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**WOMEN IN DISTANCE DOCTORAL PROGRAMS: HOW  
THEY NEGOTIATE THEIR IDENTITIES AS MOTHERS,  
PROFESSIONALS, AND ACADEMICS IN ORDER TO PERSIST**

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**ABSTRACT**

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Aim/Purpose	The purpose of this study was to explain how Distance Education women EdD students who are mothers balanced and integrated their multiple identities (e.g., mother, student, professional) to persist.
Background	It is well documented that parenting students experience higher levels of stress and pressure during their degree pursuit than their non-parenting counterparts. It is also well documented that doctoral attrition is a persistent problem across decades and disciplines, and examination of specific populations was necessary to better understand how to foster doctoral persistence.
Methodology	Data were collected from 17 women via questionnaires, life maps, and interviews and were analyzed in accordance with grounded theory procedures.
Contribution	This study generated a novel theoretical model to explain women EdD students' academic identity progression from students to scholars and its intersection with other salient identities, especially mother, and the core sense of self in alignment with other identity theories.
Findings	Academic identity development from student to research scholar is complex and challenging, but follows a unique progression that begins with gaining competence in research, followed by a confidence to conduct research. This positive attitude toward research is often shaped by an influential advisor or mentor, a relationship that enables a student mother to envision herself as a scholar and mother. However, it is a woman's social conditions (e.g., supportive spouse, friends, or employer) that provide her the confidence and space to dif-

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	ferentiate, develop, and intersect multiple identities, a process that allows for successful negotiation and integration of identities, and ultimately, persistence and attainment of the doctorate.
Recommendations for Practitioners	Findings highlight the need for more women faculty role models in higher education. To increase the number of women faculty mentors in academia, program administrators can recruit, retain, and support and encourage parental visibility through developing structures and supports for faculty with families. Given the women candidates' emphasis on stewardship, faculty should design coursework to allow students to intersect assignments with professional goals and practices, and support empirically and theoretically grounded dissertations aimed at not only solving problems of practice but also aimed at advocacy.
Recommendation for Researchers	Research is needed with women doctoral candidates in other disciplines from other institutions and regions of the country, including those without children and individuals in non-heterosexual relationships.
Impact on Society	This study is an important first step in better understanding female identity development through the doctoral process.
Future Research	Themes uncovered in this research need further investigation. Ruptures in relationships were uncovered but not fully explored or saturated. More research is needed to understand the specific contexts and factors leading to both relationship fractures and the disruption in the academic identity trajectory.
Keywords	doctoral education, persistence, female identity, academic identity, distance education

## INTRODUCTION

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Doctoral education research identifies academic identity as a trajectory by which a doctoral student develops from a student to scholar during the program (V. L. Baker, Pifer, & Flemion, 2013; Gardner, 2009; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). As a woman doctoral student sojourns upon this academic identity trajectory, she is challenged to intersect this developing academic identity with her core sense of self and other identities (e.g., mother, wife, professional). The tension and conflict that arises from this process is unfortunately a vital reason many women choose not to persist in doctoral programs. This conflict is especially strong for women who are mothers with “the primary responsibility for anticipating the needs of [her] children, a task which can be psychologically and physically consuming” (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004, p. 247). The motherhood penalty in United States institutions is well documented in the research findings (M. Baker, 2016; McCutcheon & Morrison, 2016; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Unfortunately, higher education institutions in the United States do not have a positive history of accounting for the needs of women, and researchers have documented sociocultural policies and practices that encourage the separation of academic and mother identity exist (V. Brown & Nichols, 2012; Lapayese, 2012). Light needs to be shed not only on the “institutional barriers, challenges and triumphs that women ... face as they attempt to balance the often conflicting demands of academic and family life” (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006, p. 487), but also the personal triumphs and challenges women face as they seek to integrate their academic identity with their other identities, namely mother.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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### *THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS*

This inquiry focusing on identity was situated within and sought to extend the theory and research addressing identity and its complex relationship with doctoral persistence. As it has been recognized that female identity is multidimensional and complex (Moradi, 2005), a discussion about the identity of women within the context of academia requires a conceptualization of identity as dynamic, mul-

tidimensional, complex, and socially influenced (Moradi, 2005). Jones and McEwen (2000) provide such a conceptualization as they suggested that individuals have multiple social identity dimensions that intersect. Within this model and its extensions (e.g., Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007), identity is characterized as dynamic and complex. The core sense of self, “an individual’s values and most valued attributes and characteristics” (Jones, 1997, p. 383), is at the center. Surrounding the core, and sometimes connected to the core, are externally defined identities such as gender, race, and culture. Identities are illustrated as intersecting circles around the core sense of self, signifying that “no one dimension may be understood singularly; it can be understood only in relation to other dimensions” (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 410). The development and salience of each identity is dynamic, influenced by personal filters, context, and experience (e.g., family, sociocultural conditions, academic disciplines) (Abes et al., 2007). Meaning-making is especially important and a filter for contextual factors that influence the self-perceptions of identities and the relationships between each. Abes and Jones described meaning-making as “organizational assumptions that determine whether identity is constructed through external expectations or an internally generated sense of self” (p. 619). Through their research, Abes and Jones (2004) determined that meaning-making is the defining factor in how contextual factors shape the content of identity, depending on the individual’s internal satisfaction or dissatisfaction of how this context influences their multiple identities. This meaning-making filter that was conceptualized through Abes and Jones’ (2004) study strengthens Jones and McEwen’s (2000) contextually-based theory of multiple dimensions of identity by solidifying the role that context and societal influences play and in dimensions of identity.

The concept of intersectionality, drawn from critical race theory, further illuminates the importance of the intersection of identities and emphasized the “interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies” (Davis, 2008, p. 68). Thus, this concept is not only consistent with the view of multiple identities (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000) in that it purports that that identities are formed in relation to one another and the process of merging various identities is transformative, but it also highlights the idea that context and social interaction are influential in the development and intersection of identities. In other words, Jones and McEwen’s model (2000) and intersectionality highlight the importance of exploring how women EdD students shape, balance, and intersect their multiple identities as they develop their academic identity and transition from student to scholar during the doctoral journey. They also highlight the important study inclusion of the academic setting and the discipline in which a woman EdD student enters, which may encourage or impede doctoral persistence, influences her view of self and her identities, and, ultimately, her choice to persist.

Nasir and Saxe (2003) reinforced this and the study’s focus on social and cultural influences of identity as their research emphasized the role of social and cultural influences on identity development when examining conflict and tension between ethnic identities and academic identities. Application of their finding to this study of women doctoral students suggested the manner in which women doctoral students manage and negotiate the internal identity tensions and external forces are ultimately influential in their choice to persist. Lack of successful negotiation of these tensions could result in increased attrition in an academic setting (Nasir & Saxe, 2003), or, conversely, relationship fractures or *ruptures*. The importance of negotiating tensions is consistent with well-known attrition theories. Tinto’s (1993) theory of integration explaining student persistence posits that graduate persistence is “shaped by the personal and intellectual interactions that occur within and between students and faculty and the various communities that make academic and social systems of the institution” (p. 231). In summary, the theoretical underpinnings for this study highlight identity as a dynamic, multidimensional, complex, and socially developed construct. The impetus for the study was the dearth of literature related to the phenomenon studied.

