (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). In other words, faculty who are parents are adversely affected by the struggle to meet expectations of the “ideal worker” and the “intensive parent” simultaneously (Kinman & Jones, 2008; Raddon, 2002).

As is mentioned elsewhere in this dissertation, research about academic parents often highlights role strain theory (Grant et al., 2000; Kinman & Jones, 2008; Sallee, 2015) and seldom focuses on academic parents’ experiences of role enhancement. Nevertheless, a few autoethnographic and biographical studies of faculty (Raddon, 2002; Shope, 2005; Trussell, 2015) and an empirical examination of mothers across institution types (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006) have noted the benefits afforded by parenthood. They suggested that children sometimes spur new or refined research questions (Raddon, 2002; Trussell, 2015), that parenthood puts work demands in perspective, and that contributing to each role buffers the stress of being responsible for the other role (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). Trussell (2015) described an increase in overall happiness and well-being that comes with the opportunity to find meaning in parenthood and academia at the same time. Thus, it is apparent that faculty parents find their dual roles conflicting as well as enhancing.

**Student parents**

Much of the literature on student parents includes examinations of this population as a whole (Brooks, 2015; Brown & Nichols, 2012; Medved & Heisler, 2002), rather than teasing out
the possible differences in the experiences of graduate and undergraduate student parents. Many scholars have investigated the lives of the broad group of parents enrolled in college. Therefore, studies included in this section reflect that trend and contain samples that combine graduate and undergraduate student parents or focus on undergraduates only. This section also compares and contrasts faculty parent and student parent experiences. In the subsequent section of this chapter, the topic narrows to graduate student parents.

In many ways, student parent experiences are similar to those of faculty parents. For instance, both groups must navigate efforts to perform in the “greedy” institutions of academia and family (Coser, 1974). Also, similar to faculty, research suggests that student parents view their dual roles as both mutually beneficial and as causing increased strain (Estes, 2011; Moreau & Kerner, 2015). Time pressures are significant for student parents who hold themselves to high standards in their coursework and are living within a social context that tells them that good parents focus much of their time on their children (Estes, 2011; Moreau & Kerner, 2015). As is the case for faculty parents, class schedules and childcare availability sometimes clash to create conflict for student parents (Brown & Nichols, 2012). Additionally, student parents, like faculty parents, report tremendous amounts of guilt in their efforts to fully dedicate themselves to two or more time-intensive roles (Brooks, 2015; Moreau & Kerner, 2015).

Experiences of student parents and faculty parents are unique in some ways, as well. For example, financial concerns affect student parents (Home, 1998; Moreau & Kerner, 2015) whereas financial insecurity has not been reported in research on faculty parents. Students with children experience anxiety (Moreau & Kerner, 2015) and increased role conflict (Home, 1998) due to restricted finances. Parents enrolled in college courses may need to choose between relying on student loans to fully provide for their families each semester (Brown & Nichols,
2012) and forfeiting study time so they may instead prioritize their time to attend classes, care for children, and work outside the home (Home, 1998).

Matters such as financial insecurity and working within ‘greedy institutions’ clearly apply to either one or both groups of student parents and faculty parents. Other concepts, such as institutional barriers to role balance, are significant to both groups for different reasons (Baker, 2010; Brown & Nichols, 2012; Markle, 2015). For instance, faculty members sometimes alter their family planning goals in order to best position themselves for tenure requirements (Armenti, 2004; Baker, 2010; Mason & Goulden, 2004) and policies supporting scheduling accommodations for faculty parents may be beneficial (Baker, 2010). Student parents also struggle with policies and procedures that are not supportive of them, such as a lack of proximal parking spaces for pregnant students and a need for on-campus, affordable childcare facilities (Brown & Nichols, 2012). Students with children experience occasional gaps in childcare whether their children attend childcare or typically stay home with the student parent, requiring them to choose between missing classes and deadlines or notifying their instructors to ask for accommodations (Brown & Nichols, 2012). Considering the results of a study of nearly 500 nontraditional undergraduate students, this could create strain for the parent because faculty were suggested to criticize student parents when they communicated about their children falling ill (Markle, 2015).

Additionally, although the benefits of holding dual roles has been discussed in the literature on faculty parents (Raddon, 2002; Trussell, 2015; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006) as well as student parents (Estes, 2011; Moreau & Kerner, 2015), the mechanisms behind these positive interactions are different for these groups. Faculty discuss dual role benefits such as inspiration for new research topics (Raddon, 2002; Trussell, 2015) and taking a mental break from one
responsibility in order to tend to the other (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006) whereas student parents describe how their coursework and degrees benefit their children (Estes, 2011) or vice versa (Moreau & Kerner, 2015). Student parents view their academic roles as methods of securing more stable financial futures for their families, and they describe their abilities to teach their children new information as they learn in college courses (Estes, 2011). A common theme among student parents centers on serving as role models to children; these parents believe children benefit from seeing adults persist in college despite difficulties they may be having (Estes, 2011; Moreau & Kerner, 2015). Some positive outcomes of parenting while attending college may be more likely to occur in the soft versus hard sciences, such as for the students who said parenthood enhances their roles in the classroom because they are better able to relate to learning topics (Moreau & Kerner, 2015).

**Graduate student parents**

The lives of graduate students are marked with high expectations (Moreau & Kerner, 2015), marginalization (Grady et al., 2014), guilt, and stress (Grady et al., 2014; Offstein et al., 2004). Parents in academia describe experiencing both role conflict and role enhancement as they juggle these responsibilities (Estes, 2011; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Trussell, 2015). At the intersection of these populations sit graduate students who are parents. In light of the research on student parents, faculty parents, and graduate students in general, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that graduate student parents might experience distinct and particularly intense stressors and benefits in relation to their multiple roles. However, research rarely focuses on graduate student parents as a unique group (Sallee, 2015; Springer et al., 2009). The purpose of this section is to review the literature that directly examines the experiences of graduate student parents across several academic departments.
Graduate student parents' experiences. The nature of the graduate student role as somewhere “between” student and faculty (Grady et al., 2014) may mean the experiences of graduate student parents lie somewhere “between” those of student parents and faculty parents. Indeed, research suggests this may be the case. Graduate students performing research have noted that parenthood provides new insights for topics of study, for example (Dillon, 2012), which has also been mentioned by some faculty parents (Raddon, 2002; Trussell, 2015) but has not been discussed in literature on undergraduate student parents. One graduate student also described her visibly pregnant body as beneficial to her research because it provided an instant point of mutuality between herself and the participants in her study of parents whose children had been removed from the home by Child Protective Services (Reich, 2003).

Conversely, graduate student parents also shared traits with undergraduate student parents that are not represented in the literature on faculty with children, thereby contributing to their position “between” students and faculty. For instance, similar to undergraduate student parents (Home, 1998) and absent from literature on faculty parents, graduate students with children are at risk for financial struggles (Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Myers-Walls, et al., 2011). Additionally, parents in graduate and undergraduate programs discussed faculty members as contributing either negatively or positively to their ability to fulfill multiple role expectations (Brown & Nichols, 2012; Estes, 2011; Markle, 2015; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Sallee, 2015) whereas this concept does not relate to faculty parents. Students in these studies described receiving support from faculty in such situations as needing to leave campus early in order to pick up children because of school cancellations and illnesses (Sallee, 2015). On the other hand, students were negatively impacted by faculty, as well, such as by receiving a failing grade for
coursework that could not be completed on time because the student went into premature labor (Brown & Nichols, 2012).

A lack of formal policies to support graduate student parents may reflect their position as “between” students and faculty. An absence of official policies may also be an avenue by which institutions contribute to student parents’ marginalization (Grady et al., 2014) and difficulty balancing roles. In turn, faculty-student interactions and relationships are likely to be influenced by such policies and therefore are important to consider when discussing faculty’s influence on graduate student parents. Springer and colleagues (2009) argued that parenthood justifies university accommodation for graduate students in much the same ways as disabilities and athletic participation. Given the work load expected of both graduate students and parents, university policies may be an avenue by which institutions could support graduate student parents as they balance intensive roles, similar to the ways policies support student-athletes, students serving the military, and students with disabilities so they may perform to their highest capabilities in all of their roles (Springer et al., 2009).

Policies aimed at improving the lives of graduate student parents may involve parental leave, flexibility in assistantship assignment, timeline to degree, childcare subsidies and availability, and health insurance for dependents, for instance (Chesser, 2015; Springer et al., 2009). With regard to parental leave policies, most universities offer leave for faculty who become parents (American Association of University Professors, 2016). However, only 26% of universities offered parental leave for graduate students, and only 10% of universities had paid parental leave policies for graduate student parents as of 2006 (Mason, 2006, as cited in Springer et al., 2009).
In addition to the characteristics that place graduate student parents in a middle ground between undergraduate student parents and faculty who have children, several overarching themes can be found that link all types of academic parents. Time constraints and time management, guilt (Dillon, 2012; Sallee, 2015), anxiety (Reich, 2003) and stress (Dillon, 2012) are prevalent across groups (Grady et al., 2014; Raddon 2002). Childcare concerns all categories of academic parents, albeit for different reasons such as finances and accessibility. Faculty and graduate students emphasize the benefits of having family living nearby to care for children (Baker, 2010; Myers-Walls et al., 2011), and both graduate and undergraduate students have voiced difficulty affording childcare (Moreau & Kerner, 2015).

Contradictory viewpoints emerge on the affordability of childcare for students. Graduate students may be more financially secure than their undergraduate counterparts because of opportunities for paid graduate assistantships (Brown & Nichols, 2012). However, both undergraduate and graduate students in a study by Moreau and Kerner (2015) discussed their perceptions that the former group qualifies for more childcare assistance. Although Moreau and Kerner’s (2015) sample was limited to students in England, research by Lynch (2008) supports the idea that the same may be true for students in the United States. Lynch (2008) reported that mothers’ most common grievance about their graduate programs was a lack of financial assistance for parents.

When comparing graduate students with and without children, several themes are similar; however, these themes were experienced differently depending on parental status. For example, graduate students with children, like those without children, felt guilty because they continuously strove to meet high expectations that were seemingly never met due to their ambiguous and open-ended nature (Dillon, 2012; Grady et al., 2014; Offstein et al., 2004). However, for
graduate students who were parents, guilt also resulted as a function of spending less time with one’s children than was desired or expected (Chesser, 2015; Dillon, 2012; Sallee, 2015).

In addition to the idea that students with children encountered more intense feelings of guilt than did childless students, researchers suggested these groups experienced different forms of isolation, as well (Grady et al., 2014; Sallee, 2015). In a qualitative study of 17 participants enrolled in master’s, professional, and doctoral programs, graduate students without families reported feeling isolated because they did not have enough time to develop or maintain committed relationships with spouses and romantic partners (Grady et al., 2014). Graduate student parents, on the other hand, may be at risk for isolation because they maintain fewer friendships in attempt to eliminate roles and therefore ease strain (Sallee, 2015).

Another area of common, yet varied, ground between graduate students with and without children centered on social support (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Myers-Walls et al. 2011; Offstein et al., 2004; Tompkins et al., 2016). For graduate students in general, higher levels of social support from their programs and families correlated with lower levels of stress symptoms (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Graduate students typically cited student peers and faculty members as vital to their social support systems (Offstein et al., 2004; Tompkins et al., 2016), though very limited time may restrict graduate student parents from socializing with members of these support systems (Offstein et al., 2004). Students with children and significant others may have received social support from their family members, but research by Tompkins and colleagues (2016) suggested that among student peers, faculty mentors, and friends/family outside of their program, support from faculty mentors held the most power in predicting students’ overall life satisfaction and satisfaction with the program.
Of note, female students reported less support from their graduate programs and more feelings of isolation than males (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). This may be related to the “motherhood penalty” described by Correll and colleagues (2007) as the negative consequences women face when they enter the workforce despite cultural expectations to engage in motherhood at the expense of all other roles. Regardless, research about mothers and fathers in graduate school highlighted that time spent in student and parent roles consumed any time that may have been spent within a social setting (Myers-Walls et al., 2011). Therefore, the literature suggests that social support significantly affected the lives of all graduate students but that students with and without children may have received support from different sources. Those who were parents may have lacked the time to build important social networks with faculty and peers in their programs, but family relationships provided a built-in social support network away from the program (Grady et al., 2014). Such diversions were desired among single graduate students (Grady et al., 2014).

In sum, the experiences of graduate student parents mirrored some aspects of the lives of undergraduate student parents, faculty parents, and childless graduate students. However, graduate students’ relative invisibility “between” students and faculty, coupled with simultaneous roles in two “greedy institutions” (Coser, 1974) of academia and family, places this population in a unique position that has been under-studied (Sallee, 2015; Springer et al., 2009). Subsets of this population, such as single parents and international students, are likely to be affected differently by their status as graduate students who are parents. In the next section, the literature review focuses on these groups.
Subpopulations of graduate student parents

Prior research about graduate student parents is limited. Therefore, no study of which I am aware has examined families that include multiple graduate student parents. It is hypothesized that such families may experience compounded financial and time-related burdens. In light of the findings discussed below, it might also be that mothers and fathers would simply relate to the literature that pertains to their gender identity.

Mothers. Much of the research on parents in graduate programs has focused solely (Lynch, 2008) or primarily (Myers-Walls et al., 2011; Sallee, 2015) on mothers. Because ideas of what makes a good father has differed from what makes a good mother, the experiences of these groups of parents may be dissimilar, as well. Working outside the home is a tenet of acting as a good father whereas being a good mother equates with intense involvement in children’s intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development, which Hays (1996) refers to as “intensive mothering” (p. 6). Subsequently, because expectations of ideal academics (Wright et al., 2004) conflict with cultural expectations of “intensive mothers” (Hays, 1996, p. 6), working mothers often receive “penalties” (Correll et al., 2007, p. 1298) whereas faculty fathers receive “premiums” (Kelly & Grant, 2012, p. 869). The roles of mother and academic each demand priority and therefore have the potential to cause considerable strain in the lives of graduate student mothers.

Outside of academia, scientists (Correll et al., 2007) investigated employer discrimination against women by sending fictitious résumés to employers. Some résumés briefly mentioned parenthood while others did not. The researchers then tracked the call-backs for each fabricated applicant and also conducted an experiment to study undergraduates’ responses to inquiries about the applicants’ starting wages and other employment information. The results showed that
working mothers were “penalized” as compared to women without children, receiving fewer job offers, lower pay, ratings of lower competence and lower levels of commitment to the job, and being held to stricter punctuality guidelines. Contrarily, men with children were rewarded by receiving more job offers than were childless men.

Within academia, graduate student mothers may be treated differently from fathers, as well. For instance, women perceived less social support from graduate programs than did men (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Women in graduate school have also reported gendered messages such as the incompatibility of motherhood and academic careers (Crabb & Ekberg, 2014) as well as advice to “play the game the way the boys do” (Shope, 2005, p. 53). In Crabb and Ekberg’s (2014) analysis of gender in graduate school, several participants voiced implicit messages such as the university environment being a “boys’ club” and that women in the university were regarded less highly than men. At times, women described their belief that some discrimination against females in academia stems from their status as mothers. For example, in her autoethnography, Shope (2005) reflected on the “no uterus rule,” which referred to implicit messages women received to act as though they had no uterus and were therefore more like men. Shope (2005) discussed universities’ desire for diversity with the caveat that women were not expected to become mothers.

Motherhood has been described as incompatible with academia (Crabb & Ekberg, 2014). This statement alone shows a sharp contrast between likely experiences of graduate student mothers and graduate student fathers, because fatherhood does not automatically conjure images of problems when paired with life in academia. However, graduate student fathers are vastly under-studied (Dillon, 2012; Thomas, 2014) and these lives contain distinct experiences, as well. Additionally, because societal trends are changing to include more stay-at-home fathers and
working mothers (Livingston, 2014), it is possible that graduate student parents’ experiences are beginning to become more similar as gender role expectations broaden.

**Fathers.** The literature on parenthood in academia most often has combined the experiences of mothers and fathers (Myers-Walls et al., 2011; Sallee, 2015) or analyzed only the experiences of mothers (Raddon, 2002; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Research on graduate student fathers, therefore, is rare (Dillon, 2012). Unique to graduate student fathers, research has suggested that this group sometimes worries about their spouses due to a lack of medical insurance for dependents and also because of the intense workload spouses may be responsible for at home while the graduate student is away at school (Myers-Wells et al., 2011). Additionally, although most graduate student fathers in a study by Crabb and Ekberg (2014) did not mention their families when asked about their future academic careers, several of them described struggling to find work-life balance because they desired more time to study and more time to care for their children. Interestingly, one male participant in that study explicitly discussed a societal expectation that he would be the family breadwinner, which led him to preemptively turn down any job choices that would lead to a decrease in pay (Crabb & Ekberg, 2014). On the other hand, graduate student fathers in a study by Sallee (2015) shared their tendency to sacrifice submitting higher quality coursework because they chose to prioritize spending time with their children instead.