### ***THE CURRENT STATE OF THE LITERATURE AND THE GAP***

Women who pursue and persist in doctoral degrees face many challenges. Internal conflict between the developing academic identity and other identities may result in denial or discontinuance of as-

pects of self or relationships associated with specific identities (Eisenbach, 2013; Wellington & Sikes, 2006). Divorce and marital difficulties are documented consequences of the doctoral journey (Middleton, 2001; Norton, Thomas, Morgan, Tilley, & Dickins, 1998; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Knight, 2015), and researchers have noted, “family and personal relationships are sometimes strained and can even break down as a result of a student’s involvement in their studies” (Wellington & Sikes, 2006, p. 731). As the average age of a recipient of a doctoral degree is 33, which is around the age many women choose to begin a family (Mason, Wolfinger, & Golden, 2013), women may choose to delay beginning a family or choose not to have children. With health risks for mother and child increasing with age of the mother, delaying children can pose health risks. Concern about the ability to balance school, family, and work responsibilities is the primary reason students who desire to further their education choose not to (V. Brown & Nichols, 2012), and women are less likely begin an advanced degree and more likely to depart prior to completion than men (Kurtz-Costes, Halmke & Ulku-Steiner, 2006), with pregnant and parenting students at higher risk for attrition than their counterparts (Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

The phenomenon of role conflict for women doctoral students is beginning to be documented in the literature (L. Brown & Watson, 2010; Carter, Blumenstein, & Cook, 2013; Eisenbach, 2013; Haynes, Bulosan, Citty, & Grant-Harris, 2012; Lynch, 2008); however, most of the literature on role conflict and management focuses on the residential, PhD, or first generation EdD programs where students often leave their professions and relocate to become students (Lee, Green, & Brennan, 2000). The concept of the motherhood penalty in higher education is well documented in the literature on faculty as researchers have examined faculty with children teaching in tenure-track positions and found disparity between men and women (M. Baker, 2012, 2016; Craft & Maseberg-Tomlinson, 2015; Cummins, 2012; Jakubiec, 2015; McCutcheon & Morrison, 2016; Seher, & Iverson, 2015; Stinchfield, & Trepal, 2010; Summers, & Clarke, 2015; Ward, 2014; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2015; Sallee, Ward, and Wolf-Wendel, (2016) purported that academic mothers experience greater responsibility related to household tasks and childcare than academic fathers. Moreover, male faculty publish as single authors more than women faculty, and women with children are significantly underrepresented in tenure track positions (Hart, 2006). The motherhood penalty however has not been examined in the doctoral student literature.

While some women experience negative consequences (e.g., stigmatization or isolation) and conflict between their academic work and family (Trepal, Stinchfield, & Haiyasoso, 2013; Yakaboski, 2010), some successfully integrate, albeit not without some struggle, their identities for optimal well-being, balance (Bailyn, Drago, & Kochan, 2001), and completion of their doctoral degrees. They successfully develop from students into scholars and negotiate their multiple identities and corresponding roles and responsibilities.

Researchers such as V. L. Baker et al. (2013) have examined academic identity development in doctoral students enrolled in business and higher education programs as they develop in their identities as students and emerging scholars during the dissertation process, however, there is currently no theory or model explaining the development and concurrent intersection of this academic identity with other identities, and more specifically, how women students, especially those who are mothers or desire to become mothers, develop and intersect their multiple identities in order to persist in the social and academic context of the doctoral journey. Moreover, researchers examining womanist identity development theory concur that more research is needed to capture the diversity of a woman’s identity that is shaped throughout her life to provide individuals, educators, and counselors with frameworks that guide the understanding of the complexity of female identity and inform practice (Moradi, 2005). Therefore, the personal struggles and victories women experience as they intersect their identities during their doctoral journey needs to be better understood so that faculty and administrators can develop programs, policies, and supports to empower women who are or desire to be mothers to pursue their academic goals and to help astute and talented women envision themselves as scholars and mothers.

## PURPOSE

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The purpose of this systematic grounded theory study was to generate a theoretical model explaining the process in which women come to develop as scholars and intersect this identity with other identities, especially the motherhood aspect of their female identity, which ultimately gives rise to their choice to persist unto doctoral candidacy and degree completion. For this study, a second generation EdD program is where the focus of course work and the dissertation is situated in the intersection of the education profession and the university; the dissertation research is usually conducted in a workplace or educational setting where theory is applied to practice (Perry, 2012). Moreover, the context was delimited to a distance education, second generation EdD program.

There has been exponential growth in distance education doctoral programs and second generation EdD programs, which have removed obstacles that once kept many women from pursuing doctoral degrees. The convenience and flexibility of these second generation EdD programs have allowed women to not uproot their families and to remain in their profession while pursuing their doctorate. In fact, females represent approximately 60% of the EdD population (National Science Foundation, 2009). An additional impetus for delimiting to this population is the attrition problem, which is estimated to be 10 to 15% higher than the traditional doctoral attrition problem of 50%. For this reason, this inquiry focused upon women enrolled in an online, EdD program with second generation characteristics.

The study was framed by the following research questions: (1) How do women doctoral candidates develop from students into scholars in light of other identities, especially as females and the corresponding role of motherhood? (2) How do women doctoral candidates negotiate the conflict and intersect their academic identity with their multiple identities? (3) What is the context in which women doctoral candidates develop their academic identities, intersecting it with their multiple identities and core sense of self and ultimately choose to persist unto doctoral candidacy and ultimately unto completion?

## METHODS

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### *DESIGN*

As this research sought to understand the process in which women come to develop a sense of who they are and how they intersect these identities in order to persist unto doctoral candidacy and degree completion, a systematic grounded theory design was selected (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Consistent with this design, data collection and data analysis were concurrent; participant selection ceased once the theoretical model grounded in the data was fully developed and saturated.

### *PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING*

The sample consisted of women who were distance education Doctor of Education (EdD) candidates (i.e., had successfully completed their course work and passed the comprehensive exam). A snowball sampling technique was used. Invitations to participate in an online questionnaire were sent to doctoral candidates enrolled in two online EdD programs with second generation characteristics at universities located in the southeastern United States. Both EdD programs were fully accredited through the Southern Association of College and Schools. Invitation to participate was also provided to participants attending presentations the researchers conducted at state and national conferences. All invitations encouraged participants to send the elicitation to individuals who qualified and might be interested in the study.

Sixty-four candidates responded to the online questionnaire. From this sampling frame, theoretical sampling was used to identify participants who met the following criteria: (a) current enrollment in the dissertation coursework in an online (e.g., at least 80% of coursework online) EdD program with second generation or with Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) membership, (b)

currently pregnant, have children in the home, or have a desire to have children, and (c) evidence of scholarship (e.g., a submitted article for a peer reviewed journal or practitioner forum, a published a peer reviewed journal article or practitioner forum, a presentation at a professional conference or workshop, or a desire to publish or disseminate research knowledge after dissertation). The purpose of theoretical sampling is to purposefully select information rich participants where “the sample is selected for the purpose of explicating and refining the emerging theory” (Breckenridge & Jones, 2009, p. 118). Thirty-one were eligible for participation based on the selection criteria; all identified themselves as heterosexuals and the majority were Caucasian. However, based on the diversity of the sample, participants were selected with consideration of maximum variation in terms of demographics, employment, number of children, and choices related to their identity as females and students (e.g., delay motherhood to pursue school or delay doctoral studies due to motherhood). Eligible participants were contacted one by one to participate until theoretical saturation was reached, meaning additional data collection was not likely to generate new findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

The final sample included 17 participants (see Table 1). Two participants desired but did not have children at the time of the study, fifteen did have children in the home. Every participant indicated they had or had a desire to have a research agenda, 95% ( $n = 16$ ) planned to continue to teach or pursue a career in academia, 70% ( $n = 12$ ) had presented at a professional conference, and 41% ( $n = 7$ ) had published an article in a peer reviewed journal. Every participant had submitted at least one manuscript to a peer-reviewed journal. At the time of the data collection (spring and fall 2015; summer 2016), all of the women were doctoral candidates. Since that time, fourteen of the women have successfully defended their dissertations and graduated with several having secured university faculty or staff positions or received promotions in their professional settings (e.g., principals, directors, etc.). In the findings, each participant is assigned a pseudo name.