Searching databases for research focusing solely on graduate student fathers, a single article emerged, which was an autoethnography by Dillon (2012). Dillon’s (2012) account of attempting to manage his roles included negotiations of time, marital stress, and ultimately recognizing that he inadvertently was prioritizing graduate school over his family life. By choosing to multi-task via working during his son’s swimming lesson and by adhering to
academic pressures to complete more work within small windows of time, Dillon (2012) realized he was adding stress to his own life and taking away his own time with his family. Writing his autoethnographic manuscript therefore enhanced his personal life by allowing him to investigate the meaning of family and graduate school (Dillon, 2012).

**Single parents.** Like all subsets of academic parents, single parents in graduate school face unique circumstances. As sole household income earners, it may be the case that single student parents experience heightened financial strain. Additionally, being the sole parent for children may create greater demands to spend quality time with children because of the absence of a second parent who could do so (Anaya, Glaros, Scarborough, & Tami, 2009). This may be why Home (1998) found that single student mothers, as compared to their coupled counterparts, were at a higher risk of experiencing role overload, which refers to having an insufficient amount of time to fulfill all responsibilities. Those who were single also allowed themselves less leisure time because of a lack of in-home support and because of academic and family demands on their time (Moreau & Kerner, 2015). In reference to the isolation felt by many graduate students (Grady et al., 2014; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Myers-Walls et al., 2011), single student parents reported a need to socialize with other single parents in order to feel more supported and build community (McLeod & Vonk, 1992). Thus, although parents in academia shared some traits, single parents experienced greater time constraints and risked role overload more than academic parents who were partnered.

**International students.** International student parents must adjust to multiple foreign contexts, such as parenting in a country that may have different norms, striving to meet academic expectations that may contrast with those of their home country, and regularly using a language other than their first language (Myers-Walls et al., 2011; Offstein et al., 2004). Parents who are
international graduate students have described experiencing stress when adjusting to the parenting practices of the host country (Myers-Walls et al., 2011). This stress originates from feeling conflicted about wanting children to identify with their home country but also experience the benefits of American culture (Myers-Walls et al., 2011). For students who come from collectivist cultures, living far away from family can cause added child-rearing stress because they cannot rely on familial childcare like they would be able to in their home countries (Myers-Walls et al., 2011). When international graduate students considered enrolling their children in childcare programs, concerns about providers’ abilities to speak their home language arose (Myers-Walls et al., 2011).

Within the academic setting, international graduate students may not socially connect with others in their programs because of a language barrier (Myers-Walls et al., 2011). Language translation causes international students to spend more time on coursework, as well, because of the added time necessary for thinking and writing in a second language (Offstein et al., 2004). For graduate student parents already experiencing significant time constraints (Dillon, 2012; Sallee, 2015), language translation becomes an intensifying factor in the conflict felt between attending to multiple “greedy” roles (Coser, 1974; Offstein et al., 2004).

**Summary.** Graduate student parents may experience similar events and emotions in their efforts to succeed in multiple roles. However, subsets of this group face unique challenges. Mothers, for example, may be more “penalized” for working outside the home than are fathers because of cultural expectations for mothers to provide the majority of care for children (Correll et al., 2007). Fathers have been under-studied (Dillon, 2012) but may be expected to prioritize work over children to a greater degree than women. Single parents and international students (Myers-Walls et al., 2011) may experience greater time constraints than other academic parents
because of a lack of trusted adults who could provide childcare in their absence. For these reasons, it is important to consider the needs of various subgroups of graduate student parents in addition to attending the experiences of this group as a whole.

**Importance of Faculty in Student Lives**

For a population of graduate students living with intense time conflicts, unending demands from multiple roles, guilt (Dillon, 2012; Sallee, 2015), financial struggles (Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Myers-Walls et al., 2011), anxiety (Reich, 2003) and stress (Dillon, 2012), what role does faculty play? According to research by Tompkins and colleagues (2016), in comparison to student peers, family, and friends, faculty support explains the most unique variance in graduate students’ program satisfaction and overall life satisfaction. Though the 228 participants in that sample described receiving more support from family, friends, and student peers than they did from faculty, faculty support had a stronger influence on graduate students’ satisfaction (Tompkins, et al., 2016). This study highlights the critical role of faculty in the lives of graduate students and suggests a need to research graduate student experiences with faculty.

Advisor-advisee relationships seem to be the most studied segment of faculty-student interactions (Harrison, 2009; Inman et al., 2011; Knox, Schlosser, Pruitt, & Hill, 2006; Schlosser & Kahn, 2007). Within these relationships, research has suggested that effective advisors customize their advising to fit each student and show passion for positively influencing students’ lives (Barbuto et al., 2011). Advisors who displayed these traits had advisees who put more effort into their work and felt more satisfied with their faculty mentor (Barbuto et al., 2011). Though some information has been gathered on advisor-advisee relationships across departments (Barbuto et al., 2011; Wilde & Schau, 1991), many narrowed their focus to specific majors (clinical psychology, counseling psychology, nursing) or demographic groups (African
American women, female-female dyads, aboriginal Canadians, Latinx STEM professors) (Harrison, 2009; Heinrich, 1995; Lechuga, 2011; Patton, 2009; Pidgeon, Archibald, & Hawkey, 2014; Schlosser & Gelso, 2001; Schlosser & Kahn, 2007; Tompkins et al., 2016). Therefore, it is necessary to briefly examine the findings from those studies in order to consider the possible meaning of faculty roles in the lives of graduate student parents across four departments within a “soft science” college.

For graduate students in psychology programs, the advisor-advisee relationship is affected by rapport, which was defined by Schlosser and Gelso (2001) as how well the members of the advisory pair connect personally. Harrison (2009) asked nursing and pre-nursing students which qualities described effective academic advisors and found that being nurturing, supportive, and fun were high-ranking characteristics. Also, rapport between advisors and advisees in graduate programs negatively correlated with students choosing not to disclose information to their advisors out of fear of being seen as unprofessional (Inman et al., 2011). Nondisclosures were categorized by content and included such problems as issues with family, the program, advisor unprofessionalism, multicultural issues, and personal concerns (Inman et al., 2011).

Because faculty strongly influence student satisfaction with a program and with life in general (Tompkins et al., 2016) and rapport is commonly cited as important to this relationship (Harrison, 2009; Inman et al., 2011; Schlosser & Gelso, 2001), it may be of critical importance for faculty to create an environment in which graduate student parents feel comfortable disclosing family and personal issues. This could also be inferred by mentees’ reports that being able to trust and personally relate to mentors affects the relationship greatly (Patton, 2009).

When combined with a strong emotional bond, Schlosser and Gelso (2001) purported that advising relationships with positive ratings of “apprenticeship” (p. 161) were likely to result in
graduate students’ positive attitudes about research and research self-efficacy. Apprenticeship is defined as advisors’ facilitation of students’ professional development (Schlosser & Gelso, 2001). Similarly, research by Harrison (2009) suggested students valued advisor traits of being knowledgeable about the program and showing effort in finding answers to student questions, and intrinsic motivation of students has been shown to positively correlate with faculty career guidance (Komarraju et al., 2010). Therefore, considering our knowledge of the significance of faculty in graduate students’ satisfaction with their program (Tompkins et al., 2016), advisors’ authentic attempts at facilitating graduate student parents’ academic journeys may be of utmost importance, as well.

Apart from studies investigating advisor-advisee relationships, little research examines faculty’s influence on college students. A study by Komarraju and colleagues (2010) explored dimensions of undergraduate student-faculty interactions as related to student outcomes. They found that academic self-concept and students’ intrinsic motivation were positively correlated with students’ perceptions of faculty as approachable, accessible, respectful, caring, and that they shared an emotional bond with at least one faculty member. Contrarily, student amotivation was positively related to negative student-faculty interactions. Although this study included a sample of undergraduate students, perhaps similar relationships existed within graduate student-faculty relationships.

Only one known study has examined faculty interactions with student parents specifically (Medved & Heisler, 2002). Medved and Heisler (2002) found that undergraduate and graduate student parents initiated negotiations with faculty members in times of difficulty. The majority of these difficult times grew out of an inability to complete tasks because of a child’s illness or other problem. Students reported a mean of 3.26 on a five-point scale signifying their mid-level
satisfaction with faculty responses to their requests for assistance. Because faculty influence
student motivation and life satisfaction, faculty responses to student requests for assistance in
times of need may be pivotal to students’ overall success in their graduate programs.

Within the existing literature on faculty-student interactions and advisor-advisee
relationships, authors cite a need for future research exploring related topics (Knox et al., 2006;
Rice et al., 2009; Schlosser et al., 2003). Researchers have discussed the need for studies
examining the effects of faculty-student relationships, such as whether graduate students are
satisfied in their programs (Schlosser et al., 2003). The literature has also noted a need for further
study exploring the ways that faculty may continue or improve upon supporting graduate
students (Knox et al., 2006). In their investigation of international students’ advising
relationships in graduate school, Rice and colleagues (2009) described a need for future research
to examine faculty relationships with both domestic and international students.

For these reasons, the current study aims to examine the role of faculty in the lives of
graduate student parents of various demographic backgrounds. The sample for this study
includes international and domestic students as well as single and married parents, mothers and
fathers, and parents enrolled in master’s as well as doctoral programs. This study also fills a gap
in the literature by including participants outside of nursing and psychology doctoral programs
(Harrison, 2009; Schlosser & Gelso, 2001; Schlosser & Kahn, 2007; Tompkins et al., 2016).

Research Questions

All research questions are inspired by theories of role strain and role accumulation in that
the goal of this study was to explore the ways in which students experience role strain and role
accumulation as well as how faculty members currently contribute to those experiences and how
such experiences might be facilitated by faculty and graduate programs in the future.
R1: In what ways do graduate student and parent roles conflict with and enhance one another?
R2: What experiences have students had with faculty related to the intersection of parenthood and graduate school?
R3: How do graduate student parents believe faculty members perceive their status as parents pursuing graduate degrees?
R4: In what ways do graduate student parents feel faculty and graduate programs could continue or improve upon providing support for graduate students who are parents of dependent children?

**Theory**

This study of graduate student parents’ experiences is situated within several related theories. For individuals living in the unique intersecting positions of graduate students and parents of dependent children, role strain (Goode, 1960; Marks, 1977) and role accumulation/enhancement (Sieber, 1974) theories may be particularly applicable. Role strain theory refers to the idea that the finite nature of individuals’ time and energy causes people difficulty when attempting to take on multiple roles (Goode, 1960; Marks, 1977). Therefore, according to this theory, people whose roles are demanding are likely to experience role conflict (Goode, 1960). In contrast, role accumulation/enhancement theory rejects the assumption that conflict is an automatic result of role multiplicity (Sieber, 1974). Instead, this theory emphasizes the benefits of playing multiple roles and posits that doing so may result in increased stability because roles often come with privileges and act as buffers for one another (Sieber, 1974). Sieber (1974) also argues that if conflict and enhancement are both felt, individuals are likely to experience “net gratification,” meaning that the benefits of holding multiple roles outweigh the
costs of doing so. A discussion of role strain and role enhancement follows as it pertains to the current study.

**Role strain theory**

Goode’s (1960) theory described role strain as an inevitable by-product of assuming multiple roles. Strain has been alleged to result from myriad sources such as conflicts of time, a lack of resources, and contradicting role demands (Goode, 1960). For graduate student parents, this may indeed be accurate. Time pressures have been noted amply in the literature on graduate students (Grady et al., 2014; Offstein et al., 2004) as well as parents in academia (Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006; Jacobs & Winslow, 2004; Raddon, 2002). As mentioned previously, because the family and academia are both described as “greedy” institutions (Chesser, 2015; Correll et al., 2007; Coser, 1974; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Raddon, 2002; Springer et al., 2009), parents enrolled in graduate programs are likely to experience contradicting role demands as each of these roles expects to be prioritized over the other (Chesser, 2015; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Raddon, 2002; Springer et al., 2009). Additionally, financial struggles (Home, 1998; Moreau & Kerner, 2015) and inadequate childcare options (Brown & Nichols, 2012) may contribute to strain felt due to a lack of resources.

Consistent with Goode’s (1960) theory, graduate student parents may elect strategies to reduce role strain. Methods of easing role strain are thought to be role elimination, delegation, compartmentalization, and extension (Goode, 1960). Research on student parents suggests that this group eliminates roles by neglecting friendships (Moreau & Kerner, 2015), thereby decreasing role strain as fewer roles demand attention. Also, parents enrolled in graduate programs have discussed the importance of being able to delegate childcare duties to significant others and childcare personnel when they need to fulfill their graduate student responsibilities.
(Lynch, 2008), which reduces strain felt as a result of an inability to fulfill two roles at once. Compartmentalization, which refers to mentally setting aside one role while in another role (Goode, 1960), has rarely been discussed in literature about student parents (Sallee, 2015); however, these students may employ compartmentalizing techniques as they switch from graduate student to parent roles and vice versa. Role extension, which includes expanding roles with the purpose of facilitating other role demands (Goode, 1960), may apply to this group of students, as well. For instance, these individuals may choose graduate coursework that teaches child development milestones. Though I speculate the possibility of role extension in the lives of student parents, no known research has investigated this topic.

For graduate students who are parents of dependent children, experiences of role conflict may be greatly affected by faculty. For example, instructors may choose to grant or deny deadline extensions (Brown & Nichols, 2012), they may criticize students who discuss the struggles of parenthood, and prior research suggests that student parents believe faculty have negative perceptions of them (Markle, 2015). For these reasons, the current study examines the ways that faculty influence graduate student parents’ experiences of role conflict, participants’ beliefs about faculty perceptions of them, and student suggestions for improvement of supports for this population.

**Role enhancement/accumulation theory**

Goode’s (1960) idea that people might ease role strain via extension suggests that in some ways, holding multiple roles is beneficial. Sieber (1974) theorized that the rewards gained while assuming multiple roles exceed the burdens experienced in these situations. Role enhancement or accumulation, then, refers to these rewards which include role privileges, added resources, status security, and personality enrichment (Sieber, 1974). Sieber (1974) argues that
adult students exercise role privilege by exaggerating demands felt by one role in order to excuse themselves from demands in another role. More recent research suggests that student parents feel guilty as a result of having inadequate time to achieve all role duties to their own and others’ high expectations (Dillon, 2012; Sallee, 2015), which contradicts Sieber’s (1974) image of adult students as using their multiple roles as excuses.

Despite literature describing students’ feelings of guilt as they navigate their roles as students and parents, research supports the idea that these roles enhance one another in many ways (Dillon, 2012; Estes, 2011; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). For example, graduate students with children may feel similarly to faculty parents in that each role provides a buffer for the other (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006), which corresponds with Sieber’s (1974) tenet of role enhancement via status security. Using this frame of thought, parental roles may strengthen the graduate student role by temporarily allowing individuals to be free of the demands of graduate school, and vice versa. Student parents have also acknowledged their academic roles as beneficial because they are providing positive role models for their children (Moreau & Kerner, 2015), and they have discussed their children’s roles in sparking research interests, as well (Dillon, 2012). Both of these benefits align with Sieber’s (1974) thought that multiple roles create more resources, meaning that the person becomes more valuable in each role because of their position in the other role. Finally, Sieber (1974) postulated that holding multiple roles enriches one’s personality. Essentially, a person gains a sense of “me” by taking a variety of roles. Research by Myers-Walls and colleagues (2011) supports this concept with findings suggesting that stay-at-home spouses of graduate students feel unchallenged, isolated, and concerned about their own future careers, signifying that their position in a single predominant role may contribute to a lack of self-concept.
Prior research has suggested that faculty support strongly predicts student satisfaction with their programs and life in general (Tompkins et al., 2016). I hypothesize that facilitation of role enhancement may be a mechanism by which this occurs. For instance, faculty might encourage personality enrichment by acknowledging and affirming students’ personal lives, which has been suggested to benefit students (Medved & Heisler, 2002). By recognizing certain times of day as reserved for family, faculty members could also increase the likelihood that each role “buffers” the other because the student is able to find respite from one role while attending fully to the other. Likewise, by perceiving student parents as intelligent and capable, and by providing academic opportunities to them, faculty may be enhancing students’ sense of “me” and contributing to a “buffer” effect. In cases where faculty involve students in funding opportunities, it can be interpreted that the role of the parent is receiving resources from the student role. It is hoped that the current study will shed light on ways that faculty contribute to graduate student parents’ experiences of role enhancement.