### ***DATA COLLECTION***

The study drew upon data collected via questionnaires, interviews, and life maps. The purpose of triangulating methods of data collection was to ensure a deep understating of the phenomenon and increase credibility (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). As discussed above, questionnaires were distributed to collect demographic data and ensure participants met study criteria. Participants were then asked to create a life map, allowing them to depict their journey from birth to the present, noting events significant in their journey as females, professionals, and academics. They were asked to think about, “What are events that have influenced your understanding of your role as a woman and mother? What are events that have influenced your pursuit of and persistence in a doctoral degree?” Flexibility was offered, and participants created life maps as timeline drawings, annotated curriculum vitas, and tables with dates, event labels, and brief descriptions.

Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the participants’ experiences as females in an online EdD program with second generation characteristics. Questions included whether and why students wanted to persist in the doctoral program, how they developed in their understanding of identities in the program, significant influences in understanding of identities formed or transformed in the doctoral process, and their perceptions about how their identity as women and mothers shaped their academic identities and vice versa. Questions focused on participants’ female, academic, and professional identities.

Interviews were conducted in person, on the phone, and via web-conferencing systems. Most interviews lasted about 1 hour, though actual times ranged from 45 minutes to 3 hours. After the interviews were conducted, three research assistants, who signed confidentiality agreements, transcribed them. E-mails were sent throughout the data analysis process to garner further clarification on comments to interview questions or gain further information beyond the scope of the interview to inform the theory. A sampling of participants were invited to comment on the final representation of findings as a form of member checking.

**Table 1. Participant Information**

Ethnicity	Marital status	Age	Occupation	Type of employment	Primary reason for pursuing the doctorate degree	Primary reason for persistence	Have children	Number of children	Children live in the home
Caucasian	Married	30-39	Faculty in higher education	Part time	Vocational requirement	Personal determination	No	0	n/a
Caucasian	Divorced	20-29	Staff in K-12	Full time	Vocational advancement	Personal determination	Yes	1	Yes
Caucasian	Married	40-49	Faculty in higher education	Full time	Personal goal	Vocational requirement	Yes	4	Yes
Caucasian	Married	30-39	Administrator in K-12	Full time	Personal goal	Personal determination	Yes	1	Yes
Hispanic	Married	40-49	Adjunct in higher education	Full time	Personal goal	Personal determination	Yes	2	Yes
Caucasian	Married	50-59	Faculty in higher education	Full time	Vocational requirement	Vocational requirement	Yes	6	Yes
Caucasian	Married	30-39	Teacher in K-12	Full time student	Personal goal	Personal determination	Yes	1	Yes
Caucasian	Divorced	50-59	Teacher in K-12	Full time	Personal goal	Personal determination	Yes	2	Yes
Caucasian	Married	30-39	Administrator in K-12	Full time	Financial advancement	Personal determination	Yes	2	Yes
Hispanic	Married	20-29	Faculty in higher education	Full time	Personal goal	Personal determination	No	0	n/a
African American	Divorced	30-39	Teacher in K-12	Full time	Financial	Financial	Yes	2	Yes
Caucasian	Married	40-49	Teacher K-12	Full time	Personal	Personal determination	Yes	1	Yes
Caucasian	Married	50-59	Substitute teacher	Part time	Vocational advancement	Vocational advancement	Yes	1	Yes
Caucasian	Married	60-69	Teacher in K-12	Part time	Personal goal	Personal	Yes	10	Yes
African-American	Married	30-39	Teacher in K-12	Full time	Financial advancement	Family responsibility	Yes	1	Yes
Caucasian	Married	50-59	Teacher in K-12	Full time	Vocational advancement	Personal determination	Yes	1	Yes
Caucasian	Married	20-29	Faculty in higher education	Part time	Personal goal	Financial commitment	Yes	1	Yes

### *DATA ANALYSIS*

Following Corbin and Strauss' (2015) grounded theory procedures, the data (e.g., life maps and interview transcripts) were analyzed via open coding, coding for concept development, and coding for context, process, and integration. A list of initial concepts was developed through open coding, which included process coding and context coding. Next, concepts were grouped into categories. More specifically, the multiphase data analysis process began with coding statements and words from each of the data sources and organizing them into content categories around identities. Researchers have documented that during the doctoral process the development of academic identity occurs as individuals move from student to scholars or "from being a consumer of knowledge . . . to creator" (Gardner, 2009, p. 328). Thus, analysis focused on how women doctoral candidates' academic identity developed and by what means they intersected this identity with their core sense of self and other identities, namely their identity as mothers. Knowing that other identities could emerge as salient, and that identities can be numerous and potentially unwieldy, it was also necessary to choose which identities to focus on. It would be impossible to saturate descriptions of the development of all identities. Thus, while initial focus was primarily on mother identity and academic identity, descriptors and statements of identity were recorded every instance in an excel matrix. In describing their multiple identities, the women used words such as "mother," "wife," "daughter," "student," "educator," "professional," "researcher," "woman of faith," "Latina," and "nurturer." Recording each instance in every case enabled the researchers to analyze patterns that arose related to participants' descriptions of themselves and identities that were most salient during their doctoral journey. The most prominent descriptions fell into three identities that concurrently developed and intersected, often with tension and conflict: (a) female, with primary descriptors being mother and wife, (b) professional, and (c) academic. Through employing Corbin and Strauss' (2015) systematic grounded theory procedures, in the analysis, memoing, and ensuing discussion about categories, it also became apparent that at the core of each identity was a strong sense of self as a "steward."

In the next phase of analysis, all the data sources were reviewed again for key descriptors and phrases related to how these identities and core were defined, how they developed or changed, and how they were negotiated through the doctoral journey. All these descriptors and phrases were recorded in an Excel matrix and then analyzed using aspects of the constant comparison method (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The Excel matrix had numerous columns. The three identities and the steward aspect of core sense of self appeared first. Next, columns were added for how each identity and the core was defined by participants. Columns were also created for explanations of how each identity was developed, transformed, integrated, and balanced in light of other identities and the core. Strategies used to integrate and negotiate various identities, giving rise to persistence were also documented. Consistent with identity literature (e.g., Abes et al., 2007) and Corbin and Strauss' (2015) systematic grounded theory procedures, it became quickly apparent that the identities developed and changed within a social process. Thus, in the Excel matrix, a column was added to provide more information about the context for the development of these strategies and processes. Identities were analyzed one by one via open coding, completing the columns. Notes on patterns were analyzed until main or axial categories were derived, which were found to directly influence the central or concept of identity development and intersection that gave rise to persistence. Through the process of integration, categories were linked around the core category and depicted via an integrative diagram (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The diagram was then used to develop a narrative explaining how women doctoral students develop their academic identity, intersect their multiple identities around their core sense of self, and persist unto doctoral candidacy and completion. Given the nature of grounded theory research and the emphasis on memoing and constant comparison of data, our initial analyses generated findings that were used to inform additional data collection and analysis. To ensure trustworthiness of this analysis, two of the researchers individually coded the data and identified categories. The researchers discussed the coding throughout the process and came to consensus at each phase of coding.



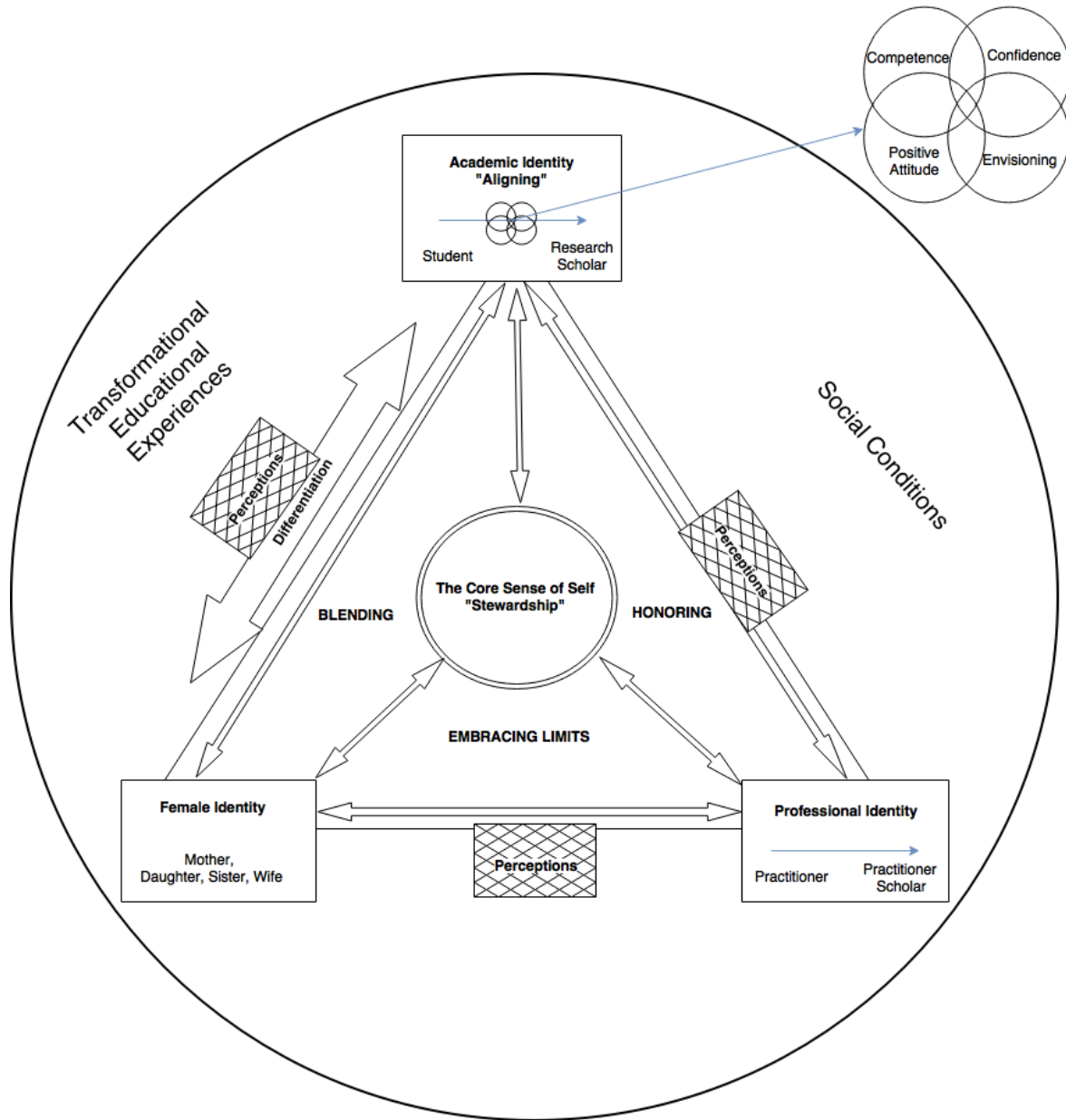


Figure 1. Women Doctoral Student Multiple Identity Model (Adapted from Jones & McEwen, 2000).

## THE MODEL

A model was formulated based on data analysis and interpretation to describe the online EdD student's academic identity trajectory during the doctoral journey and the process by which she intersects her multiple identities, which ultimately gives rise to her persistence (see Figure 1). This model begins by demonstrating how a woman moves from student to scholar, which was defined as an expert in an area of study who creates and disseminates knowledge for academic or practical purposes. Key themes included the internal elements of (a) *competence in research*, (b) *confidence to conduct research*, (c) *positive attitude toward research*, and (d) *envisioning of self as a motherscholar or womanscholar* as well as the behavior of *aligning*. The model also demonstrates how academic identity development intersects with the core sense of self as steward and other identities (i.e., female, namely described as mother

and wife, and professional/practitioner) is supported by *transformational educational experiences*, *social conditions*, and *perceptions of social conditions*, as well as the process of *differentiation* and the use of *personal strategies*. Each of these themes are defined and elaborated on below through the voice of the participants.

### ***THE ACADEMIC IDENTITY TRAJECTORY: MOVING FROM STUDENT TO SCHOLAR***

Corroborating persistence literature (Tinto, 1997) and identity research (Kogan 2000; Nasir & Saxe, 2003; Sweitzer, 2009) findings acknowledge that the academic identity trajectory for women who are mothers or desire to be mothers is both individual and social; the narratives of the women in this study revealed that the successful transformation from student to scholar involves personal and institutional factors and the interaction between the two. Fifteen of the seventeen participants described their development from a student to a scholar as dependent upon all four of the following elements: (a) *competence in research*, (b) *confidence to conduct research*, (c) *positive attitude toward research*, and (d) *envisioning of self as a motherscholar or womanscholar*.

During the doctoral process, a woman gains the relevant skills and knowledge to perform research (e.g., *competence in research*). These skills and knowledge are usually gained early in the doctoral journey as she chooses to fully participate in research-related coursework and co-curricular opportunities. For example, when asked to describe her identity transformation from student to scholar, Linda reflected, “I think it was very much because the coursework in the doctoral program, especially the coursework that taught me about research and how to integrate it into practice.” She noted however, that “you’re responsible for so much of your own learning” and, in line with the literature, becoming an autonomous and then self-directed learner (Ponton, 2014) during the course work was key in her trajectory. One noted participation in communities of practice helped to increase competence in research, “I gained an understanding of what all this research stuff was about as I learned more and more through classes and discussions with peers in my Facebook group.” Yet, another participant found opportunities to join a faculty in professional development activities as key to gaining competence, “I began realizing that research was not as scary as I thought when Dr. . . . invited me to do a study with her.”

As a woman progresses in her doctoral journey and takes advantage of opportunities to make her research visible (e.g., class presentations, professional workshops for colleagues, conference presentations, and publications) and in turn gains recognition of research ability by a valued member of the academic institution, usually a woman mentor, her *confidence to conduct research* is cultivated. Jennifer, for instance, said, “It was very helpful to seek opportunities to publish and present with [faculty] as I learned to research.” Patricia explained the importance of her dissertation chair’s feedback on her conference presentation and its role in helping her to begin seeing herself as a capable scholar, “She treats me like a fellow researcher. And I thought, okay, I . . . [can be] a researcher. . . Research is good.” The more opportunities a women engages in, the more her competence and confidence develops.

This confidence, similar to Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy and Fishbein and Ajzen’s (2010) capacity, is the belief that one has the ability to conduct research and eventually be a scholar. As a woman’s competence and confidence grows, she develops a *positive attitude toward research* (e.g., Ashley and Marcia expressed a value of learning and a pleasure in intellectual processes required for assignments and coursework, “I am a life-long learner and classwork, both the theory and the research, are stimulating.”), or a favorable disposition toward research that includes an interest in doing research and the value of research (see Gelso, Mallinckrodt, & Judge, 1996) as a useful tool for knowledge creation, practice, and advocacy or “stewardship.”