**Positioning role strain and role enhancement**

Although Goode (1960) and Sieber (1974) argued opposing theories, more recent research proposes that role strain and role enhancement are not two concepts at either ends of a mutually exclusive continuum (Tiedje et al., 1990). Tiedje and colleagues (1990) presented work that suggested that, similar to the concept of health meaning more than simply the absence of disease, so too does role enhancement mean more than simply the absence of role strain. Rather, individuals with multiple roles report varying degrees of role strain and role enhancement simultaneously (Tiedje et al., 1990). Using this thought, the current study aims to explore the ways in which graduate student parents experience role conflict and role enhancement at the same time.
I argue that faculty may influence graduate student parents’ experiences of role strain and role enhancement. When graduate student parents approach faculty for assistance during difficult times, as discussed by Medved and Heisler (2002), faculty members’ responses to those requests may contribute to role strain. Alternatively, faculty may contribute to a buffering effect by building rapport with student parents (Inman et al., 2011). Because this area has been previously unexplored in the literature, the current study will analyze the ways in which faculty influence role strain and role enhancement for graduate students who are parents to dependent children.

**Interpretivist Paradigm**

For the current study, I am working within the interpretivist paradigm. In contrast to a positivist approach, which assumes that there is an objective truth that can be discovered via research, I believe everyone has a unique subjective reality that can be interpreted and described in detail by scientists (Glesne, 2011). Additionally, interpretivists recognize that perceptions play a key role in people’s experiences, including those of the researchers themselves (Glesne, 2011). Therefore, it is critical that I reflect on my own understanding and lenses regarding parenting while enrolled in graduate programs. Related to the interpretivist paradigm, the phenomenological approach acknowledges that although individual perceptions contribute to subjective realities and truths, objective events are experienced with others, as well (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology includes qualitative studies that examine a specific type of experience shared by a group of individuals and studies that seek to understand lived experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Creswell, 2013). Because the research questions for this study include inquiry about participant beliefs about faculty perceptions as well as graduate student parents’ descriptions of their lived experiences, I am conducting the study within an interpretivist paradigm using a phenomenological approach.
Summary

A thorough review of the literature reveals that little attention has been paid to graduate student experiences with faculty (Medved & Heisler, 2002). However, when comparing studies across samples of faculty parents, undergraduate and graduate student parents, it is within reason to suggest that graduate students who are parents of dependent children may experience significant strain and enhancement due to their unique positioning and dual roles. Therefore, one purpose of this study is to explore graduate student parents’ experiences of role conflict and role enhancement. Because faculty play an influential role in the lives of students (Tompkins et al., 2016), the current study also examines graduate student parents’ experiences with faculty, graduate student parents’ beliefs about how faculty perceive their status as parents pursuing graduate degrees, and in what ways faculty and graduate programs could continue and improve upon supporting graduate students who are parents.

In light of prior research and anecdotal evidence from my own experiences and those of my student peers, I hypothesize that graduate student parents encounter many instances of role conflict and role enhancement and that faculty affect these parents in a variety of ways. For example, I believe the participants will report that their children make the process of attending graduate school less stressful, such as by offering respite from coursework, but also that the responsibilities of parenthood clash with the expectations of graduate students at times (Estes, 2011; Moreau & Kerner, 2015). Similarly, graduate program requirements are likely to detract from students’ abilities to parent as effectively as they would like but may positively influence families by providing parents with an intellectual outlet and improved financial trajectory after graduation.
Faculty members who teach graduate courses may contribute to role strain or role ease for students by allowing or disallowing students flexible deadlines in response to children’s illnesses, recitals, and other family events (Brown & Nichols, 2012). Advisors and other committee members who acknowledge and affirm personal matters may create an environment in which students feel comfortable seeking assistance when necessary (Medved & Heisler, 2002), which likely increases role enhancement and may decrease role conflict. However, a study by Markle (2015) suggested that student parents believe faculty members perceive them negatively, which may create additional role strain for these students. In summary, I hypothesize that the participants of the current study have simultaneously experienced role conflict and role enhancement and that faculty have significantly influenced those experiences.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore graduate student parents’ experiences with faculty. The methodology used to complete this study is described herein. This chapter begins with a description of the research design followed by information about the study’s sample, ethical considerations, methods of data collection, and procedures for data analysis. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the methods by which trustworthiness is achieved and the limitations and delimitations of this study.

Research design

Qualitative inquiry aims to explore the meaning individuals attach to objects and experiences (Creswell, 2013). Due to the present study’s focus on understanding and interpreting graduate student parents’ experiences with faculty, I took a qualitative approach. Additionally, I believe knowledge is socially constructed rather than objectively “true,” which Glesne (2011) describes as a hallmark of the interpretivist paradigm. The research questions at hand ask about the “essence,” or core ideas (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997), of graduate student parents’ experiences with faculty, which may only be answered via qualitative research.

Phenomenology includes qualitative studies that examine a specific type of experience shared by a group of individuals and studies that seek to understand lived experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Creswell, 2013). The aim of this study was to explore the ways that parenting and academic roles affected one another in these students’ lives and to seek information regarding graduate student parents’ experiences with faculty. Because the research questions for the current study asked about lived experiences of a specific group of people (e.g., graduate student parents), a phenomenological approach was chosen.
It is important to note that the topic of the current study holds deep meaning for me as a graduate student and a parent. I have experienced defining moments in my graduate career that had significant implications and consequences for my own physical and psychological health, as well as my children’s well-being. My concern for graduate student parents is rooted in some of these experiences in which I attempted, unsuccessfully and without just cause or justification, to negotiate with faculty for a mutually beneficial situation, such that I could meet my departmental obligations and also respond to my own and my children’s personal needs. So as not to expose myself to any additional hardship, the details of these interactions with faculty members will not be disclosed.

Using a phenomenological approach requires the researcher to “bracket” their own history of the phenomenon under investigation, separating their experiences from those of the participants as a means of viewing the data with a new lens (Creswell, 2013, p. 83). Though fully bracketing one’s experiences may be unrealistic (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016), I strived to do so. I followed recommendations by Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins (2010) in the process of bracketing via journaling with the purpose of critically analyzing my own experiences and therefore my lens on this topic. To increase the trustworthiness of the study (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010), I reflected upon the debriefing questions they suggested and these reflections became part of the audit trail.

In some ways, journaling and bracketing influenced the manner in which interviews were conducted. When considering my initial interpretations of interviews, my surprise that some participants had overwhelmingly positive experiences with faculty became evident. This showed me the hypothesis with which I subconsciously began the study, which was that most, if not all, of the participants would discuss struggles they had endured as graduate student parents rather
than ways in which faculty enhanced their ability to navigate these roles. I assumed that because
difficult experiences were more prevalent in my own experience as a graduate student parent and
my peers had confided similar stories before the study began, I would continue to hear about
negative interactions with faculty. In my efforts to bracket my own biases and assumptions, then,
I approached interview opportunities with a blank canvas in mind, ready to listen to and inquire
about each participant’s unique lived experiences without a predetermined idea of what they
would describe. In this way, bracketing affected the way I conducted interviews because it
encouraged me to ensure a more balanced focus on role enhancement and role conflict, rather
than allowing my initial hypothesis to lead the data in one direction.

Sample

Recruitment criteria

All participants were recruited from four departments housed within a “soft science”
college at a large, research intensive Midwestern university with Carnegie Classification. The
university offers degrees at the bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral level. Criteria for participant
inclusion were limited to enrollment in a single college due to the likelihood that experiences
differ depending on the type of graduate program (i.e., “soft sciences” or “hard sciences”) in
which the student is or was recently enrolled. All participants were enrolled in a graduate
program for at least one full semester within the past five years. Participants were also required
to have dependent child(ren) who were 18 years of age or younger at the time of graduate study.
Parents of adult children were excluded from this study because the intensity of their
involvement in their children’s lives may not influence their experiences while pursuing a
graduate degree in the same manner as it may for students who are parents of younger,
dependent children. Recruitment criteria included self-identification as a parent via birth,
adoption, or marriage. Graduate students who were dating partners with children to whom they were not related via biology or adoption were excluded from the study because it would be difficult to establish the extent of these students' duties in their role as an adult caregiver in a child's life. Though one participant was pregnant during the time of this study, she also mothered dependent children. All of the above-mentioned criteria existed in order to narrow the focus of the study and create a more homogenous group for investigation.

**Recruitment methods**

Several recruitment methods were employed to ensure the most diverse sample of graduate student parents possible. Flyers were shared in a graduate research methods course and were also emailed to graduate student and alumni list serves. A student parent support group was contacted and information about the study was thereby disseminated to relevant group members. A Graduate Student Directory and an Alumni Directory were used to identify graduate students who were currently or recently enrolled in the college. I sent individual emails to personal contacts, contacts suggested by a supervising instructor, and students identified in the directories to ask whether they were interested in being part of the study. In addition to reaching out to potential participants via list serves, personal contacts, and a student parent support group, snowball sampling was employed. Six participants were initially personally emailed by me, six were recruited via emails sent on list serves, and four learned about the study during a course in which I was enrolled.

**Declined to participate.** Though efforts were made to include everyone who expressed interest in the study, five potential participants were not interviewed. In three of these cases, I was unable to schedule interviews after repeated attempts to do so. Two others were busy with a new baby and an upcoming wedding and were therefore unable to participate. The demographics
of the potential participants who were not included in the study differ somewhat from those who were able to participate. Based on first name and personal relationships with some of the potential participants, it appears that two of the five (40%) individuals not included in the study were fathers, which is a considerably larger proportion than the 19% of fathers in the final sample.

**Sample characteristics**

Participants included 16 graduate student parents. Though most of the participants (n=13) were currently enrolled, three alumni were also recruited in an effort to increase the sample size. Of the current students, eight (62%) were in doctoral programs, four (31%) sought master’s and doctoral degrees, and one (8%) was working toward a master’s degree. All alumni had earned doctoral degrees. The number of semesters completed in their graduate program ranged from two to 15, with a mean of 7.5, and participants’ mean age was 33.3 with a range of 23 to 50 years.

With nine White participants, this group comprised slightly more than half of the sample (56%), followed by five Asian (31%) and two African American (13%) parents. Though fathers were encouraged to participate, the study included 13 mothers (81%) and three fathers. Additionally, 13 (81%) of the graduate students in this sample were married and three were single and were not cohabiting. One participant had previously experienced married and single parenthood as a graduate student.

The pre-interview questionnaire for this study asked participants to indicate their household income level, in increments of $10,000 to represent their finances. Wide variation in income was reported, from $10,000-20,000 annually for one family to $70,000 or more for six (38%) families. It is important to note that all three alumni included in the sample reported income greater than $70,000 per year which skews the data. More reflective of prior research
(Grady et al., 2014; Hyun et al., 2006), 53.8% of the current graduate students included in the study grossed less than $30,000 per year. The fact that family income was measured rather than individual income may alter these results as well because they reflect partners’ income levels in addition to those of the graduate student participants.

Demographic information was also collected about participants’ children. The majority of participants in the sample (n=10) had one child and the remainder had two (n=3), three (n=2), or four (n=1) children. Children’s ages ranged from five months to 18 years with a mean age of 5.5 years. For children whose parents had graduated, their average ages during their parents’ time of graduate study are reported rather than children’s current ages in order to reflect the time period under investigation. Children were related to the participants via marriage (n=1) and biology (n=16) with one family inclusive of biological and step children. (See Table 1 for demographic descriptions of the sample.)

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Trait</th>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child Age (years)</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>.5-18</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Ethical Considerations**

**IRB**

This study received approval from the Iowa State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (#16-112) (See Appendix A for IRB approval document).

**Informed consent.** I read the informed consent document aloud prior to the start of each interview. All participants received a copy of the informed consent document after signing it and having an opportunity to ask questions.
Risks. During the interviews, participants were advised of several risks that may occur, such as minor emotional discomforts in reflecting on difficult experiences. Risks also included the possibility of minor psychological discomfort when considering disclosing information about their experiences with faculty. Because the nature of the study relies on disclosure of information about interactions with faculty members, perhaps the most significant risk was possible harm to their reputation as a graduate student if their involvement in the study were to become known.

Confidentiality. As is written in IRB paperwork, confidentiality measures were implemented to protect the identities of participants. For instance, all interviews were conducted off campus in a private location such as a library study room or the participant’s home. Pseudonyms replaced actual names of all participants, and information about anyone discussed during interviews, such as faculty members and children, has been de-identified (e.g., “Shelley” becomes “daughter”). All audio recordings and the participant key were saved only to a password-protected server, and completed demographic questionnaires were stored in a locked cabinet when not in use. In order to avoid the risk of deductive disclosure, I will also limit the demographic information accompanying descriptions of participant experiences in written publications.

Benefits. An inherent benefit of this study is that participants will be given an opportunity to share their lived experiences about parenting while pursuing a graduate degree. Additionally, it is hoped that the findings of this study will be used to build upon and strengthen policies or practices that support graduate students who are parents and contribute to the nascent literature on this group.
Data Collection

Consistent with Creswell’s (2013) description of data collection procedures for phenomenological studies, I collected data in the form of individual interviews and observation notes. With little literature on graduate student parents from which to draw, open-ended questions were necessarily asked in order to capture the essence of graduate student parents’ experiences. Because of the broad focus of this study, I found semi-structured interviews to be appropriate. Semi-structured interviews require questions to generally follow a similar structure from participant to participant, but questions can and do vary as the interviewer deems necessary in order to gather data pertinent to the study at hand (Lichtman, 2010). After interviewing each participant, I took observation notes to record data related to interviewees’ emotions, comments made during their departure, and other topics such as my own emotional and behavioral responses to the setting and to participants’ experiences.

Participants were asked for one 60-minute interview. Actual interview times ranged from 39 to 67 minutes with a mean length of 53 minutes. First, I collected demographic information including the semesters during which participants were enrolled in a graduate program, in which department they were a graduate student, how many dependent children they had, the nature of their relationships with their children (e.g., biological, adoptive, or via marriage), and the ages of their dependent children. During interviews, I discussed a range of topics with the participants such as their experiences with faculty members related to their status as a parent, how they believed faculty perceived graduate student parents, and how academic expectations and parenthood affected one another in their own lives (See Appendix B for interview guide). In addition to the planned interview questions, I asked clarifying and probing questions to gather in-depth data about the unique experiences described by each participant.
**Interview guide**

The interview guide was designed after reviewing relevant literature on faculty parents (Armenti, 2004; Baker, 2010; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006), student parents (Brown & Nichols, 2012; Estes, 2011; Moreau & Kerner, 2015), the ways faculty influence students (Barbuto et al., 2011; Schlosser & Gelso, 2001; Tompkins et al., 2016), role strain theory (Goode, 1960; Marks & MacDermid, 1996) and role accumulation theory (Sieber, 1974). Four main topics emerged as the basis of the guide. These included participants’ experiences with faculty, graduate students’ perceptions of faculty beliefs about graduate student parents, students’ role conflict and role enhancement, and continuing and improving upon faculty and program support for graduate students. For specific interview questions, my intent was to broadly inquire about participants’ lived experiences related to their roles as graduate student parents and the ways faculty played a part in the intersection of those roles. For example, because researchers have proposed that support from faculty members on campus likely influences academic-parental role balancing (Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006), I asked, “In what ways have faculty or your graduate program made you feel supported as a parent in the program?”

**Plans for Data Analysis**

Prior to the first phase of data analysis, an undergraduate research assistant and a paid professional transcriptionist transcribed all interviews by listening to the audio recordings and typing interviews verbatim in Microsoft Word documents. My first phase of analysis consisted of carefully reviewing all interview recordings and transcripts for accuracy. Participants’ responses were analyzed in depth individually before I compared patterns across participants (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Specifically, I looked at each case alone to examine the types of experiences each participant described related to parenting while being enrolled in a graduate
program. The goal was to look for any factors or processes that graduate students experienced as supportive and unsupportive, factors contributing to role conflict and role enhancement, and ways in which students believed they were perceived by faculty. I then evaluated, compared, and contrasted data across the participants and developed a list of data summaries, themes, and clusters that emerged from my review of the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

The data were organized using color-coded Microsoft Excel spreadsheets and Word documents. Each row in the spreadsheet included the participant’s pseudonym, one unit of data in the form of a code, the interviewer’s reflections, and key patterns in the data related to beliefs about faculty perceptions of parenthood and graduate student status, experiences involving faculty related to participant status as a parent, and the effects that faculty expectations and parenthood have on one another. Color coding in Microsoft Word allowed me to begin to cluster codes into themes as the analyses progressed. I regularly added to the audit trail to maintain credibility and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 2005); the audit trail documented my reflections about the transcripts, notes on themes in the data, data interpretations, and analytic memos to record the process (Carlson, 2010; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

**Dependability**

During all phases of data analysis, I met bi-weekly with my supervising mentor to discuss the coding schemes and emerging findings. During research meetings, my mentor analyzed and evaluated coding, notable themes, and findings resulting from data analyses (Saldaña, 2013), providing me with guidance and suggestions. Reviewing and critiquing the data analysis process establishes dependability, which is analogous to reliability in the quantitative paradigm (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Furthermore, the analytical procedures included multiple iterations of reviewing, categorizing, and drawing conclusions from the data (Miles, Huberman, &
During phases of data analysis, I followed up with participants via email up to four times to gather additional data that allowed me to clarify my interpretations of their experiences.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

The current study has several limitations and delimitations that affect the transferability and confirmability of the findings. Because recruitment criteria required that all participants were enrolled in a graduate program within a single college at one large Midwestern university, the themes discussed within this study may differ from themes that would emerge from students in other departments, in other regions, and in different types of academic institutions. For instance, it is possible that graduate student-faculty relationships at research universities are built upon more or less of an emotional bond than those at teaching institutions. Additionally, the types of role conflict, role enhancement, and academic expectations experienced by graduate students may vary depending on their enrollment in “hard” versus “soft” sciences. The findings of the current study, therefore, should be viewed within the context of a specific program within a single Midwestern university. However, research has shown similarities between groups such as faculty parents, graduate student parents, undergraduate student parents, and university students in general (Estes, 2011; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Offstein et al., 2004; Raddon, 2002; Trussell, 2015), which supports the transferability of the current findings to graduate student parents in other types of institutions and programs across the United States.