The envisioning of self as a scholar is a consequence of ongoing opportunities to reinforce skills, knowledge, visibility, and recognition. A woman begins seeing ways to engage in behaviors of a scholar (e.g., investigating problems, establishing best practices for the profession through research, publishing in journals, sharing research with professionals via workshops). However, the primary av-

venue by which a woman begins *envisioning of herself as a motherscholar or womanscholar*, developing a picture of her identity as a scholar intersecting with other multiple identities and core self, occurs is through not only observing a woman faculty member who models the scholar identity but by intentionally engaging in a relationship with “strong female faculty,” who the woman student sees balancing multiple identities and deems is successful at balancing the multiple identities. Emily explained this, “My dissertation chair was truly the first female scholar, truly the first I met.” She went on to expound that her chair’s modeling, joy and passion for research, and critical critique of Emily’s dissertation were key to her development as a scholar and motivation for scholarship. Notably, her chair’s recognition of her as a scholar and nomination of her dissertation for a research award as well as development of a personal and collegial relationship were critical. Maria echoed,

I think is very powerful when we see and are mentored by other women that have navigated their own doctoral studies especially as wives, as moms, and have published scholarly research. I am very thankful for those kind of faculty members in my program and being introduced to them early was very helpful. They can give very real encouragement along the way, and it’s nice to know that they’ve been where we are at. It was very helpful to seek opportunities to publish and present with them. I learned so much. And, right after I had my daughter, my dissertation chairperson was right there to say “yeah I had a daughter too when I was in that stage of my research” . . . That was vital for me. And, so I think having those connections to other women is really helpful.

While this academic trajectory is presented linearly, the four elements (i.e., competence, confidence, positive attitude, and envisioning) a woman experiences are inextricably connected, each interacting throughout the doctoral journey. These elements are developed in the context of *transformational educational experiences*, an institutional condition that, if embraced by the students, supports the academic identity trajectory of the doctoral candidate (e.g., “my female mentor,” “well developed research courses aimed at preparing me for dissertation,” “my chair, who is a woman and invited me to write”). They are mediated by *aligning*, or the actively taking advantage of these opportunities. In other words, for a woman, the mere presence of the transformational educational experiences does not guarantee actual competence, confidence, positive attitude, and envisioning. Active engagement in opportunities is necessary for development. For, a woman’s development as a scholar, and ultimately a *motherscholar* or *womenscholar*, is directly proportionate her engagement in development opportunities and scholarly relationships. Emphasizing the importance of the personal agency in seeking and maximizing opportunities for growth within the educational context, Jennifer explained, “students also need to seek opportunities and relationships, too.” Emily said, “You cannot sit back and wait for faculty or peers to pursue you. I sought online meetings with faculty and created peer study groups to help me through the statistics course.”

### ***THE INTERSECTION: MULTIPLE IDENTITIES AND THE CORE SENSE OF SELF***

The model further demonstrates that as a woman moves through the academic identity trajectory, she seeks to intersect her academic identity with other identities, namely her identity as a female, especially “mother,” a professional, and her core sense of self as steward. The doctoral journey is acknowledged as a “transformative process” as a woman transforms personally (e.g., “self-confidence,” “self-awareness,” “increased independence,” “stronger woman of faith”), behaviorally (“doing research,” “reflective practitioner” “more communicative”), affectively (“passion,” “hope”), and cognitively (“value research,” “think more deeply”). The development of her academic identity causes transformation in her other identities and vice versa. For example, as a woman gains confidence and competence as a researcher, her professional identity is informed and she begins seeing herself as not merely a practitioner but a *practitioner-researcher*. Confidence gained within the academic identity also translates into who she sees herself as a woman and mother. As she becomes more self-confident as an academic, she experiences confidence in who she is as a woman and, as one participant noted, “better balance and insight as a mom.” Therefore, the academic identity trajectory from student to scholar is moderated by *intersection*, the ongoing process of interconnecting multiple identities, namely the iden-

tities salient during the doctoral journey, with the core. As each identity intersects it is influenced to some degree depending on the amount of overlap or permeability by the intersection. It transforms. Moreover, rather than developing multiple identities in isolation, the *valuing* and developing of an academic identity only takes place as a woman sees meaning in developing it, and in turn intersecting it with other primary identities, namely woman and mother, and core self. The mother identity however is primary.

### **Professional identity**

The *professional identity* is defined as “the sense of being a professional” (Paterson, Higgs, Wilcox, & Villeneuve, 2002, p. 2) and is a salient identity for a woman during the doctoral journey. It was noted as salient by all 17 participants in their life maps and discussed it in the interview. This identity encompassed the functions and attributes participants described in relationship to their roles as professionals, generally within the field of education.

The data illustrated that as a woman begins developing her academic identity through the doctoral process and intersecting the academic and professional identity, this in turn transforms who she is as a professional. It affects her practice and changes how she thinks about it. For example, Lauren explained that she developed reflective thinking behaviors about her profession and developed a better understanding of how research improves practice, “When I go to use a strategy, I now ask, ‘is this evidenced-based?’ If not, I need to be researching this. Too often teachers blindly adopt this strategy or that strategy without asking if it is effective. Blind adoption can actually harm our kids.” Similarly, through her doctoral program, Madison developed a value for critically analyzing the literature to address practical problems she and her colleagues faced in the school environment. She discussed this during her interview and on her life map illustrated her identity of the “in-house researcher” at her school.

### **The core sense of self as steward**

A deep connection between the core value of stewardship and academic and professional identities emerged as salient through analysis of the interviews and life maps. As a woman progresses in her doctoral program and develops as scholar, she sees research as a vehicle for altruism; conducting research was “part of good stewardship,” as Jennifer said. This idea was expounded by over half of the participants (n=14) who described a desire to do research for dissemination in scholarly, peer-reviewed and practitioner forums consumed and used by not only academics but also practitioners and policy makers who worked directly with children and adult students. Doing research was seen as a tool to “advocate,” “contribute,” “serve,” and “make a difference.” Thus, for the women interviewed, their interest in pursuing and, for some, developing as scholars was less about the title or producing knowledge for their own promotion (albeit different than what is conventional in academia), it was about altruism, stewardship, and advocacy. The core of stewardship permeated the meaning they attributed to the degree and their development as scholars seemed to serve as a factor in their persistence, as Patricia explained that her desire to develop as an academic and finish her degree was to advocate for “students to persist and get degrees.” Thus, stewardship is a salient element of the core for females. Academic identity development and persistence, especially for those that allowed deep permeable intersection between their cores an identity as a scholar hinged not upon traditional accolades within the academic community (e.g., desire to pursue tenured careers, acceptance of publications in tier 1 journals). What was most important, if not essential, for these women was to receive recognition for their altruistic commitment in conducting research.

### **The female and “mother” identity**

Descriptors of the female identity for a woman pursuing a doctoral degree may include the following, as they did for the women in this study: “daughter,” “nurturer,” “caregiver,” and “women of faith,” “wife,” “heterosexual women,” and “women of color.” However, for a woman who is a moth-

er or desires to be a mother, “motherhood” is the most salient aspect of the female identity. This was clearly articulated by the women of the study who most often described during the interviews that their primary sense of being a female was being a mother. A few of the participants used circles and lines on their life map to demonstrate the circular influence of her motherhood on her academic identity and vice versa. Thus, for a woman, who is a mother or desires to be one, her identity as a mother influences and is influenced by academic identity development. For all the women in this study, this identity was primary and would not be sacrificed for any other aspect of who she considered herself to be.

A woman pursuing a doctoral degree is likely to prioritize her identity as a mother. All of the participants, whether stated overtly during the interview or evidenced in their actions, prioritized their identity as a mother. “My identity as a mother [came] first” was a phrase that was repeated by many.

Being a mother is also closely associated with a woman’s pursuit of the doctoral degree and motivation to persist. This was clearly illustrated in the interview responses of the participants. The choice to honor academic identity by starting the doctorate was often motivated by the participant’s identity as a caregiver (financial provision, security, or expanded opportunities for children), and motherhood served as a central reason to finish. Sarah explained this as she reflected upon a marathon she ran,

A year and a half ago, I signed up for a marathon. And I never really paid attention to how much my kids look at me and see what I’m doing. I think it was like mile 18, I had two blisters blown and I didn’t think I was going to make it. I called my husband. . . I was like, “I just don’t think I can go on.” He put it on speaker, and the kids [said] “We’re on our way mom, we’ll be right there.” I’m like in tears. . . . *I can’t not finish. The dissertation and the degree are the same. They have to see me finish this* [italics added].

### ***INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND INTERSECTION***

As development of the academic identity occurs and intersects with multiple identities and the core sense of self, a woman experiences not only positive development within each identity but “growing pains.” The interview and life map data supported that as a woman seeks to balance responsibilities associated with multiple identities, unpleasant emotions and tension are experienced. Guilt and fear were common themes that emerged in almost all of the individual interviews ( $n = 14$ ). Again and again the acknowledgement was that “There’s always guilt.” Many even questioned if developing as a scholar and pursuing a doctoral degree was worth it. For example, Emma asked, “Am I trying to get other people to raise [my daughter]? [I am] very conflict[ed] . . . Why I was doing this?” Cognitive dissonance and dissatisfaction also ensued when these women did not feel they could meet faculty expectations or sacrificed an “A” on an assignment when trying to balance multiple identities.

Corroborating identity research (Kogan 2000; Sweitzer, 2009; Tan & Barton, 2008), the data demonstrated that unpleasant emotions and mental struggles faced by a woman as she strives to manage tensions and to form and intersect multiple identities requires both social and personal processes. This development and intersection of identities supported by the process of *differentiation* and the use of personal cognitive (e.g., goal setting), metacognitive (e.g., self-talk), behavioral (e.g., time management), and social-emotional (e.g., talking with a friend, going to counseling) strategies. More specifically, the personal strategies of *honoring*, *blending*, and *embracing limits* need to be employed for healthy relationships (e.g., mother/child; husband/wife, daughter/parents), optimal academic identity development, intersection of identities, and persistence to occur.

#### **Personal strategies for intersecting identities**

A woman pursuing a doctoral degree employs personal strategies to intersect her multiple identities and core with the aim of optimal well-being and functioning. Participants’ life map illustrations and words illuminated three strategies: *honoring*, *blending*, and *embracing limits*. The women who served as

participants in this study exhibited strong identities as females, acknowledging their role as mother as primary, while also taking great pride in their professional and academic identities. They honored the different aspects of their selves that often seemed incompatible by focusing on developing identities at different times. Each participant discussed honoring all aspects of herself but defined time differently. For some, time was defined as segments of the day. Participants came up with creative ways to carve out specific times in their day through prioritizing and good time management (e.g., “waking daily at 3 a.m. to complete responsibilities as a student so I could complete my responsibilities as a mother when my kids woke up at 7 a.m.”) to honor multiple identities. For most, time was defined as a stage or season in their lives as only a few females felt that they could concurrently engage fully in their multiple identities. Some honored the identity of mother first (delay doctorate); some honored professional and academic identities first (delay motherhood); some stepped away from their profession to balance female and academic identities. Olivia explained how she had taken a leave of absence from her professional role to persist in her degree and care for her parents:

My mother had a stroke in June last year ... I have just been trying to juggle my schooling and job with the caretaking ... So, I decided not to go back to school- my teaching job- in the fall ... I needed to honor my desire to become a scholar in the field and I could not neglect my parents.

In contrast to the idea of “having it all” at once, participants’ views suggest that this idea only makes women feel disillusioned and like a failure when she realizes she can’t. To “have it all,” a woman needs a long-term perspective that allows her to be content with prioritizing the development of and fully engaging in certain identities in specific seasons of life.

Similar to the idea of “not having it all,” all participants clearly articulated that achieving equilibrium or perfection in all areas of life (e.g., academically, professionally, and personally) was an elusive concept; however, they could “blend” or integrate their domestic, career, academic, faith, and community in an albeit “messy” but “mostly satisfying way.” Blending was defined differently for participants. Some sought to compartmentalize their identities (e.g., “not being on the computer during my kids waking hours”) while others allowed them to overlap (e.g., “taking a daughter to class,” “reading articles during a son’s soccer game”). For each participant, the boundaries they set between identities and the associated roles and responsibilities differed. There did not appear to be an ideal permeability or spillover. However, the level of stress and guilt experienced appeared to be proportionate the ability to set clear boundaries and blend identities in a manner consistent with those boundaries.

For all, blending as well as honoring required the “right coping mechanisms” (e.g., self-talk, organization, daily goals, and time management). Accepting that sometimes the “all” is not always obtainable within the desired timeframe was another key element that enabled participants to intersect their identities and persist in their doctoral journeys. Adjusting and reevaluating expectations for roles, going from unrealistic to realistic was essential in successfully negotiating all identities and persisting. Limits had to be acknowledged and accepted. For example, Emily noted, “I finally wrote myself a pass last year that just said ‘I’m not going to be able to juggle things this next year and that’s kind of the way it is.’” All participants also accepted practical limitations. For example, most selected a primarily distance education second generation EdD program because it maximized opportunity to further their professional identity (remain in their profession) and not destabilize dimensions of their identity as a female - a mother, a daughter (not uproot children or move from loved ones [e.g., parents] needing their care).

### ***DIFFERENTIATION***

*Differentiation*, the separating of one’s intellectual and emotional functioning from that of the family (Bowen, 1978; Sabatelli & Anderson, 1991), occurs as part of the doctoral process and is necessary essential to the development and intersection of a woman’s multiple identities. In the interviews, this was often explained as a source of tension between the doctoral candidate and the family. For example, Grace explained that prior to the doctoral journey, part of her identity as a female was wrapped

up in pleasing her family of origin, namely her parents, who were accustomed to her “seeing to their needs immediately when requested.” Yet, as the doctoral coursework demanded more of her time and emotional energy, she needed to begin to redefine her identity as a female and let her siblings “step up” to assist with care for her parents. Focusing on school challenged the status quo, which resulted in some tension that she needed to address and negotiate. Others explained how the doctoral journey resulted in cognitive growth (e.g., thinking more analytically, more reflective, more communicative) as well as increasing confidence as a woman. Maria demonstrated her increased confidence in herself as a woman on her life map using stick figures that got bigger as she progressed in the doctoral journey. Emily described in her interview that as a result of her growth her husband also had to develop, which ultimately resulted not only in her persistence but a stronger bond between them, “As my identity has developed, so has his. And, it’s brought us closer together even though it’s been the hardest years ever.”

### ***CONTEXTS FOR IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT, INTERSECTION, AND PERSISTENCE***

Further, as the model depicts, identity development and intersection is not merely personal for woman, but social. Identity development and intersection is supported or thwarted by *social conditions* and *perceptions of social conditions*, including *perceived social support* (i.e., perception of support from significant individuals in academic identity trajectory), *perceived social norms* (i.e., perceived social pressure or perceived value of academic identity and behaviors in response to social norms), and *actual social support* (i.e., actual support from significant individuals or the academic institution in academic identity trajectory).

*Actual social and familial support* during the doctoral journey and the *perception of the valuing of the academic identity trajectory* from significant individuals is central as a woman develops as a scholar and seeks to intersect her multiple identities in an optimal way. These constructs are clearly seen in the interview transcripts and life map illustrations. The women described themselves at their cores as “self-reliant,” “independent,” and “driven,” yet they recognized that familial understanding and emotional support was essential. Eight participants acknowledged that it was a family member or spouse who helped them realize they needed to “slow down” and “lean on somebody else sometimes” if they were going to complete their doctoral studies while also honoring their female and professional roles and responsibilities. Moreover, every participant who was married noted that spouses took on responsibilities (e.g., “He took on a lot of the cooking staying on top of the laundry. He gave me the break that I needed to do this.”) Extended family, friends, and even communities assisted with childcare and cooking.