Though efforts were made to recruit a diverse sample of graduate student parents, more than half of the participants were White and few were fathers. Research on graduate student parents of differing demographic backgrounds may yield different results. Conversely, because of a lack of delimitations related to the participant income level and age of participants’
dependent children, some themes applicable only to certain groups may not emerge in the data. For example, because the sample includes recently graduated students, conflict related to financial struggles may not be apparent overall in the current study despite research that indicated financial distress in the lives of graduate students (Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Myers-Walls et al., 2011).

To address the aforementioned limitations and delimitations of this study, I will conduct group-level analyses in order to more closely examine experiences of underrepresented populations such as fathers and international students. After coding each interview individually and examining themes across interviews, data will be separated and analyzed with the goal of searching for themes significant to subgroups of the sample. I will also examine the data for themes specific to faculty gender and age.

Summary

This phenomenological study used semi-structured interview data from a sample of 16 parents attending graduate programs within a single college at a large Midwestern university to investigate the lived experiences of graduate students who are parents to dependent children. Specifically, I explored graduate student parents’ experiences and perceptions related to faculty, role conflict, and role enhancement. Coding of interviews took place on individual, whole-group, and subcategory levels, and dependability was achieved via bi-weekly research meetings focused on coding, emerging themes, and the analytic process. Confidentiality is maintained by using pseudonyms, storing identifiable data on a password-protected server and in a locked filing cabinet, and avoiding deductive disclosure by removing unique participant information from all publications, such as number of children and graduate program.
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine graduate student parents’ (n=16) experiences of role enhancement and role strain and focus on student-faculty interactions related to the intersection of parenthood and graduate school. In this chapter, I discuss the key findings that emerged from the semi-structured interviews and field notes.

Study participants identified as parents who were single, married, Asian, African American, White, fathers, mothers, international students, and domestic students. The sample ranged from first-year master’s students to doctoral alumni. All participants were recently enrolled in one of four departments within a single college at a large, Midwestern university. Interestingly, some phenomena were experienced similarly across participants (e.g., time as producing role conflict) whereas some were on a spectrum (e.g., feelings of isolation versus department as “family”) and still others could be described as categorical (e.g., “face value” or sincere support). Additionally, nine less dominant themes appear to apply only to specific demographic groups. Data are compared between and across groups because some themes naturally emerged from all participants whereas others were specific to African American students or were dependent upon family size. Prior literature has also identified subsets of students to be distinct, such as international students (Myers-Walls et al., 2011). Therefore, subgroup analyses received special attention for this study.

I employ “thick description” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Glesne, 2011; Lichtman, 2010) in this chapter, which means the findings are presented in a way that is detailed, emotional, and intended to bring readers into the experiences of the participants. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) purported that it is from “thick description” that qualitative studies draw their power. Participant
quotes are used not only to remain true to the data but also to provide readers a direct window into the lives of graduate student parents. To maintain confidentiality, however, minor details within quotes are de-identified (e.g., “hockey practice” becomes “athletic event”) and all names are pseudonyms.

Study findings will be discussed beginning with the themes that are most common and most salient, and continuing with the themes that are experienced in more diverse manners across participants. Theme titles denoted by quotation marks are In Vivo codes (Saldaña, 2013), meaning they are quotes from participant interviews that have been used to label the essence of the theme. Within this chapter, the following dominant themes are discussed:

1. Time as a Source of Conflict
2. “Where is My Tribe?”
3. “It’s Not Their Decision to Make”
4. “Not in the Same Boat”
5. Am I “Just a Graduate Student?”
6. “Face Value” versus Sincere Support
7. “Trust That They’re Doing the Best They Can”
8. Resources? What resources?

Following rich descriptions of these eight themes, I discuss the findings of analyses of demographic subgroups within this study. Specifically, I examined the experiences of single parents, international students, fathers, and mothers. I also investigated differences and similarities in participants’ experiences based on race, the ages of their children, and whether they were current students or alumni. No findings emerged regarding current student or alumni status, income level, degree program, department, or number of semesters completed.
Finding 1: Time as a Source of Conflict

The most salient theme throughout the lives of these graduate student parents was time. Time pressures were felt from multiple angles, from planning pregnancies that coincided with semester breaks, to daily time management struggles, to stress stemming from the perception that graduate students are expected to be available around the clock. Aspects of time were described by all 16 participants, often in related but distinct ways.

Round-the-clock availability

Six mothers in this study perceived an expectation for graduate students to be available all day, every day for assistantship work and research. This expectation weighed on graduate student parents who divided their time between their responsibilities to the graduate program and their responsibilities to their families. For example, Mariam’s assistantship supervisor regularly expected email responses within a few hours despite the time of day the original email was sent. Mariam recalled a night when, after working for eight hours in her office, she picked up her children from an after-school program, made dinner for everyone, then put her children to bed. The next morning, she helped her children get ready for school and went back to her office at 8:00am to discover several emails from her supervisor. Her supervisor had written that morning to ask why Mariam had not yet responded to the emails that were sent the evening before. This disturbed Mariam, who said her initial thought was:

Calm down!... I could have come 8 o’clock in the morning to my office and respond to your email. Like, geez. (laughs) So yeah, there’s some sort of expectation, I just feel like it’s unrealistic, and I would expect her to know that I’m a parent.

Naomi described her perception that her department had unrealistic expectations for graduate students to be available at all hours of every day, as well. Her assistantship duties
entailed being away from home overnight, drastically changing hours from week to week, and limited choice in deciding when those hours would take place. These assistantship requirements, paired with mandatory evening classes, created an intense struggle for Naomi, who said:

It's a different game for someone to be expected to have these crazy long days and then, you know, not just be taking care of a family but missing a family. Like there were weeks where I saw my kids (pause) Oh, now I feel like I'm going to cry. (pause) where I wouldn't see my kids because… we were leaving before they would get up and being home after they would go to bed and then I'd be in class and they'd be in school and, with my daughter, 'cause she has (a mental health concern), she started having a really hard time. And a lot of that was because her schedule was changing. It was changing unpredictably and too much... and I think it got to be the worst when she was having an uncontrollable meltdown and she told me she wanted to die.

Naomi continued by describing graduate students’ lack of power and fear of backlash if one were to voice that they were not available for work at all hours of every day. Interestingly, two participants juxtaposed the schedules of graduate students and faculty or working professionals, concluding that the former benefitted from flexible hours and paid weeks off during spring and winter breaks. One mother shared that she quit her job as a teacher and enrolled in graduate school partially because of the more flexible working hours. It was evident, however, that the participants who felt as though they were expected to be available around the clock were more strongly affected by time than were the students who expressed gratitude for a flexible schedule.

Ten participants discussed their beliefs that childless graduate students were able to commit more hours to their coursework and research than were parents. Jaden, who became a
mother during her graduate program, affirmed this idea, saying that prior to having children, she “had a 24/7 schedule in school.” As a childless graduate student, Jaden enrolled in more credits per semester and devoted days, nights, and weekends to her program. After the birth of her daughter, she remained a full-time student with an assistantship, noting that she reserved evening and weekend time for her family unless she had a class during that time or a pressing deadline to meet.

Half (n = 8) of the participants in this study discussed similar desires to “block out” time for their families and for work. However, their hopes to do so often collided with program requirements and faculty expectations. Required courses were sometimes only offered in the evening, which Naomi described as “not family-friendly.” Denise, a mother to an infant, discussed night classes as being incompatible with her family’s schedule because her child’s daycare closed at night. For parents whose children attended school during the day, required night classes equated to not being able to see one another all day, which was stressful for everyone in the family. Interestingly, three participants acknowledged and appreciated that the purpose of night classes was to accommodate students who were working professionals. Ciara added, however, that this was not accommodating for full-time students who were on campus during the daytime hours. It is important to mention that although most participants who discussed class timing preferred daytime classes, one participant who worked full-time while raising two adolescent children did express a preference for evening classes.

**Family leave**

Half (n=8) of the participants added to their family while enrolled in their graduate program. One participant was pregnant at the time of interview and became the ninth participant to add to their family while completing graduate work. These students often talked about
difficulties they faced due to insufficient time off after birthing a child. Two participants discussed their department’s policies in light of an absence of nationwide leave legislation and a recent change in university policy on parental leave. Ji-Yu, for example, reflected on our country’s inattention to the needs of new parents and their infants, calling the lack of policies to protect postpartum families “a joke.”

These parents recognized that in the United States, maternity and paternity leave were benefits “you didn’t get in a professional career very often” (Brooke). They also referred to research that supported providing new parents with time to bond with their infants, saying the university “should know better” (Mariam). Because most of the participants received pay from assistantships that was much-needed income, they could not afford to step away from assistantship responsibilities for more than the six weeks of paid leave currently offered.

In addition to needing more of a break from assistantship work after the birth of a child, the parents talked of a need for “stop the timeline to degree clock” policies for graduate students who are adding to their families. Ji-Yu, who birthed her first child while attending graduate school, talked about the reasons why paid leave and stopping the graduate student clock are necessary for graduate student parents. She said:

You don't get your brain until like six months postpartum. I think mothers in general and the postpartum period in general is a really misunderstood time for families and I think that society tends to look at that as fluff time.

She went on to state how policies can support student parents in times when their multiple intensive roles are incompatible, saying:

I think (family leave policies and “stop the clock” policies) would give students some kind of agency to say wait a minute, no, no, no, I'm not going to do this research for you
because I'm a month after having my baby. I'm not sleeping yet. Or my baby is having these sorts of issues.

**Time and family planning**

Time also contributed to some students’ family planning efforts. Of the nine graduate student parents whose families grew while they were enrolled in courses for their current degree, three attempted to time their pregnancies to coincide with summer break or a certain point of progress in their degree program (e.g., All But Dissertation). Another four students intentionally increased the number of children in their families and cited religion, cultural beliefs, or infertility struggles as strong influences on their choices to intentionally add to their families without regard to the timing of their graduate program. Two pregnancies were unplanned.

Participants also told me they decided to have children while in graduate school because of an awareness that they were aging. Fernando recalled his thought process that he:

> Could have one kid every two years or so and, you know, get them out of the way early and then get my degree and start working and then it will work out in the long term and then they'll graduate from high school before I'm old and gray.

Similarly, Ji-Yu remarked:

> I was in my late twenties and I felt like, you know what? It's now or never, you know? Life isn't going to get any easier. What are we waiting for? I didn't want to be forty and starting my family. I think we know a little bit too much about all the genetic complications. We were kind of too informed about some of that and so we just kind of said alright, let's just try.
Finding 2: “Where is My Tribe?”

Words and phrases such as “tribe,” “fitting in,” “not fitting in,” “sense of family,” and “outlier” were uttered during many of the interviews for this study. Because of these types of statements, a theme emerged regarding a perception that there are informal groups within graduate programs to which students can belong or not belong. Also, a few participants said they “self-selected” to work only with faculty members who were supportive of their roles as parents as well as graduate students. Whether discussing a sense of group membership or actively seeking mentors who are understanding, the 11 participants who touched on these concepts desired support and guidance from others within their departments. They talked about automatically being included in or excluded from networks within their graduate programs, sometimes searching for people who could fill those roles. In Vera’s words, they each wanted to belong to a “tribe.”

“Fitting in” versus being an “outlier”

Belongingness and inclusion were very important to the participants. Whether they described fitting in or not fitting in within their department or cohort, this theme impacted 11 participants to varying degrees. Zachary passionately referred to his cohort and department as providing a sense of family. Morgan and Naomi, on the other hand, dishearteningly expressed feelings of isolation and loneliness because their responsibilities as mothers kept them from being able to socialize with or relate to peers. Like Zachary, Morgan, and Naomi, some graduate student parents explicitly described the heavy influence this sense of belongingness had on them. Others suggested that “fitting in” may have played a significant role in their experiences but they had not considered it prior to the interview. Johanna, for example, first said her identity as a parent “never really came up” in graduate school. She later explained that fifteen of the twenty
graduate students in her cohort were parents and therefore, her similarity to the other students may have been a reason she did not notice how her experiences may have differed if she had been a childless graduate student. (See Table 2 for interview excerpts from which the theme of “Fitting in Versus Being an Outlier” emerged.)

Additionally, despite not being asked any questions about how many other students or faculty members were perceived to be parents, this topic surfaced in many of the interviews. For example, in response to being asked, “What made you decide to go to graduate school and become a parent at the same time,” Ji-Yu highlighted several factors that contributed to her decisions. One factor included recognition that some of her peers were graduate student parents and that there was a sense of camaraderie in this group of students.
Table 2

*Interview Excerpts to Illustrate Theme of “Fitting in Versus Being an Outlier”*

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<thead>
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<th>Fitting In</th>
<th>Being an Outlier</th>
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<td>“When I found out that there were other grad students who are also parents, I felt a little relief… and then also to hear that the department that I’m in is very supportive of graduate students with children made me feel like I fit in a little more.”</td>
<td>“In class, we hear a lot about work-life balance but I don’t hear very much about work-life-kids balance. You know? It’s more about take some time for yourself. It’s about <em>yourself</em>. Self-focus is not family. So a lot of those discussions in class, I still feel a little bit left out.”</td>
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<td>“There were a few other people in the program who also had children, so it felt like we had some camaraderie around it.”</td>
<td>“(Having several children while attending graduate school) is not common and there’s not a lot of people I can relate to.”</td>
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<td>“When I was having my first child, I was trying to find some camaraderie, so I would go on discussion boards and try to find stories of people’s experiences just to get the sense of what was happening.”</td>
<td>“A lot of times, I feel very isolated and lonely because I don’t feel (pause) I think I’m feeling better or more connected, but definitely my first year, I very much felt like I was watching these very strong bonds form not just between grad students but even between grad students and faculty because they were able to meet more. I don’t even know how it was all happening, but it just seemed very much like an outsider, because I would get done with class and I would like (snaps fingers). My stuff is booked to the minute, you know? It doesn’t feel inclusive because you’re limited. You don’t have the same flexibility. So I guess that if I were to describe an overall feeling, being a parent in our program feels isolating.”</td>
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*Note.* Pseudonyms left out to avoid deductive disclosure of participant identity based on specific characteristics (e.g., international student status). Each row represents quotes drawn from one participant.
Table 2 continued

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<th>Quote</th>
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<td>“(In my department, everyone is) always sharing kid stories, or if you have an issue or something or don’t know something as a parent or want suggestions, they talk about that stuff often. There’s nothing negative. There’s always been either support or positivity when talking about kids. And most of our kids are young, so we see pictures and talk to (each other’s children) and see them and it’s like we are kind of in the family watching our kids grow up together. That’s where I get that sense of family from.”</td>
<td>“Having a cohort and people you can talk to and lean on, that is invaluable. I don’t think people really understand the value of having people going through the same struggle with you… I had somebody who I could talk to, I could share dark thoughts and secrets with… You’re depressed, you’re going through stuff, and then also in turn to have them tell you those same things so that you know that you’re not the only one going through hard times. ‘Cause if somebody’s giving you all this good information and telling you about the positive but you’re struggling, it’s going to be like, ‘Why is it all happening to me?’ But to hear somebody else struggling… that meant a lot to me to have that.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I’m an international student and there are many international students in our department but I’m the only one who has a child… I have a much closer relationship with international students in our department but once I became a parent (laughs), I don’t think they understand my stress and I don’t want to stress them either with something they don’t understand… I have no one to discuss my problems with.”</td>
<td>“I’m an international student and there are many international students in our department but I’m the only one who has a child… I have a much closer relationship with international students in our department but once I became a parent (laughs), I don’t think they understand my stress and I don’t want to stress them either with something they don’t understand… I have no one to discuss my problems with.”</td>
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Note. Pseudonyms left out to avoid deductive disclosure of participant identity based on specific characteristics (e.g., international student status). Each row represents quotes drawn from one participant.
Table 2 continued

| “I was going from (a profession) where quite a few people were in similar family status, to graduate school where the majority of the people that I go to school with are younger than me. So not only was there an age difference but there was a family identity difference. They don’t have children… (Before becoming a student), I didn’t think about how my different positionality in this program was going to almost single me out with my cohort. ‘Oh, well we’re not going to invite Vera because she’s got a kid.’ This kind of thing. That happened very early on. So I didn’t really form this very strong bond with my cohort for that reason.” | “(It’s important for faculty to) create the environment that allows the graduate students with (role balancing) challenges to be able to come to them, and I think a part of that comes from sharing their own stories of their struggles. ‘Cause then when they open up about it, the shame goes away and then it becomes a safer space to be able to share those things.” |
| “It’s been nice to have support from people your age and with kids that have similar issues and similar developmental milestones. I’d say that has affected me positively.” | “(In my previous program), I was an odd duck…most of the students did not have families” |
| “There’s a disconnection… being a graduate student, you know how much we need support from each other. But because I don’t have that relationship, I feel like I’m alone sometimes… I have to figure out things on my own.” | “Sometimes people don’t want to hear about your kids. Sometimes they do, but just having peers that are in the same sort of life stage would be good.” |

*Note. Pseudonyms left out to avoid deductive disclosure of participant identity based on specific characteristics (e.g., international student status). Each row represents quotes drawn from one participant.*
Table 2 continued

| “Most of the students in my cohort that I went through with, a really close cohort, were all non-traditionally aged students, so we almost all had children that were at least upper elementary and a few had little kids.” | “My daughter has friends whose parents are faculty members. There is kind of a barrier because I'm a student. Because they are faculty members, they can share information and they have things in common. But even though they can understand my situation, they don't want to (talk to me at children’s school events) … I don’t expect them to approach me. But what I want to say is that graduate students who have kids who go to school, maybe they have the same feelings.” |

*Note.* Pseudonyms left out to avoid deductive disclosure of participant identity based on specific characteristics (e.g., international student status). Each row represents quotes drawn from one participant.
Faculty members as part of the “tribe”

Much like these graduate student parents value a sense of belonging among their peers and in their departments overall, four participants discussed searching for faculty members to act as mentors and guides. For these participants, faculty support for their identity as a parent was as important as faculty support for their academic efforts. Some students discussed this in terms of a generalization that parents understand parents and that faculty parents “get” the struggles of life as a graduate student parent, so they are therefore more understanding and supportive. Ciara emphasized her belief that many students “don’t know they have power to choose” who mentors them in graduate school, and that she:

Purposefully selected people partially because of interests and topics but also because of who was going to be supportive to me as a mom. So I wouldn't have a major professor or a professor on my committee who was not supportive.

Similarly, when choosing a major professor, Vera selected someone whose research interests did not mirror her own but who had experienced life as a graduate student parent. Vera said, “You can't be what you can't see. I thought if she can do it, so can I.” A few others also discussed “strategically building” (Lili) their committees to include faculty members that they had previously interacted with and from whom they sensed a generally supportive attitude regarding their roles as parents.

Contrarily, three graduate students in this study stressed that they view faculty members’ role as one of academic support. Clem stated that he does not expect to be included in discussions among faculty parents and Johanna remarked, “The very fact that I was part of a cohort and took most of my classes with the same people, those individuals became my primary support. Much more so than my faculty.” These two participants explicitly stated that they did
not believe faculty members held responsibility for providing social support to graduate students and therefore faculty members were not a part of their “tribe.” Morgan’s perspective of the role of faculty lies somewhere between the aforementioned participants. For her, faculty may provide support but they are not expected to do so. She said:

"It was my choice to become a parent and a graduate student, so they can be supportive but they don't have to accept that. They don't have to understand me. ‘Cause it was my choice. It's something I have to deal with."

**Finding 3: “It’s Not Their Decision to Make”**

For the graduate students in this study, their roles as parents sometimes affected the ways they were perceived and responded to within their departments. Of 16 participants, eight described instances in which they perceived unwelcome restraints on their academic or parental roles. One father perceived similar restraints and concluded that they were justified and helpful. Five felt that the professional opportunities offered to them were altered because of their status as a parent and four perceived faculty comments as judgmental or as attempts to dictate their parenting choices. This theme illustrates a concept several participants described in response to such experiences, which encompasses the idea that “it’s not their decision to make” (Brooke).

**My family, my choice**

Four graduate students expressed strong negative reactions to faculty members’ unsolicited parenting and family planning advice. An assistantship supervisor recommended that Mariam avoid adding to her family after learning about the number of children she mothered, which offended Mariam and caused her to feel judged. Naomi said she was “angry and shocked” when her Major Professor told her “not to worry” about picking up her child from school because the faculty member would “just find someone to pick her up. You just go ahead and
(perform research tasks).” Brooke’s Major Professor repeatedly attempted to influence her plans for her family, using research to suggest the negative effects of the type of childcare Brooke chose and advising her to wait until graduation to try to conceive another child. Brooke summarized this theme by asserting firmly:

> It’s not their decision to make. My family life and my personal life should not be dictated and decided by my Major Professor. I should be able to sit down with them and change timelines and work out goals, taking into consideration those things, but they should not have a say in what I do, whether or not and when I have children. Those decisions aren’t faculty’s to make.

**Altered opportunities**

Graduate students believed faculty members often assumed parents were too busy or less passionate about their studies and therefore opted not to include them in academic opportunities, thereby making decisions for them. Ji-Yu felt that there was a general attitude in her department that a student’s pregnancy was met with “There goes my person’s availability,” and Vera said she was “tapped on the shoulder less” because she was seen as less available due to her role as a parent. Similarly, a mother questioned the legality of her Major Professor’s comments that she would be removed from an agreed-upon assistantship assignment because of the projected timing of her child’s birth. Denise recalled that a parent in her department proposed a research project to their Major Professor who then initiated the project without including the student because they “assumed (she) was too busy.” Denise also discussed feeling that faculty perceived her as “aloof or not caring” about her coursework during her postpartum months, which she said was “unfortunate because that was not the case.” She affirmed her passion for course topics and her program in general, adding that her infant’s reluctance to drink from bottles distracted her while
she was unable to be with him. Whether such events directly or indirectly affected the participants, they contributed to their beliefs about the opportunities they were and were not offered and why, to which Vera replied, “I’ll decide what’s too much for me.”

Interestingly, participants described instances in which they perceived they were afforded not only fewer, but sometimes additional, opportunities because of their status as a parent. One father’s instructor asked him if he would like to perform non-academic work for them during the summer months, saying they “would like to give (him) a chance to make money (because he has a) family.” The same parent’s Major Professor explicitly said they “motivate” and “stimulate” parents to complete their programs more quickly than childless students because parents must be more mindful of their financial situations. Ciara knew of a faculty member who sought out parents when additional assistantship hours were available, though she said such instances “probably happened very less often” than cases in which faculty members automatically offered opportunities to childless students because of a perception that they have more availability.

Importantly, though the following theme describes ways that participants believe graduate student parents differ from childless students, the essence of the current theme lies in their desire to make choices for themselves rather than have restrictions or beliefs imposed upon them by faculty.

**Finding 4: “Not in the Same Boat”**

Life as a graduate student parent is different from life as a childless graduate student. Parenthood comes with a host of responsibilities, challenges, and benefits, all of which interact with the responsibilities, challenges, and benefits of being a graduate student. When asked why he volunteered to be interviewed for this study, Fernando said he wanted to “raise awareness a little bit that not everybody's in the same boat.” He elaborated by saying he dedicates some of his
time to his children and therefore does not have round-the-clock availability. He also explained his thoughts on why it is:

Not a detriment to not be in the same boat… In the sense of being a productive student, a productive researcher or what have you, depending on what field you go into, I think that having children and opening up those different experiences can potentially lead to people that are a little more well-rounded than individuals that don't have any of that. If they're single and just sit there and work all the time, academically they might be doing very, very well but from a non-academic sense, I almost feel like they miss out a little bit because all of a sudden, they're not experiencing some of those things and I think their horizons may be a little more narrow and their perspective might be a little more narrow.

Most of the participants in this study echoed similar sentiments regarding the unique positionality of graduate student parents. Five of the people interviewed for this study became parents while they were enrolled in graduate coursework, whereas 11 had children before they entered graduate school. People in the former group contrasted their own experiences pre- and post-parenthood. Morgan’s foremost priority went from her coursework and research to providing her daughter with attention. Three others said parenthood “adds another kind of layer of complication” (Ji-Yu) and that “it's a different box in your head. For people with no kids, that box is empty. If you have kids that box is full” (Jaden). Additionally, many of the participants who never experienced the life of a childless graduate student contrasted their own lives to those of their peers, calling it a “different game” (Naomi) and saying parents have “more life load” (Evelyn).

Regardless of whether they became a graduate student or a parent first, many participants discussed their thoughts on whether being in this “different boat” warrants accommodations from
facultyt members. For example, one father talked about his previous work as a manager, noting that employees’ statuses as parents or non-parents did not affect his decisions when creating the weekly work schedule. He related this to his belief that faculty members should not be expected to provide accommodations for graduate students who have children. In more of a middle ground, several participants outlined their need for flexibility though they also understood that “sometimes things are just due so you’ve just got to accept it” (Zachary).

At the other end of the continuum, Ella and Naomi likened parenthood to “experiencing a natural disaster” and “having a disability,” respectively. Ella stated that unpredictable events occur for all students but that graduate student parents “have even more unpredictable uncontrollable things that will happen” because they are responsible not only for themselves but for others, as well. Six participants discussed experiencing such unpredictable events, including divorce (leading to single parenthood), custody litigation, a child’s health concerns, and troubles with infant teething. Naomi further explained her stance by saying, “With reasonable justification, if something is going to cause you undue duress or financial duress above and beyond what other people are experiencing, then yeah, I feel like those things should be considered.” These participants believed that parents’ needs and increased unpredictability of life events should be taken into consideration when deciding whether to grant flexibility in deadlines and when assigning assistantships.

For many of these students, faculty acknowledgement that parents are not “in the same boat” as childless students eases some of the weight of carrying two intensive roles simultaneously. A recurrent topic across interviews was one that “the little things mean a lot.” For example, Ella “runs” from task to task every day and “cannot separate” her life as a parent
from her life as a student because she has both roles in mind most of the time. She proposed that one-on-one meetings with faculty members could begin by:

Spending just a couple of minutes talking about real struggles, real day-to-day things that the student experiences. Just a few minutes would leave a lot of that awkwardness and then the rest of the meeting would be a lot more meaningful for the student.

Ciara and Brooke suggested that assistantship supervisors should allow students to work from home when possible, especially when they consistently “prove themselves” (Brooke) by producing high-quality work. A few parents also mentioned that permitting students to attend classes via video conference (e.g., Skype) is a reasonable accommodation. Ciara, a single parent who does not see her child during the day, noted how important this is for her family.

It bothers my daughter to have a babysitter for three hours in the evening if she hasn't seen me all day versus if I'm at home at the kitchen table on the laptop videoing into class and engaging just as fine, I'm sure he would not even need me. But just the fact that I would be gone would be a problem.

Many of the participants who advocated for flexibility and accommodations during their interviews also mirrored Fernando’s thought that “it’s not a detriment to not be in the same boat.” Ciara equated spending time with her child to having a “built-in break” from coursework. Some participants became more organized and efficient students because of parenthood. In some cases, learning course material makes “parenting more effective” (Jaden). Conversely, parenting a child provides context for and deeper understanding of course concepts. Ten participants said attending graduate school makes them positive role models for their children, and seven described their children as motivators for them to continue their journey toward a graduate degree. Two of these students doubted that they would have ever begun graduate work if they
had not had children, citing their desires to “break the cycle” of difficult family circumstances in their own lives.

**Finding 5: Am I “Just a Graduate Student?”**

Clem stated that faculty “treated (him) as just a graduate student. They don't treat (him) as a graduate student who has a kid.” Like Clem, eight other participants believed that faculty perceived them as “just graduate students.” Complexity arises within this theme because of exceptions, caveats, and contradictions within the data, such as Clem’s expression of appreciation for an instructor who knew he was a father and therefore offered him extra income-earning opportunities. Many participants also debated aloud whether parents and childless students should be perceived as the same. For these reasons, this theme is framed as a question of, “Am I just a graduate student?”

Taking a more nuanced approach to these findings, it is necessary to closely examine the words of the participants. For example, one student said she did not personally have experiences that would suggest faculty perceive parents and childless students differently, but a friend told her that a faculty member stated a preference for students not to become parents within the first few years of their doctoral studies. Another mother said a possible reason she believed faculty perceived student parents “just as students” was because her cohort primarily consisted of nontraditional students, most of whom had children in elementary school or older. Additionally, two parents referred to equal treatment as unequal because parents are not “in the same boat” as childless students and therefore have different needs which they believed should be considered. Naomi phrased it in this way, “Faculty treat everybody the same and in doing so are actually treating parents differently because you're assuming that it's all equal.”
Finally, it may be that the way each student prefers to be perceived is affected by their beliefs about whether accommodations are warranted for parents. Many participants said they felt that “special treatment” for parents was unfair, but many also advocated for accommodations for this group, thereby contributing to the question of “Am I just a graduate student?” A breastfeeding mother, for instance, spoke of needing to leave class to pump milk. She said:

My whole life, I haven't been someone that wants special treatment. I want to feel like I deserve what I work for… but then my girlfriend was like, ‘It's not special treatment. You need to do what you have to do for your baby.’

Such conflicting emotions about accommodations may affect whether these students believe faculty should perceive parents as “just students” or as “graduate students with children.”

**Finding 6: “Face Value” versus Sincere Support**

Unlike participants’ beliefs about whether faculty should accommodate students who are parents, the sixth theme of this study lies within categories rather than on a continuum. One category includes “face value” support (Naomi) and the other consists of sincere and meaningful support. Naomi contrasted these categories by saying faculty members:

All say very nice and very supportive things, but as far as offering (pause) I don't know what. I can't even imagine what could be offered to make that change from being just a face value statement to an actual support. I don't know what's underneath those statements. I haven't seen anything to make that like a core fundamental belief that they will actually be there for me.

Other participants, meanwhile, illustrated heartfelt examples of faculty showing their sincere support for graduate student parents. Both “face value” and meaningful supports greatly impacted participants, albeit in different ways.
It is important to note that this theme includes only instances which were perceived as supportive or as attempts to be supportive; this theme does not consider statements made by three participants that faculty members are not responsible for providing social support to graduate students.

“Face value” support

Faculty assertions that “family comes first” were perceived as empty statements by six parents because they were followed with contradictory actions. Naomi discussed this concept in depth, saying her supervisor’s “face value support” contradicts her assumption that assigning Naomi radically different working hours “should be fine” from week to week. Naomi clarified:

If I'm a grad student and I have a child with (a mental health concern), does none of that matter? The messages I get is that those things don't matter. That's not important. You chose to come to grad school. You make it work. I don't know, that might sound really harsh but it's like they say things that are the opposite of that, so it's really confusing. I'm sure it sounds great to the people who don't have families, ‘cause I wonder what their perception is, like ‘Oh, they're always telling you your family comes first and all that.’ And it's like, how? When? And no, no it doesn't.

When faced with significant struggles in graduate school, Vera and Morgan said they broached the subject with faculty members and were met with “face value support” which was discouraging. Morgan disclosed her emotional difficulties to her Major Professor, who smiled with optimism and said “You'll make it.” Morgan continued, “(They) keep saying that and ‘You're going to do it. You've been doing a great job,’ so I don't know. That kind of stops me from talking about my problems.” Vera described this type of response as “just pure dismissal of your emotions, completely. They're just kind of saying, ‘I hear how you feel, but I don't really
have the time to deal with it, so ‘It’ll be ok,’ and then out the door they go.” Further, Vera acknowledged that she does not expect faculty members to counsel graduate students, but rather to “take a moment to listen” and then assist the student in drafting a plan for moving forward.

**Sincere support**

Though almost half (n=6) of the participants talked about receiving superficial support from faculty members, most (n=13) of the participants in this study recalled at least one time in which they felt their role as a graduate student parent was truly supported by an instructor, a committee member, a supervisor, or their Major Professor. At times these gestures were small and in other cases they required more effort. For instance, Ji-Yu’s Major Professor expressed genuine happiness upon hearing about her pregnancy. Another participant’s former instructor offered him non-academic work during the summer months because she knew he had a child and no income during that time. When Brooke birthed her first child, her Major Professor visited her in the hospital and held her son. For Fernando, support came in the form of his supervisor walking some exams outside to hand them off to Fernando, who had his infant in the car because his childcare fell through that day.