Though there was a tendency to hide academic identity in outer social circles (colleagues, early in dating relationships), with close friends and family academic visibility served as a motivator to develop as a scholar and to persist. Valuing of an academic identity and recognition of academic success by meaningful others (e.g., children, spouse, parents, extended family, friends) was central to intersecting an academic identity with other identities. For example, Emma spoke about the satisfaction she gleaned from her family’s recognition of her success during her doctoral studies:

My getting this degree has been a good thing. You know, my family really encourages me. When I get an A on a paper or a presentation accepted at a conference, I go to my kids. They tease me about it . . . being a scholarly mom. This makes me satisfied in my performance as a mom and scholar.

Others, such as Olivia, leaned on friends and colleagues for support and recognition, “my scholarly friend, helps encourage me in this doctoral journey and inspires me to research.”

For a woman, *perceived socio-cultural messages and social norms* can motivate and sometimes discourage academic identity development and its intersection with other identities. For example, about half the participants ( $n=9$ ) noted that stereotypes and expectations about females in the academic and social settings added pressure and frustration (e.g., “it’s okay if you don’t finish your doctorate as a mom,”

“do what’s best for your child,” “it’s not womanly”), which for most consequently resulted in motivating them toward identity development and degree completion. Mary explained how societal expectations of females, albeit stressful, motivated her in her academic identity development and helped her to succeed:

I do think the expectations [in higher education] are a little different for females, and that we often, sometimes we feel like we have something to prove to others, maybe we do and maybe we don’t. . . . Proving myself as a woman who could be an academic was a motivator, but also emotionally draining.

*Supportive elements within the educational institution*, in addition to the transformational educational experiences discussed above, are also as necessary in order a woman to be successful in persisting and intersecting her identities the data demonstrated. Participants identified these supportive elements as practical supports including flexible, online course offerings; faculty understanding about late or delayed submissions due to female or professional responsibilities; and varied hours (e.g., late night, weekends) of support services (e.g., library, advising, etc.). Again and again, all 17 participants noted that selecting a primarily online program maximized opportunities to further their professional identity (remain in their profession) and dimensions of their female identity (not uproot children or move from loved ones [e.g., parents] needing their care). When participants reflected on ways the university could better support them in their persistence and identity development, nine of them acknowledged that the culture of higher education is dominated by androcentric values, which makes it difficult for women who are “relationally-oriented” and “emotionally-attuned” to gain the type of relational and affective support needed for success. As emotionlessness is strongly associated with masculinity and emotional expression is not valued in the culture of higher academia (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003.), it is not surprising that a lack of emotional support for difficult times, or even jubilation over victories, was noted by participants. Nor was it surprising that a prominent recommendation from participants was to offer counseling and support groups to talk about identity struggles and the tensions related to intersecting multiple identities. For example, Grace explained, “I’m relationship oriented and relationship driven, and it’s hard to form a relationship online. So, I would say if there is a way to figure out how to get these women in relationship with each other, to support each other.” Gendered communication encounters imbued with masculine norms was another issue several participants identified. Patricia explained how her male dissertation chair’s silence (i.e., absence of feedback and affirmation) as well as tone, whether intentional or unintentional, lead her to almost quit the program. Eventually, Patricia secured another dissertation chair and described the stark contrast in communication styles between her previous male and new female chair. Though her female chair had equal or higher expectations, the affirmation and encouragement Patricia received from her was central to her development as a scholar and her ability to finish her dissertation. Lauren concurred that females need a personal and encouraging approach, “[I]t would be good if professors could understand how women are wired. . . . We [are] a bit more personal. . . .” The offering of child and parent care stipend was also mentioned by at least twelve of the women.

### ***RUPTURES***

Finally, data analysis and interpretation of the data also revealed that woman, like a few participants ( $n = 3$ ), can experience a *rupture*, a discontinuing of a role within an identity or a disruption in an identity trajectory. This does not mean that a woman does not persist through the degree. Rather, consistent with what previous research illuminated (e.g., Middleton, 2001; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2015), a rupture occurs in the female or academic identity. For example, one participants’ interviews indicated that the transition from student to scholar did not take place, “I will do it. . . . *Tell me what to do, and I’ll do it* [italics added].” This “tell me what to do” approach to the dissertation is reflective of a candidate who has not transitioned from an autonomous to a self-directed learner (Ponton, 2014), a transition necessary to develop a scholar identity. What distinguished participants who developed scholar identities from those who did not was demonstrating personal *agency* or *aligning* that is, “selecting learning opportunities from available environments” (Ponton, 2014, p. 98).



While the focus of the study was on success, reported ruptures also included the discontinuance in the role as a wife, a role associated with female identity, in order to finish her transformation from student to scholar and persist in her doctoral program; this occurred when her husband failed to allow her to transform in who she was as a woman and differentiate. These ruptures need to be investigated in future studies.

## DISCUSSION

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Previous study has examined the role conflict that women, especially those who are mothers, experience during their doctoral journeys (Haynes et al., 2012; Wolf-Wendel, & Ward, 2015). Although these studies provide rich results and implications for practice, the process of academic identity development for woman and its intersection with other identities remained a gap in the literature. As such, this study generated a novel theoretical model to explain women's academic identity progression from students to scholars and its intersection with other salient identities, especially mother, and the core sense of self in alignment with other identity theory (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Data analysis revealed that a woman doctoral students' transformation from student to research scholar is dependent upon becoming *competent in research*, *confident in conducting research*, *developing a positive attitude toward research*, and *envisioning of self as a motherscholar or womanscholar*, which is made possible by active engagement or *alignment* in what the researchers termed *transformational educational experiences* (e.g., coursework aimed at dissertation preparation, mentored scholarship opportunities, a relationship with a woman role model). Her development as a scholar was directly proportionate to her engagement in development opportunities and scholarly relationships. Mentorship between a woman who has successfully negotiated her identity between the multiple identities and a doctoral student who is working through these identity tensions is an essential transformational educational experience. For mentorship can provide an avenue for the student to fully share her "voice," which Gilligan (2004) theorized maintains balance in the psyche.

The *valuing* and developing of an academic identity only takes place when a woman sees meaning in developing it and, in turn, intersecting it with other primary identities, namely female and mother, and core self. If the identity is too different from the core or other identities, it could be abandoned. The only exception, or non-negotiable identity, is that of mother. However, most often as a woman seeks to intersect her academic identity with other identities, namely her identity as a female, especially "mother," similar what Stevens-Long, Schapiro, and McClintock (2012) suggest, transformation takes place. As each identity intersects it is influenced in some manner with some *level of permeability* by the intersection. The more permeability of the intersection, the more transformation and moderation of one identity of another.

The energies and resources needed for identity development and intersection are finite, meaning that as a woman focuses on and nurtures her academic identity, she needs to have the necessary supports (internal and external) to develop as a scholar and see this identity as compatible with others (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Validating identity research purporting that the nature of identity development and intersection is both social and personal (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Sweitzer, 2009). Identity development and intersection was supported or thwarted by social conditions and perceptions of social conditions as well as educational conditions. Personal strategies of *honoring*, *blending*, and *embracing limits* were employed. The motivation for these personal strategies was fueled by the core sense of self as a *steward*. For the participants, stewardship involved accepting limitations and investing in identities at different times of the day and even different seasons, allowing the candidates to maximize their efforts and find satisfaction and fulfillment in roles. Whether isolating identities within a day (e.g., mom during the day, student/scholar when children are sleeping) or choosing to focus on developing specific identities in specific seasons (e.g., delaying motherhood in favor of doctoral studies or delaying doctoral studies until children are older, or delaying until well established in a career) having a "long term" perspective and "embracing limitations" allowed participants to intersect and honor multiple identities, representing a complex meaning-making process in participants.