These 13 participants made it clear how much they valued such supportive actions. They said of faculty members, “I don't know what planet she came from, but she's like a miracle and I'm really thankful to have her” (Denise), and:

She’s like a mom. Not really a mom. A sister. A big sister to me. Because of my kids, I’m close to her. If I were single, we probably would not be that close, you know? ‘Cause she feels the need of stepping up and wanted to help me navigate things. (Mariam)

Jaden emphasized the deeply meaningful nature of the emotional support she received from an instructor who hugged her as she wept because of recent news of infertility. She added,
“I just collapsed and started crying and (they) hugged me. (They were) really (pause) (They are) one of the professors that I still have contact with. Having that support helped me go through it.”

When graduate student parents perceived sincere support from faculty members, they often talked about wanting to “repay” (Zachary) or “reward” (Morgan) them. This “repayment” was sometimes described as planning to do “something big for the department” upon graduation (Zachary) and typically included mentions of increased research or teaching productivity. Brooke elaborated, “Her being supportive makes it that much more motivating for me. I’ll pull late nights for her because I know that she’s doing everything she can to advocate for me.”

Statements like these display the effects of sincere, as opposed to “face value,” faculty support for graduate student parents.

**Finding 7: “Trust that They’re Doing the Best They Can”**

At times, these parents did not feel that faculty members believed they were performing to the best of their abilities. Vera reported that she feels faculty members perceive graduate student parents as “less than” and with a “deficit orientation.” Similarly, Naomi joked that she was not expecting faculty members to give her high-fives because she came to class with her hair washed and had fed her children before school, but her demeanor flattened when she said faculty do not talk about parenthood in “the same good way” as they do about graduate students who work full-time.

Often, the perception that faculty members see parents as “less than” stemmed from unspoken and possibly unintentional communication. For example, Ji-Yu perceived that her supervisors’ requests for her to complete additional work often come with an “under layer” of an implied message that she is not working her hardest. Ji-Yu said her unspoken reaction to such requests is:
You know, I don't think I really can. I have all of these other things to do. I'm not just sitting around watching Netflix. I'm really working a ton … It wasn't ever anything said but I think there's kind of those little comments that get maybe taken a certain way even if someone doesn't mean it that way. It's kind of that under layer, you know?

Similarly, Ella specified that she feels guilty when asking faculty members for deadline extensions and that faculty members sometimes inadvertently exacerbate this emotion. She said:

In the conversation, I guess there's a hint of ‘Well, let me see if I can do this.’ Like a hesitation. Just that slight hesitation is impactful, I think, for someone like me because I already feel so guilty about having to push this deadline and having to request for an extended deadline.

These participants detailed the ways in which they show dedication to their programs, such as via “a lot of late nights” (Brooke) completing research and coursework. In order to focus on program requirements as much as possible, a few parents neglect what responsibilities can be neglected, such as by allowing children to go an extra day without a bath or by watching dirty laundry make mountains on the floor. Ciara said she participates in an abundance of activities which fit within her childcare schedule in order to “overcompensate for” turning down academic opportunities that do not fit with her child’s schedule. The participants also commonly highlighted their passion for learning, research, and teaching, with Mariam pointing out that she came to graduate school to earn a doctoral degree that she has been dreaming about since childhood. Similarly, Jaden joked that she did not enroll in her program because she found herself bored one day, but instead that she is “doing this because (she) want(s) it.”

In this vein, when asked what suggestions participants had for faculty to continue or improve upon supports for graduate student parents, they often recommended that faculty “trust
that they’re doing the best they can” (Jaden). These thoughts were shared specifically within the context of providing flexibility, accommodations, and being understanding of the needs of this population. Participants suggested that faculty consider reasonable flexibility or accommodations when needed, owing to students’ sincere dedication to and passion for their academic work.

**Finding 8: Resources? What Resources?**

The theme of “Resources? What Resources?” contains two sub-themes of data. The first is that of participants’ lack of awareness of existing resources and policies related to graduate student parents. The second refers to students’ descriptions of resources and policies that they identified as needing improvement or as nonexistent but necessary.

**Resources unknown**

Parents’ knowledge about existing resources differed depending upon the age of one’s children, the children’s specific needs, and the family’s needs overall. For example, for parents whose youngest children were adolescents, information about on-campus lactation rooms was unnecessary and therefore unknown. Participants also tended to be unaware of family health insurance options if their children had insurance through their other parent’s employer or via Medicaid.

In many cases, a lack of need for specific resources resulted in a lack of knowledge about them. However, some parents described difficulties they encountered, then incorrectly stated that there were no supports in place to which these struggles corresponded. I sometimes knew such statements were inaccurate because of prior participant interviews or my own experiences as a graduate student parent. For instance, when children fell ill, three parents missed classes or brought their children with them to class because “when a kid is sick, they can’t go to daycare” (Fernando). Contrarily, one of the 16 participants said a “super important” resource she used was
an on-campus facility that provides an on-site nurse to care for children who are ill at no cost to university students. Likewise, one international student repeatedly expressed that she felt alone and unsupported because she believed that she was the only international student with a child, but I knew of several. Further, a few participants who birthed children advocated for family leave policies not knowing one had been put into place since the time their children were born. It was apparent that these participants were not aware of some existing supports that they felt were needed.

Relatedly, a few graduate students described their experiences searching at length for policies they had heard existed but were incredibly difficult to learn about via online searches, sifting through university and department policies, and by looking in their handbooks. Four students discussed learning about potentially beneficial policies and resources primarily via word of mouth. Jaden, whose partner attends a graduate program within the same university, said she and her husband “had to dig around” to find information about paternity leave for graduate students, which “none of administrative staff or faculty told him.” Ella asserted that family-friendly resources “should be more accessible” to parents. Considering a possible method of bridging this gap, Ciara hypothesized that “if (family) was something that people talked about more openly (in academia), (students) would know the different things that are there.”

**Resources needed**

In addition to the unknown or difficult-to-find existing supports, graduate student parents highlighted areas of need which were not being met or were under-supported. The physical environment that served as the setting of these students’ graduate programs made six parents, all of whom were mothers, feel less welcome on campus and prevented others from completing
more work because they perceived that campus was “not a place for kids” (Denise). Specifically, Ciara said the absence of diaper changing tables:

Might be the reason why some people don't bring their baby in and get a little bit of work done on Saturdays. Maybe they could bring in their bouncy seat and they could get a couple of hours of work done, but if there's nowhere to change their diaper or a clean place to prepare their bottle, why would they?

Also, in order to allow parents without childcare to work on campus more often, two mothers suggested the creation of a “working play room” (Ciara) which could house toys and books for children as well as a few computers with statistical programs and other relevant software. Because graduate students typically share offices, Denise discussed how working with children in one’s office can be “distracting to other people” and therefore, some parents choose not to do so.

The physical environment combines with an absence of policies, interactions with faculty, and mothers’ guilt to complicate breastfeeding matters for this group, as well. One participant referred to the lactation rooms as “a dungeon” (Denise) and another felt that designating part of a restroom as a lactation space is “really degrading” (Vera). Needing to walk “four buildings over” (Brooke), carrying bags of academic and nursing supplies several times per day through “snowing, windy, cold” (Ciara) weather conditions also were cited as reasons to create more lactation spaces. Lili once allowed a faculty candidate to use her office as a space to pump breastmilk because there was no lactation room in the building in which the faculty interview took place. This instance shows how family-friendly structures on university campuses not only benefits student parents but university employees, as well.
The mothers who chose to breastfeed stated that their instructors and supervisors permitted them to pump milk when necessary, but three participants cited barriers that kept them from doing so. For instance, Brooke said she felt guilty leaving class to gather her pumping supplies, walk to a lactation room in a different building, pump, clean the pump, and walk back to class. She reflected that if lactation rooms were more easily accessible, pumping would take less time and she “would have been able to breastfeed longer had that been facilitated a little bit more.” Much like previously described instances of support, breastfeeding support came at “face value” at times. Denise’s instructor told her she could miss some time to pump milk mid-class. However, when Denise then mentioned that she had missed the instructor’s discussion of a class assignment, the professor flatly replied, “Well, I said it.” This led Denise to feel that although she technically had permission to pump, she was doing so at a cost academically. For these reasons, Ji-Yu stated that there “absolutely should be” written policies designed specifically to delineate the rights of graduate student parents so they do not “get bullied” into making choices that are not the best for themselves or their families.

Last, “childcare is a problem” (Ella and Ciara) for many of the students involved in this study. The cost of childcare is prohibitively expensive for graduate students who live with limited income. Especially for students with multiple children and students who are single parents, childcare costs can be particularly burdensome. As an undergraduate student, Ciara took advantage of university funds allocated for childcare reimbursement, but such financial assistance is limited for graduate student parents. In addition to high costs of childcare, one participant experienced conflict because university childcare facilities close during university breaks, but graduate assistants are expected to work and perform research during these times.
Graduate student parents in this study expressed the need for resources and policies which support their unique circumstances. They needed childcare that fit within their budgets and financial assistance to make childcare more affordable as they attended their graduate programs. They wanted clean, accessible rooms dedicated to lactation and policies to support them doing so. They ached for “stop the timeline to degree clock” and family leave policies that would allow them to take a break from academia in the vulnerable and intense months following the arrival of a child. They hoped to encounter faculty members who would advocate for their needs and speak openly about family issues. This is especially important because as one participant remarked, policies and resources are only capable of supporting student parents if students are made aware of their existence.

**Findings by Demographic Group**

The 16 students who participated in this study were diverse. Four had experienced single parenthood during their graduate coursework, one of whom was partnered at the time of the interview. Two students were African American, five identified as Asian, and nine were White. The group included three fathers, five international students, and three alumni. The participants parented children who ranged in age from five months to 18 years old, with a mean age of 5.5 years. The intersectionality of the role of graduate student parents and their many diverse traits are examined herein.

**Fathers and mothers**

There were no themes unique to fathers within these data. However, two findings emerged as unique to mothers’ experiences, “Effects of Power” and “Inherently Primary Caregivers.”
**Effects of power.** Seven of 13 mothers, and zero of three fathers, identified power as a mechanism at play in faculty-student interactions. Five women suggested that graduate student parents are affected by the difference in power between faculty members and themselves, often within the context of assistantships. Mariam posited that assistantship supervisors can “pass down (their stress) to their Teaching Assistants” because of the imbalance of power in these relationships. Additionally, Naomi expressed frustration in the manner by which assistantship positions are delegated. “You’re not asked. You’re told,” she said. Two more mothers processed decisions regarding assistantship assignments in a similar manner, citing contract wording that implies the department’s “Take it or leave it” stance. Three mothers requested that their departments consider individual needs when planning such positions. Recognizing the amount of work this would require in the planning process, Naomi suggested that students should be allowed to turn down positions that would burden them “above and beyond” how much the same position would burden other students.

In addition to the five mothers who identified power differences as a concern for graduate students, three women emphasized the need to advocate for oneself. For instance, when Brooke considered taking an additional research opportunity, her Major Professor asked if she “wants to graduate.” Her Major Professor followed this question by recommending that she place her children in childcare. In this situation, Brooke said despite her proven record of consistently meeting deadlines, she “really had to advocate” for herself to be allowed this opportunity. Referring to her graduate student peers, Ciara suggested that “People don't know that they have power but they have power.” She continued by saying students can say no when offered an academic opportunity that does not fit with their family’s needs, and that this power can be used to select supportive faculty members with whom to work.
Inherently primary caregivers. The data suggest that mothers perceive themselves to be children’s primary caregivers. Eight of 13 women stated that they felt guilty because they were unable to spend more time with their children, and a ninth mother said, “I don't have to put him in daycare full-time, so I’ve gotten to spend a lot of time with him. That's really helped me not have mommy guilt and feel like I'm leaving him behind” (Denise). Naomi referred to herself as “ninety percent guilt” due to feeling “selfish” that she was sacrificing large amounts of time with her children so she could pursue her academic goals. Two of three fathers did not report feeling guilty for any reason, and the remaining father spoke of this emotion only in reference to receiving government assistance for his child’s health insurance.

Denise, Evelyn, and Morgan stated their beliefs that “There are some things that only mothers can do” (Morgan) or that they “needed to let go of” the idea that they were the ideal caregivers for their children, in comparison to the children’s fathers. Four mothers also struggled to attend conferences due to a lack of childcare at such events, despite three of these participants being married to and residing with their children’s fathers. Evelyn said, “My biggest concern is to present at a conference. That requires me to be out of town for a few days. If I left her at home just with daddy (laughs) I don’t know what would happen.” Within the data from interviews with fathers, there are no mentions of childcare preventing them from attending conferences, nor any perceptions that “there are some things that only (fathers) can do.”

International students

Two factors were particularly salient for international graduate student parents (n=5). These were “(Dis)advantage” and “Effects of Cultural Norms” on life as a graduate student parent.
(Dis)advantage. Four of these participants mentioned some way in which this demographic equates with disadvantage. For instance, the nature of student visas made international students ineligible for work off campus, which limited possible income for their families and placed more burden on them in summer months when assistantships were not as readily available. Translation required additional time spent reading and doing coursework, which decreased the amount of time available to spend with family. Difficulties with English proficiency also created barriers for parents in instances such as communicating with pediatricians about children’s illnesses.

Interactions with faculty members were perceived to be affected by a student’s international status, as well. One mother talked of specific instances in which she and others felt “belittled” by a faculty member who “targets international students.” A second mother said she and her international student peers often referred to themselves as “at risk” because they perceived that faculty members preferred assistants who were domestic students. For this reason, they sometimes felt they must rush through their studies in order to continue to receive funding. After birthing an infant, this was especially stressful because of the perceived inability to take a break if necessary. In contrast to the mothers’ perspectives, one international student father considered it helpful that his Major Professor “tries to make graduate student parents graduate faster than the students who don't have kids.” This father’s Major Professor told him, “I don't really push (childless international students) because they get the money from their parents.” Because this student was a father, his Major Professor told him, he should “graduate as soon as possible.”

At times, being an international student parent also carried benefits. A mother of an infant discussed her postpartum experience, saying her mother flew to the United States and stayed
with her for several months to assist with the baby. As the student spoke, she highlighted her belief that American grandparents offer less social support than do grandparents in her home country. Additionally, one mother said that because of her role as a graduate student, she had the opportunity to learn about the American school system in some of her courses before her own child entered kindergarten in the United States.

**Effects of cultural norms.** Two of the five international students explicitly addressed cultural norms during their interviews. For example, expectations from home cultures sometimes affect a student’s choices regarding when to start a family and how many children the family should include. Also, norms within the United States created stress and confusion for some international students as they navigated a more individualistic, less direct society with increased emphasis on work productivity. For these international graduate students who are parents, life consisted not only of fulfilling responsibilities to children, performing research, teaching courses, and completing coursework, but of adjusting to the ways of a foreign culture, as well.

**Race/ethnicity**

Three races of parents are represented within this data set, including five Asian, two African American, and nine White students. Two participants referred to overt racism as present or absent from their experiences. An African American parent said, “Outside of school, I've dealt with a lot of racism (laughs) … so that's why I give (university) staff so much praise because (faculty members) are not like that in my experience.” On the other hand, a White mother in the same department stated that she has observed differences in the ways faculty interact with people of different races and genders, adding that she may not notice differential treatment of parents and non-parents because one’s identity as a parent is not typically visible.
Break the cycle/beat the odds. Fourteen participants did not mention race during their interviews. Nonetheless, two themes were identified within racial groups. For instance, when asked why they chose to earn a graduate degree while parenting dependent children, both African American students referred to a desire to better their lives in the face of adversity. One of these participants noted a desire to “break the cycle” of crime, poverty, and drug use in their family. The other, in reference to specific life circumstances, said they wanted to “beat the odds” by not only obtaining a bachelor’s degree, but a graduate degree, as well.

Luck. Among White parents, luck was repeatedly mentioned as a factor in their lives. Seven of nine White students said they were “lucky” to receive support from faculty members, to be part of a closely-knit cohort, or to be assigned an assistantship with a flexible schedule. Two White parents described themselves as “privileged” because of their opportunity to pursue a graduate degree. Zero of the seven Asian and African American participants used terms such as “luck” and “privilege” in reference to themselves. However, feelings of gratitude for faculty and cohort support were evident across races. Though appreciation was expressed by White, Asian, and African American participants, the former group attributed positive experiences to luck and privilege whereas the latter groups did not, and two Asian students specifically described feeling that they were working against discrimination. A more thorough examination of this emergent theme was not possible within these data collected from a few members of each race, but it may be that students’ perceptions of the reasons for their experiences vary by race or that White graduate student parents perceived more unearned support than did parents of other races.

Single parents

Stressors unique to single parents. Single graduate student parents experienced unique stressors. Unlike their married counterparts, the four students who were single parents at some
point in their graduate student careers endured divorce, custody litigation, and daily attempts at balancing their coursework while being the sole providers for their children. Two parents were working toward their graduate degrees while attempting to gain custody of their children after separation from their former partners. One of these fathers declared “pure love for” multiple faculty members who emotionally supported him when he “almost lost (his) daughter, which was “the hardest, most depressing thing (he’s) ever had to deal with.”

“I’m the only parent for them.” For single parents enrolled in graduate programs, time pressures were exacerbated because of the absence of a second parent to fulfill parenting responsibilities. This sometimes limited the amount of time they were able to spend on optional academic tasks which may advance their careers. A single mother explained her experience by saying:

I only have 24 hours a day and I feel like a lot of it I already contribute it to my assistantship and my studies. I don’t think I have anything else. I want my time with my kids. And (pause) I’m the only parent for them and I just feel it’s unfair for my kids.

Another single mother reiterated the idea that time conflicts affect her family more than they influence childless or two-parent households. Regarding her department offering some required courses solely at night, she lamented that her daughter struggles when she is cared for by a babysitter after being in school and away from her mother all day.

Age matters

Whether single or married, an international or domestic student, and no matter the race or gender of the parent, the ages of a participant’s children influenced their experiences. Several parents recognized ways in which graduate students’ experiences would likely differ if their children were older or younger. Others did not speak directly about this topic, but a careful
examination of the data revealed expected distinctions such as breastfeeding and postpartum concerns being discussed in greater detail by participants who experienced those issues themselves. It is important to remind readers that the mean age of the participants’ children was 5.5 years, with a range of five months to 18 years old.

Five parents of infants, school-aged children, and adolescents agreed that the younger children are, the harder it is to balance parenting and graduate student roles. Zachary said time management was “easier now because (his) daughter is older.” Similarly, a mother of adolescents remarked that:

You can rationalize with a teenager that ‘Even though you may not like it, I have to turn this in. It’s just like your homework. I have to get it done.’ But a 3-year-old doesn’t always understand when you say, ‘I’m sorry, mommy has to do this.

In addition to requiring more attention and not understanding reasoning, infants prompt a host of unique physical and emotional changes in their parents. Mothers who birth infants “don’t get (their) brains back until about six months postpartum” and are self-described as “postpartum sensitive people” (Ji-Yu). Sleep deprivation was also discussed as common during the first year of a child’s life, which affected students’ abilities to fully focus on academic tasks. Denise feared that she was being perceived as “aloof and not really caring” about her coursework because she had difficulty concentrating in class as her breastfed infant refused to drink from bottles at home.

Interestingly, Vera concluded that parents must “be pretty involved” during early childhood and adolescence, but that the middle childhood years are slightly less complicated. She stated that during these years, graduate students do not typically need to pay for full-time childcare and their children’s developmental needs are less intense than they are during their teenage years.
Summary

Eight overarching themes emerged from data drawn from interviews with 16 graduate student parents. The most salient theme was one of time conflicts in various forms, such as family leave after having a baby and planning births to occur during academic breaks. The participants also sought out people like themselves in their departments, and whether they “fit in” with their peers was meaningful to them. They argued that the intersection of their parent and student identities created a unique niche for them, and they affirmed that they are “not in the same boat” as childless graduate students. Some participants felt that they were perceived as “just graduate students,” and they pondered whether they should be perceived in this way. Faculty members have reportedly shown these students sincere support as well as superficial, or “face value,” support; many parents expressed deep gratitude for the former. At times, graduate students perceived faculty members as imposing academic and familial boundaries upon them that were unwanted and unnecessary. When asked about departmental resources they found helpful, many participants were unaware of the resources that existed to support parents, and others cited an absence of policies which they deemed important. Finally, graduate student parents urged faculty members to “trust that they’re doing the best they can.” They said they are “here because (they) want (an education)” and that when uncontrollable needs surface, they appreciate faculty members’ understanding and flexibility as they work to navigate multiple intensive roles.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

Introduction

Graduate students serve universities by performing service, teaching, and research tasks (Leath, 2016; Offstein et al., 2004), and educational institutions strive to be inclusive of diverse populations (Springer et al., 2009). Additionally, the percentage of students who were parents rose by 30% between 2004 and 2012 (Noll, Reichlin, & Gault, 2017). It is therefore imperative for universities to find ways to continue and improve structures that support parents enrolled in graduate programs. Positioned at the intersection of two time-intensive roles (Chesser, 2015; Correll et al., 2007; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Raddon, 2002; Springer et al., 2009), parents in academia are likely to experience role conflict as well as role enhancement that impacts their well-being and performance (Baker, 2010; Estes, 2011; Kinman & Jones, 2008; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Raddon, 2002; Shope, 2005; Trussell, 2015). Prior research suggested that faculty support influenced graduate student well-being more strongly than did support from family members, friends, or student peers. Therefore, I hypothesized that faculty may significantly contribute to graduate student parents’ experiences of role conflict and role enhancement. However, no research of which I am aware has examined this concept. For these reasons, the purpose of this study was to examine graduate student parents’ experiences with faculty members.

Four topics were identified as central to this study. First, I explored the ways graduate student and parent roles conflict with and enhance one another. Second, I examined the experiences graduate student parents have had with faculty, and third, I inquired about participants’ beliefs regarding how faculty perceive parents who are pursuing graduate degrees. The fourth aim of the current study was to investigate graduate student parents’ thoughts about
how faculty and graduate programs could continue and improve methods of supporting them. Because prior research has suggested that international students (Myers-Wells et al., 2011), students who are single parents (Anaya et al., 2009; Home, 1998), and working mothers (Correll et al., 2007) may be uniquely affected by their intersecting roles, these groups were analyzed separately. Of note, I searched for themes specific to other characteristics but found none; these characteristics included income, degree sought, current student or alumni status, participant age, graduate department, and number of semesters enrolled. Because “Age Matters,” “Breaking the Cycle/Beating the Odds,” and “Luck” emerged as themes specific to certain demographics, data were also examined by race and child age.

Data were collected in the form of one-hour interviews with 16 parents currently or recently enrolled in a master’s or doctoral program at a large Midwestern university. I used a blend of Initial, In Vivo, Emotion, Process, Versus, and Values Coding to allow codes to emerge from the data naturally as well as with intentionality (Saldaña, 2013). Next, I created a map in an Excel spreadsheet to organize the codes and prepare them for the second cycle of analysis, which involves the systematic metasynthesis of first cycle codes (Saldaña, 2013). I then used a blend of Pattern and Focused Coding (Saldaña, 2013) to categorize the codes and identify emerging themes.

In the previous chapter, I discussed 17 themes ranging from more to less dominant. The eight themes present across demographic groups included “Time as a Source of Conflict,” “Where is My Tribe?,” “It’s Not Their Decision to Make,” “Not in the Same Boat,” “Am I ‘Just a Graduate Student?’” “Face Value versus Sincere Support,” “Trust That They’re Doing the Best They Can,” and “Resources? What resources?” When data from subgroups of participants were analyzed, nine additional findings surfaced, including “Effects of Power,” “Mothers as Inherent
Primary Caregivers,” “(Dis)Advantage,” “Effects of Cultural Norms,” “Break the Cycle/Beat the Odds,” “Luck,” “I’m the Only Parent for Them,” “Stressors Unique to Single Parents,” and “Age Matters.” The findings of this study were organized in such a way that allowed the data, rather than the research questions, to take center stage.

In this chapter, I will address the findings within the context of the research questions and prior literature. This chapter ends with implications for research and practice.

**Research Question 1: Role Conflict and Enhancement**

The first research question for the present study was, “In what ways do graduate student and parent roles conflict with and enhance one another?” Goode (1960) proposed that role multiplicity naturally generates strain for the role holder. Sieber (1974) argued that the benefits of assuming multiple roles outweigh the conflict experienced from doing so. Tiedje and colleagues (1990) reconceptualized role strain and role enhancement theories by positioning each on its own continuum rather than thinking of them as mutually exclusive concepts that lie at opposite ends of a single continuum. For the current study, it was assumed that conflict and enhancement could be experienced simultaneously and to varying degrees. Indeed, 15 of 16 participants described many ways that graduate school and parenthood both positively and negatively influenced one another in their lives. Notably, one mother communicated that “there's got to be positives,” but was unable to name any that she had experienced.

For these parents, role conflict stemmed from time pressures, feeling like an “outlier” within their programs, and perceiving oneself as the primary or sole caregiver for children. The age of participants’ children also influenced the amount of role conflict (Goode, 1960) they felt, as did whether they were an international or domestic student. Role enhancement (Sieber, 1974), on the other hand, was experienced when parenthood provided context for learning material,
when interacting with children acted as a buffer (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006) or a “built-in break” from academia, and when participants were able to find a “tribe” of similar individuals within their departments. A few students also referred to graduate school as their way of “beating the odds” and improving their family’s life circumstances. Role conflict and enhancement are discussed separately within this section.

Experiences of role conflict

Time pressures burdened many of these graduate student parents as they attempted to be available around the clock as “ideal workers” (Wright et al., 2004) and “intensive parents” (Hays, 1996). Like faculty parents and undergraduate students with children (Baker, 2010; Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006; Estes, 2011; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006), the participants sometimes struggled with finding sufficient time to attend to their responsibilities to both roles. Though faculty members’ comments about email response time and “not worrying” about picking up a child from school likely contribute to student perceptions of needing to be “available 24/7,” participant beliefs that childless students’ availability surpasses their own may also factor in to these perceptions. Additionally, power dynamics and financial insecurity may affect perceptions of availability requirements, as several students said they felt that they could “not say no” to faculty members.

Furthermore, graduate students reflected on an absence of supportive policies that would allow them to spend time with their newborns. Such policies may not receive attention within universities because graduate student status lies somewhere “between” those of undergraduate students and faculty members (Grady et al., 2014) and they are not afforded the family leave options available to of either of those groups. For instance, 43% of higher education institutions across the United States (86% at Research I universities), including the university at which these
participants were enrolled, have “stop the clock” policies in place for faculty members (Hollenshead, Sullivan, Smith, August, & Hamilton, 2005). However, such written accommodations are not provided for students. Unlike their undergraduate counterparts, graduate students often rely on funding from assistantships as a source of income, and assistantships are contingent upon course enrollment. Therefore, participants often felt they needed to choose between spending time bonding with their newborns and managing postpartum life or facing financial insecurity and risking violation of timeline-to-degree requirements.

In part because of an absence of family leave policies, three participants also mentioned planning births to coincide with the academic calendar, which supports prior research (Armenti, 2004; Baker, 2010; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). However, several participants explicitly stated that they did not time their pregnancies because of religious or personal values. This finding has not been discussed previously in the literature, which may be partially due to the combination of the literature’s focus on faculty parents (Baker, 2010; Kinman & Jones, 2008; Raddon, 2002; Shope, 2005; Trussell, 2015) and the tendency for a growing family to equate with a decreased likelihood of being granted tenure (Baker, 2010; Mason & Goulden, 2004). Therefore, graduate students who do not feel pressured to birth children only during academic breaks may not be included in research on faculty parents because these students are less likely to be hired for tenure-track positions.

The importance of finding or building a “tribe” of peers and faculty members who can empathize with student parents corroborates prior research on social support (Offstein et al., 2004; Tompkins et al., 2016). Like previous studies have suggested, these graduate students seemed to experience heightened stress in response to feeling like an “outlier” in their program because of their identity as a parent, and limited time contributed to their ability to socially
connect with others (Myers-Walls et al., 2011; Offstein et al., 2004; Sallee, 2016). A few participants in this study noted that peer support was of equal or greater importance to them, as compared to support from faculty members. This sheds light on a recent quantitative study which suggested that faculty support predicts graduate students’ program satisfaction and overall life satisfaction to a greater degree than does peer or family support (Tompkins et al., 2016).

Considering the results of both studies, it may be that faculty more strongly influence some students’ experiences of role conflict and role enhancement, whereas peers may have a greater effect on other students. It is possible that a factor analysis may have identified such groups of students within the study by Tompkins et al. (2016), which instead employed regression analyses to identify relationships between faculty support and student satisfaction.

Regardless of who participants felt had the strongest influence on their experiences of role strain or enhancement, social support played a key role in their lives. According to the findings from the current study, graduate students who are mothers or single parents may feel the most role conflict because of a lack of support in the home, which coincides with prior research (Anaya et al., 2009; Home, 1998). Some international student participants perceived a faculty preference for domestic students as teaching and research assistants, which contributed to their role strain because they felt pressured to complete their degrees as quickly as possible in order to avoid losing funding. This finding suggests that international graduate student parents may be at increased risk for role conflict, as well. However, several international students stated that compared to domestic students, they received more social support from their parents after the birth of a child and therefore experienced less role conflict. This contradicts previous research that suggested that living far from immediate family members causes added stress because of the
absence of familial childcare that would be more likely to occur in a student’s home country (Myers-Walls et al., 2011).

**Experiences of role enhancement**

Faculty parents and undergraduate student parents have previously reported that their roles as parents and academicians sometimes enhance one another (Estes, 2011; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Raddon, 2002; Shope, 2005; Trussell, 2015; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). Though two mothers reported few to no benefits of holding these roles simultaneously, most of the participants in this study easily named several ways in which parenthood and graduate school positively affect one another. In some instances, the types of role enhancement mirrored those experienced by faculty parents, such as that time spent with children acted as a “buffer” for the stress felt from academic demands (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). Also, parents in undergraduate programs believed they were providing positive role models to their children by attending college (Estes, 2011; Moreau & Kerner, 2015), which was a concept that was evident within in this sample of graduate students.

The parents I interviewed also highlighted benefits of their dual roles that have not been previously identified in the literature, likely because conflict receives more empirical attention (Baker, 2010; Brown & Nichols, 2012; Kinman & Jones, 2008; Raddon, 2002). Participants said being graduate student parents made them more “well-rounded,” which relates to a tenet of Sieber’s (1974) role enhancement theory purporting that people gain a sense of “me” by holding several roles. Parenthood also necessitated that these students became more organized and better at managing their time. Information learned in graduate courses sometimes made “parenting more effective” while at the same time, parenthood provided context for such course material. This supports Sieber’s (1974) stance that contributing to one role makes a person more valuable
in other roles. Some parents in this study not only felt that having a child while enrolled in a graduate program had benefits, but also that their childless counterparts were “missing out,” which could be analogous to a perception that “net gratification” is the result of attending graduate school as a parent (Sieber, 1974). These findings add to our understanding of not only graduate student parents, but about Sieber’s (1974) theory of role accumulation.

**Role conflict and role enhancement summary**

Though some themes were more evident within certain demographic groups, the overarching finding for Research Question 1 is that graduate student parents have individually unique experiences of role conflict and role enhancement. For instance, both expected and unexpected events and expectations contributed to the variety of ways in which these parents felt strained. Infant teething, a lack of lactation spaces, night classes, children’s disabilities and assistantship traveling requirements affected some, but not all, of the participants in this study. Similarly, some parents experienced role enhancement via feeling more well-rounded or by being a positive role model for their children, whereas one student reported not feeling like her roles enhanced one another at all. These findings suggest that participants experienced a variety of levels of both role conflict and role enhancement, which supports the assertion that these theories are not mutually exclusive (Tiedje et al., 1990).

**Research Question 2: Experiences with Faculty**

The importance of feeling supported by faculty members has been emphasized in the literature (Barbuto et al., 2011; Schlosser & Gelso, 2001; Tompkins et al., 2016). The value of rapport, individualized mentorship, and support are common focal points in studies of student-faculty relationships (Barbuto et al., 2011; Schlosser & Gelso, 2001; Tompkins et al., 2016). Further, a recent study by Tompkins and colleagues (2016) suggested that compared to support
from student peers, family, and friends, faculty support better predicts student satisfaction with their program and with life in general. Interactions between students and faculty members likely affect such relationships. However, our empirical understanding of these dyads is limited to the methods by which graduate student parents frame requests of faculty members in times of difficulty (Medved & Heisler, 2002). Therefore, the second research question was, “What experiences have students had with faculty related to the intersection of parenthood and graduate school?” Findings related to this research question contribute greatly to the literature base because no known studies have previously examined graduate student parents’ experiences with faculty within the context of role conflict and role enhancement. Themes relevant to the second research question include “It’s Not Their Decision to Make,” “Sincere versus Face Value Support,” “Effects of Power,” “Luck,” “Age Matters,” and “Am I ‘Just a Graduate Student?’”