Jones and McEwen (2000) defined *meaning-making structures* as “organizational assumptions that determine whether identity is constructed through external expectations or an internally generated sense of self” (p. 619). Participants with a more internally generated sense of self demonstrated increased agency during coursework (e.g., seeking out mentors with research scholar identities) and their narratives indicated a transformation from student to research scholar in the dissertation phase. Further, meaning-making is necessary for individuals to filter contextual messages and develop a more complex identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Through their research, Abes and Jones (2004) determined that meaning-making is the defining factor in how contextual factors shape the content of identity, depending on the individual’s internal satisfaction or dissatisfaction of how this context influences their identity. The ability to filter contextual messages was evident as participants discussed developing identities that went beyond familial or cultural expectations (e.g., “dutiful daughter”), redefining for themselves, and those around them, what it means to be a female. These findings diverge from previous research suggesting that judgments and stereotypes in social and academic settings often result in undue pressure that leads to underperformance and isolation (Steele, 1997). However, this makes sense in light of Fisher and Margolis’ (2002) research on females studying computer science demonstrating that rejection of the discipline’s or culture’s dominant norms is associated with persistence. Meaning-making capacity, as displayed by the participants, incorporated a “richer portrayal of not only *what* relationships students perceive among their personal and social identities, but also *how* they come to perceive them as they do” (Abes et al., 2007, p. 13).

The findings from this study have significant implications for doctoral faculty and program administrators in second generation EdD programs who have the ability to facilitate development of a more advanced and internally generated senses of self in female students through providing or facilitating a range of structures and supports that assist students in developing their identities as research scholars, ultimately, fostering doctoral persistence. However, before the researchers discuss the meaning for these populations, the limitations of this study are discussed.

### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

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While efforts were made to conduct a robust study taking a holistic look at the construction and intersection of a scholar identity with other identities, this study has limitations. Only heterosexual women who desired to have children or had children from second generation or practitioner focused EdD programs from a few universities were included in the sample, limiting transferability of findings to other populations and settings. Findings may only reflect this specific population and context. In addition, the primary sample was students in doctoral candidacy demonstrating evidence of persistence, not all had successfully defended at the conclusion of the study. Although these limitations exist, the researchers believe that this study is an important first step in better understanding female identity development through the doctoral process and lays the foundation for future research. For example, research is needed with women doctoral candidates in other disciplines from other institutions, and from regions of the country. Additional research is needed on women who choose not to have children as well as those in lesbian relationships.

This study revealed that as a candidate evolves from student (consumer of knowledge) to scholar (producer of knowledge), she is assuming a new identity, with new skills, knowledge, and values. While building this identity, the woman doctoral student may develop new goals (e.g., to further research on her dissertation or related topic), career aspirations (e.g., transition from employment in K-12 to higher education), or feel the need to redefine herself within her family (e.g., from helpmate to partner). Based on Papero (1990), Didericksen, Edwards, Wetchler, and Walker (2014) defined differentiation as “understanding the balance between individuality and togetherness, while minimizing emotional reactivity to stressful or anxiety-provoking situations” (p. 56). While this process of differentiation was identified, these researchers do not believe it was fully explored. A more in-depth understanding of this process is needed. Ruptures was another area not fully explored or saturated. More research is needed to understand the specific contexts and factors leading to both relationship fractures and the disruption in the academic identity trajectory.

## IMPLICATIONS

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Findings provide numerous implications for doctoral program personnel. These study findings also provide significant implications for transforming academia to provide a more supportive socio-cultural context for women doctoral students, increasing persistence and fostering the transformation from student to scholar. Findings highlight the need for more women faculty role models in higher education. While *competence* and *confidence* in research skills can be developed through coursework, and men and women faculty alike can model a *positive attitude toward research* – elements necessary in developing a research scholar identity, *envisioning self as a research scholar* was possible when female candidates had the opportunity to interact with a female mentor who modeled the behaviors of a scholar, while also visibly honoring her female identities by demonstrating commitment to her spouse and children, rather than making their role in her life invisible, a behavior many believe is necessary for success in academia (Lynch, 2008). As faculty, women or men, become more transparent about their own identities and model for candidates how they blend and intersect their multiple identities, the culture of academia might slowly change and recognize the value-added from honoring and intersecting multiple identities. To increase the number of women faculty mentors in academia, program administrators can recruit, retain, and support and encourage parental visibility through developing structures and supports for faculty with families.

Faculty and administrators can foster persistence through understanding, as these findings exemplified, that at the core of each EdD woman doctoral candidate is a strong sense of self as a *steward*. Given the women candidates' emphasis on stewardship, faculty should design coursework to allow students to intersect assignments with professional goals and practices, and support empirically and theoretically grounded dissertations aimed at not only solving problems of practice but also aimed at advocacy.

Course and program designs should also account for women candidates' need and desire for relationship with peers and faculty. Thus, universities, especially those with online programs, need to find ways to support relationship development among women students and faculty and to increase opportunities for social and academic integration, factors associated with persistence (Tinto, 1993). Further, faculty mentors, advisors, and dissertation chairs should be cognizant that the literature on gender and communication demonstrates that a common female communication pattern is affirmation seeking and giving (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Eisenbach, 2013).

For doctoral students, there are many personal as well as social implications derived from the study findings. Consistent with previous research (Eisenbach, 2013; Lott, Gardner, & Powers, 2009), spousal support is a significant factor associated with doctoral persistence, and partners need to have candid conversations about their roles in the home and be aware that if the wife returning to school results in role reversal in the relationship or differentiation this may result in marital stress that will need to be resolved or different roles and responsibilities will need to be negotiated. Partners need to develop strategies to address and manage the added stress (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2015) and be prepared to grow and develop together.

Moreover, familial integration is essential to persistence (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, Swezey, & Wicks, 2014) and partners need to collaboratively determine the best season to begin and the most optimal schedule (daily, weekly, etc.) for supporting academic identity development while balancing other female and professional identities and responsibilities.

While supporting a doctoral candidate requires sacrifice from spouses and children (Eisenbach, 2013; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012), women also need to sacrifice to intersect their academic identity with other identities. This involves managing and perhaps even adjusting expectations regarding their pace or redefining their own standard of perfection. Candidates can use *self-talk* to give themselves “permission” to slow down and most importantly, to realize that they are not expected to “have and do it all,” but to recognize that it is acceptable to have a “long term view,” selectively determining which identity(ies) will take “center stage” in any given season.

While engaged in the doctoral process, females need to recognize how their identities inform and intersect. For example, commitment to transform or ameliorate problems observed in her profession may provide the candidate the motivation and passion needed to persist in the dissertation phase of the journey, the most challenging stage (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). A desire to model commitment and tenacity to her children may also motivate the woman candidate to persist to completion. Additional supports include parents, friends, social groups (e.g., religious groups or military wives), and doctoral peers.

### CONCLUSION

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A woman with identities related to who she is as a female (wife, mother, caregiver) and professional (educator, administrator) begins her doctoral degree embarking on a journey that requires the transformation of a familiar academic identity, that of a *student*, into the unfamiliar identity of a *scholar*. Unfortunately, during this journey, many women believe that they must choose between a female identity, namely being a mother, and strong academic identity, failing to see how they can be integrated or enhanced and bring even greater fulfillment and purpose to the other. While this study documented the fact that energies and resources needed to make this transformation and intersection are finite, a woman who focuses on and nurtures her academic identity, engaging the necessary social supports and personal strategies, can develop as a scholar and see this identity as compatible with others (Jones & McEwen, 2000). She can successfully complete her EdD.

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