Whether positive or negative, participants described deeply impactful experiences they had had with faculty members. Five committee members continuously emotionally supported and motivated a single father who said his committee “saved (his) life in a sense,” and an instructor hugged a mother while she wept for her recently deceased unborn child. Conversely, a mother of multiple children felt offended and judged when her Major Professor responded to news of her pregnancy by suggesting family planning options. Another participant talked of her assistantship supervisor’s strongly implied “data before family” messages, and asked with desperation in her voice, “If I’m a grad student and I have a child with (a mental health concern), does none of that matter?” These types of experiences support previous research that suggested that faculty support is significant to student lives (Tompkins et al., 2016), and these findings add to our current understanding by suggesting that experiences with faculty that are perceived as unsupportive can be meaningful for graduate student parents, as well.
Perceptions of luck and power factored into many of the participants’ experiences with faculty. Across participants, finding support was partially attributed to the individual personalities of each faculty member (i.e., whether they were compassionate and supportive). Students paired with supportive faculty sometimes attributed this to luck whereas others emphasized that they sought out Major Professors and committee members who would support their identities as graduate students and parents. Ciara referred to this as the “power to choose.” On the other hand, several participants described the ways they felt powerless, such as needing to return to work shortly after childbirth and perceiving assistantships in a “take it or leave it” manner rather than being offered choices. Because graduate students often struggle with financial insecurity (Hyun et al., 2006; Offstein et al., 2004) and face strict timelines to graduation, a feeling of powerlessness may stem from financial worries combined with a lack of supportive policies and interactions with faculty members.

The theme of “It’s Not Their Decision to Make” appears to corroborate prior research about fatherhood premiums (Kelly & Grant, 2012) and motherhood penalties (Correll et al., 2007). Though graduate students receive a standard amount of pay at this institution, premiums and penalties occurred in the form of opportunities offered by faculty members. Though only three participants were male, it is nonetheless meaningful that one of three fathers, and zero of 13 mothers, was offered additional opportunities because he was a parent. Contrarily, four of 13 mothers, and zero of three fathers, discussed personal experiences or perceptions of faculty providing fewer opportunities to graduate student parents.

Like premiums and penalties take a different form in academia than they do in other professions, relationships and interactions between graduate students and faculty differ from those of typical supervisors and supervisees. A study by Wortman and colleagues (1991)
suggested that academic mothers experience more objective and subjective conflicts between their work and home lives than do women in other professions. Lechuga (2011) also argues that academia is a unique workplace because unlike typical supervisors, faculty play a variety of roles in the lives of their mentees, such as advisor, employer, instructor, and agent of socialization. Perhaps the ever-changing context within which graduate students and faculty members interact causes some of the difficulties these participants described that were related to power. Additionally, it may be that the variety of faculty responsibilities creates circumstances in which faculty sometimes feel inclined to show a student emotional support or inquire about their personal lives, and at other times they do not.

**Research Question 3: Students’ Beliefs about Faculty Perceptions**

As is suggested by research on response bias and social desirability, people are affected by the ways they feel they are perceived (Chase & Sassenrath, 1967; McGee et al., 2016). Because studies also suggest that faculty members have a great influence on students academically as well as emotionally (Komarraju et al., 2010; Patton, 2009; Schlosser & Gelso, 2001; Tompkins et al., 2016), it is reasonable to conclude that graduate students are affected by their beliefs about faculty perceptions of them. Therefore, this study’s third research question was, “How do graduate student parents believe faculty members perceive their status as parents pursuing graduate degrees?” Three themes address this research question; the themes of “Not in the Same Boat,” “Am I ‘Just a Graduate Student’?” and “Trust That They’re Doing the Best They Can” contain elements of students’ beliefs about faculty members’ perceptions of them.

Prior studies have acknowledged that students sometimes feel faculty view student parents negatively (Markle, 2015). The current study adds to our understanding of this concept with a finding that graduate student parents sometimes believe that faculty perceive them with
indifference or positivity. Seven of the participants in this sample described faculty perceptions of graduate student parents by using phrases such as “deficit orientation,” “lesser quality,” “less available,” and “harder to work with,” which is consistent with prior research (Markle, 2015). By contrast, eight participants declared that faculty members saw parenthood as a private sector of one’s life and therefore irrelevant to their lives as graduate students. One father stated that he believed faculty members perceived graduate student parents in a positive light because they are working hard to better themselves and provide for their families, and one mother believed perceptions of graduate student parents varied between faculty members.

The findings of this study contribute to the literature by highlighting the complexity of graduate student parents’ beliefs about faculty perceptions of them as well as how these students would like to be perceived. A few parents proclaimed that they preferred to be perceived as “just graduate students” and several emphasized that they wanted to earn their graduate degree in the same manner as childless students. However, they also stressed the importance of faculty understanding that children make students’ lives more complicated and add a layer of unpredictability that students without children do not experience. Two mothers’ analogies likened parenthood to having a disability and experiencing a natural disaster. As such, many participants, including those who wanted to be perceived as “just graduate students,” expressed a desire for faculty to perceive and respond to their multiple roles rather than only their role as a student.

A medley of factors may influence the ways graduate student parents feel they are perceived by faculty, such as third-party experiences with faculty. Though some participants did not report direct or explicit negativity from faculty members, they sometimes described this feeling as a part of the general departmental climate because of the lived experiences of their
peers. It is also possible that the commonly-experienced guilt that results from the inability to simultaneously attend to two intensive roles (Brooks, 2015; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Trussell, 2015) contributes to participants’ beliefs that they are perceived negatively by their instructors, mentors, and committee members. Additionally, research supports the idea that people are more likely to remember negative experiences (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001), which increases the likelihood that these participants believed faculty perceived graduate student parents as “less than” or with a “deficit orientation.”

**Research Question 4: Suggestions for Continuing and Improving Support**

The final research question for this study was, “In what ways do graduate student parents feel faculty and graduate programs could continue or improve upon providing support for graduate students who are parents of dependent children?” Due to the overlapping nature of the findings, a few participant suggestions have been discussed elsewhere in this chapter. The answers to the final research question can be drawn from more than half of the themes, including “Trust That They’re Doing the Best They Can,” “Not in the Same Boat,” “Am I ‘Just a Graduate Student?’” “It’s Not Their Decision to Make,” “Time as a Source of Conflict,” “Face Value versus Sincere Support,” “Age Matters,” “Effects of Power,” and “Resources? What Resources?”

Participants highlighted their desires for autonomy, opportunities, sincerity, and consideration of reasonable accommodations. They expressed strong displeasure about faculty members making decisions for them regarding whether they are “too busy” for additional academic opportunities and they recommended that faculty not provide unsolicited family-planning and childcare advice. Students also differentiated between “face value” and sincere faculty support, and expressed a clear preference for the latter, whereas the former was perceived as offensive to many. Sincere support sometimes included considering reasonable
accommodations for student parents, partially because unexpected events occur more often in the lives of parents. Most students conceptualized accommodations as separate from unwanted “special treatment.” Naomi also vocalized her internal debate regarding whether parenthood warrants accommodations in the same way that disabilities do because parenthood is a choice. On this note, Springer and colleagues (2009) argued that as university policies and instructors often accommodate athletes’ academic endeavors, so too should formal and informal protections be offered to student parents.

Parents in this sample commonly argued that their institution was oriented toward young, single people, which is a perception that has been reported in prior research (Estes, 2011). The physical environment was a source of role conflict for many participants. Lactation areas were referred to as “dungeons” and one mother talked of lactation spaces in restrooms as “degrading.” Diaper changing tables and sanitary areas to prepare infant bottles were discussed as missing from campus, as well, contributing to the family-unfriendly atmosphere. In some cases, participants suggested that faculty members could support graduate student parents by advocating for structures and resources that recognize their intersectionality. In this sense, the participants may be seeking a sense of allyship (Anicha, Burnett, & Bilen-Green, 2015; Casey, 2010) because faculty tend to hold more privilege and power than themselves, and therefore may more strongly influence changes at the departmental or university level.

Two parents hypothesized that a lack of child-friendly structures keeps student parents from completing more work because they do not perceive their campus to be a place where they can bring their children. Both mothers suggested that a work-play room could be created, in which student parents could come to work and have access to statistical software while children could play with toys or books nearby. Upon further investigation of child-friendly study areas, no
empirical studies on the matter surfaced. However, the University of California at San Diego (2017) boasts that it offers a space “with children's books and activities where (students) may supervise (their) children while (they) study.” Nursing mothers, crawling infants, and fathers are explicitly invited to utilize the room. Similar family-friendly study areas exist at Portland State (Petit, 2014) and Southern Illinois University (Morris Library, 2017).

The parents in this study also posited that faculty members could advocate for improved university policies geared toward graduate students with dependent children. Potential methods of easing role conflict for this group included enhancing paid family leave and “stop the timeline to degree clock” policies. Participants also displayed a lack of knowledge about existing family-friendly resources and policies, which several students attributed to avoidance of talk about families in academia. If faculty members and departments openly spoke of family matters, they proposed, students may be more aware of resources and policies designed to support student parents because the topic would occur more often in natural conversation. This would of course depend upon whether the faculty members themselves are aware of the existing policies that relate to graduate student parents.

Though these participants identified areas for improvement, they also specified instances in which faculty members provided them with meaningful instrumental and emotional social support. When considering Lechuga’s (2011) assertion that faculty play diverse roles (e.g., instructor, mentor, supervisor, agent of socialization), it may be that students seek different types of support within different contexts or that each student has unique preferences and relationships with faculty members. Regardless, instances of faculty support and lack of support were integral to participants’ experiences of role conflict and role enhancement. Participants’ suggestions for faculty to continue supporting students via flexibility, compassion and empathy coincides with
and expands prior research about the importance of nurturing students and building rapport within the advisory pair (Harrison, 2009; Schlosser & Gelso, 2001).

In sum, the participants in this study recommended that faculty members provide support to graduate student parents via direct interaction with students as well as by advocating for family-friendly structures, policies, and resources within their departments. The findings from the current study also suggest that family factors, such as the parent’s marital status or a child’s disability, influence the amount or type of support students need from faculty members. As such, they requested that faculty members view and respond to them as unique individuals whose lives are multifaceted.

**Implications**

No research of which I am aware has previously examined graduate student parents’ experiences with faculty apart from how students initiate negotiations with faculty when they are having difficulty fulfilling academic responsibilities (Medved & Heisler, 2002). Therefore, the current study offers a foundation upon which future studies may be built. Similar to prior advisor-advisee studies (Knox et al., 2006; Schlosser et al., 2003), the current study could be expanded upon by future research examining faculty members’ experiences, beliefs, and perceptions as they pertain to graduate student parents. Paired with the current study, interpretations of the faculty-student dyad would be more complete. Also, because perceptions of social support were integral to the participants, experiences of graduate students in cultures which are more or less interdependent may differ greatly from the participants in this study and therefore they warrant further study.

Subgroup analyses revealed experiences specific to demographic characteristics, but additional research is needed to corroborate or expand upon these themes because of the limited
number of participants per group. For example, experiences of social support within single-parent families (n=4) may be more nuanced than the findings of the current study suggest. Additionally, it is possible that graduate student parents’ perceptions of their experiences change upon graduation, but with only three alumni in the current sample, such results were not found. Also, though no themes were found to be specific to family size or fatherhood (n=3), perhaps a study with a larger sample would find themes related to these categories.

Implications for practice align closely with the findings within the final research question for this study. Providing reasonable accommodations and emotional support, offering equal opportunities to parents, and avoiding giving unsolicited family planning advice are key tenets of the implications for practice. Faculty development opportunities such as diversity and inclusion workshops could highlight graduate student parents as one segment of the student body that has unique experiences and needs. Departmental faculty mentoring committees and subcommittees could be developed in order to enhance mentorship efforts overall and for unique populations such as student parents (Lechuga, 2011). Ongoing assessments of student-faculty interactions and rapport could be utilized to strengthen personal and academic relationships within the university. Recommended tools for such assessment are the Advisory Working Alliance Inventory-Student Version (Schlosser & Gelso, 2001) and the Advisory Working Alliance Inventory-Advisor Version (Schlosser & Gelso, 2005). Finally, faculty-graduate student collaboration may be beneficial in planning efforts to continue and improve upon supports for mentees, advisees, and students who are parents. This encourages shared power and allows each member of the dyad to voice their concerns, desires, and expectations (TWIG Writing Group, 1996).
Summary

This study extended the literature about student parents by specifically examining the experiences of role conflict and role enhancement in the lives of graduate student parents, particularly as related to faculty members. Unique interactions, personality traits, family dynamics, beliefs, and values intersected to produce a mosaic of findings that are likely to be interpreted slightly differently by other researchers. Using a combination of reflexivity journaling, bracketing techniques, and challenging myself to consider alternative explanations for these findings, I have analyzed and described these data as objectively as possible.

Also, as was acknowledged by one participant, “extreme” experiences are likely to be the most easily recalled; therefore, the findings may be reflective of interactions which are not necessarily common, but are instead memorable. Within the data, parents’ rich descriptions of experiences naturally draw the most attention, as well, further increasing the likelihood that the “extremes” are disproportionately emphasized within this study. Additionally, as hypothesized earlier in this study, a participant’s general outlook on life may color the ways they frame experiences. For example, data drawn from one mother illuminated many examples of sincere support from faculty members, which aligns with her active attempts “to put negative things away.” She added that she tries “not to think about them so even when (she) face(s) a negative problem, (she tries) to make it into a positive situation.” To manage these concerns, I regularly and purposefully re-examined the data to find meaning in the everyday experiences of graduate student parents, and I asked myself how else the data might be interpreted.

Parents in this sample urge faculty members to treat them as individuals who are “not in the same boat” as childless students, but who strive to achieve success in graduate school nonetheless. The participants expressed sincere appreciation for Major Professors, instructors,
and committee members who supported them emotionally and instrumentally. Additionally, previous studies explored only the negative aspects of students’ beliefs about faculty perceptions of them whereas participants in this sample outlined a wider variety of ways in which they feel they are perceived by faculty members. Large-scale supports such as formal policies and improved access to lactation rooms were recommended, as were day-to-day faculty acknowledgements of students’ lives outside of the graduate program. Because every graduate student experiences a one-of-a-kind blend of culture, life circumstances, strengths, and academic aspirations, the lasting message from this study is the importance of faculty asking, “How can I support you best?”
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APPENDIX A. IRB APPROVAL DOCUMENT

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice President for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
(515) 294-4566
FAX (515) 294-4207

Date: 3/24/2016
To: Amber Kreischer
84 LeBaron

CC: Dr. Tera Jorson
430 Palmer Bldg, Suite 1364

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Parents Enrolled in Graduate Programs: Experiences with Faculty

IRB ID: 16-112

Approval Date: 3/23/2016
Date for Continuing Review: 3/22/2018

Submission Type: New
Review Type: Expedited

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 50), please be sure to:

• Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.

• Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study, when documented consent is required.

• Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.

• Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

• Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.

• Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Please be aware that IRB approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and ISU policies governing human subjects research. Approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g., student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. IRB approval in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.
# APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Parents Enrolled in Graduate Programs: Experiences with Faculty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas to Explore</th>
<th>Key Questions</th>
<th>Probes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Information</td>
<td>Tell me about yourself, your children, and your status in the graduate program.</td>
<td>How many dependent children do you have?</td>
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<td>How old are your children?</td>
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<td>What is the nature of your relationships with your dependent children (biological, adoptive, via marriage)?</td>
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<td>Which program are you in, and during which semesters have you been enrolled in that program?</td>
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<td>What degree are you seeking?</td>
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<td>What motivated you to take part in this study?</td>
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<td>What led you to pursue a graduate degree while parenting a dependent child?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate Student Experiences Involving Faculty Members</td>
<td>Tell me about your parenthood-related experiences involving faculty members.</td>
<td>Tell me about some comments, conversations, or interactions you have had with faculty members that were related to your or someone else’s status as a parent in academia.</td>
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<td>What are some examples of times when your role as a parent has intersected with your encounters with faculty?</td>
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<td>Graduate Student Beliefs about Faculty Perceptions of</td>
<td>How do you feel faculty perceive your status as a parent who is pursuing a</td>
<td>What kinds of implied messages do you feel you have received from faculty related to being a parent and an academic at the same time?</td>
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<td>their Status as a Parent in a Graduate Program</td>
<td>graduate degree, and why?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate Student Experiences of Inter-role Conflict and Inter-role Enhancement</td>
<td>Tell me about the ways that faculty expectations and parenthood have affected one another in your life.</td>
<td>How do you feel you and other people who are parents in your program are treated by faculty in comparison to graduate students in your program who are not parents?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continuing and Improving Upon Supports for Graduate Students who are Parents</td>
<td>What has your program done well to support you as a parent who is pursuing a graduate degree?</td>
<td>What can you tell me about family-friendly policies within your graduate program?</td>
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<td>In what ways could your graduate program better support you as a parent who is pursuing a graduate degree?</td>
<td>What are your recommendations to improve policies within your program to make them more family-friendly?</td>
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<td>How would you recommend faculty improve their support to graduate students who are parents?</td>
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<td>What other resources do you feel are needed to support parents of dependent children who are pursuing a graduate degree in this program?</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Information</td>
<td>What else would you like to share with me regarding parenting a dependent child while pursuing a graduate degree?</td>
<td>Is there anything else you would like to share related to experiences with faculty members, faculty perceptions of your status as a parent pursuing a graduate degree, inter-role conflict, inter-role enhancement, sources of support within your graduate program, or recommendations for your program?</td>
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