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The intersection of motherhood and academia as conceptualized by female doctoral students

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THE INTERSECTION OF MOTHERHOOD AND ACADEMIA AS CONCEPTUALIZED BY
FEMALE DOCTORAL STUDENTS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Educational Leadership, Research, & Counseling

by
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May 2013
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have dreamt about writing the acknowledgement section since I began this dissertation journey. I knew making it to this section meant I made it through. Well here I am. This last half decade I have dedicated to this completing degree has been an amazing time of personal growth. I have a greater understanding of who am I as a Black woman and what I can contribute to scholarship. I have no other choice than to thank Jesus Christ for being my Lord and Savior and the most consistent force of motivation, focus, and strength in my life. Proverbs 9:10 says, “Knowing God results in every other kind of understanding.” This process has brought me closer to Him than I’ve ever been before and having this amazing spiritual relationship with Him is everything I need in my life. For everything else I accomplish as a result of this process, I will be indebted to Him. And if I nothing comes from this degree, this moment will be more than sufficient. Next, I have to thank my parents, Charlie Riser and Brenda Thomas. They taught me how to read at three years old and since then they have pressed me to live a life that exceeds my own expectations. I could not be where I am today with these two people who have prayed for me and lifted me up without ceasing for 28 years. They have instilled in me that everything is within my grasp if I work hard enough and make the necessary sacrifices to get where I want to go. I also thank my family. I have a God-ordained heritage of strength and perseverance that a pull from every day. Next, I have to mention by name a few people who have been there for me through this process and every other life moment: The Spring 2005 line of the Royal Rho Epsilon Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta International Sorority; Cerise Edmonds; Toshiba Johnson, LaShonda Woods; and Chester Griffin. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart for being a part of my life and a part of this journey of my life. I love you all so much and thank God for you every day.
Next, I must to recognize the all the faculty and staff at Louisiana State University who have had a hand in propelling me to where I am. Thank you to my dissertation chair, Dr. Brian Bourke for dedicating so much of his time to my journey. I hope to repay you be exceeding your expectations as I transition to the field. I also want to thank my dissertation committee for signing on to this project and sacrificing their time: Dr. Roland Mitchell, Dr. Laura Choate, Dr. Kim MacGregor, and Dr. Emerald Roider. I would like to thank all of the students in my program as well as other programs on campus who I have befriended along the way. To all those I have studied with, written with, laughed with, and complained with, I thank you wholeheartedly. Finally, I would like to thank the six participants in this study for being so candid and open with me. I hope I have presented your words and thoughts in a way at honors you. I have been most humbled by working with such a strong, intelligent, spiritual, and determined group of women.

I have one more person to thank. Two years ago I randomly met a man named Andrew Broussard. Two years later, I am getting ready to wear his last name. Although I started this working on this degree before I met you, I cannot imagine finishing it without you by my side. You have been my best friend, my confidant, my prayer partner, and the person who has pushed me to finish on the days when I would have preferred to take a nap. Thank you for being willing to learn more about critical feminist analysis than you probably will ever need to know. I thank God every day for bringing us together at the right time, for the right reasons, and for the furtherance of His kingdom. Let’s go take over the world.

Peace and Blessings.
PREFACE

Completing this research project was been an incredible experience for me as a woman and as an academic. I’m sure every doctoral student who has sat where I’m sitting has said that. Because it’s true. Mostly likely, it was one of the more strenuous moments they have had, so the fact that they finished in one piece is incredible. But for me, I have encountered truths or as I word them, moments of pristine clarity into whom Shaina really is as a result of this process. I hope that those moments are the academy’s end game in having us complete such a task; to discover our own truths. Even if we never touch the topic again, we have learned how to connect the passion behind their truths to all our future projects and all our future interactions with students. This is where I find myself at this moment. All though I am still living in the moment for my next steps professionally, I have added these experiences to my knapsack and they will translate into every other experience I have. I have finally begun to comprehend what it means to think critically and holistically and to create with responsibility and application.

Even as I worked towards completion of this project, I still felt a sense of disconnect from the material. The more I worked through it, the less connected I felt. I have a relationship with the material because the topic involves me. But there was a lived experience disconnection that didn’t allow me to make a cyclical connection between the literature, the data, the analysis, back to the literature. After all, I wasn’t a female professor so how could I even begin to relate to one. And if I couldn’t relate, how could I predict what I might feel like when I become one. Further, if I could not relate, how could I ask the right questions of the participants that would give birth the very essence of the material I wanted to create. I came to a point where my end game was to complete the steps and finish the paper. What I didn’t allow myself to feel and be burdened by I would no longer be responsible for presenting in the writing. But after I turned in
the document, I began to realize these incredible moments of clarity and understanding of what a mother academic just may go through every day, specifically on a less than stellar day. During these last eight months (August until today) I have been simultaneously been working through and struggling with a few major life activities. I work a full time job and a part time job and sometimes another part time job when I go help my family’s business. I was, of course, collecting data, transcribing the data myself and creating a final product. I am planning my wedding; my eight bridesmaids, eight groomsmen, and 250-guest wedding. I didn’t hire a wedding planner because I thought I could do it all and do it all at the same time. I was unbelievable wrong. Oh, and I’m buying a house right now too because I needed one more thing to deal with. Some days I feel like I’m juggling it all just fine. Then there are days like the one two weeks ago when my boss decided that she needed what was due the next day right away, and that she still needed me to drop everything I was doing to sit in an hour and a half meeting about something that really had nothing to do with me on a day when I really needed that time to finish some last minute edits. I finally escaped the building at 4:29, only to find out that I needed a new tire on the same day that I really needed to leave Lafayette right on time to bring the copies of my dissertation to Baton Rouge. Then someone in my family felt it incredibly necessary to call me at that moment and let me know that something in the wedding planning wasn’t going as swimmingly as they would hope and when I didn’t have the response they were looking for, they were less than thrilled and incredibly vocal about. But somehow I made it through it all and when I woke up the next morning, I had vague connections to the turmoil of the day before. Some days in the last few months I felt like a champion. I worked all day, worked on my dissertation when no one was in the office, then made it home in time to have dinner cooked and laundry done before Andrew walked in the door. Nothing went wrong. And what did go wrong
was something I could handle all by myself. Then there were days, disproportionally more days, when I truly felt like I was going to come unglued. I couldn’t be attentive to every single student’s needs, I couldn’t answer all emails and return all my voicemails in a timely manner and I had to apologize one too many times, and I didn’t write like I wanted to and what I did write was not great. But I had to keep moving because nothing comes of me sitting still, and I had to keep smiling because these are only my problems and the world doesn’t owe me pity. I came home late from work that day and my house was a mess and there were no groceries because I forgot to go shopping. I ran to the grocery store in rush hour traffic to get something to cook. I tried to cook dinner, but I messed it up and had to throw it away. I drove to Popeye’s to pick up some chicken that we really couldn’t afford since I went to the grocery already. As I drove down the street, tears began to stream down my face. All the brave face I wore all day melted away and I felt like an absolute failure. I was overwhelmed, I was burnt out, I had too many responsibilities and there was nothing I could do about it. Everyone needed me in some capacity and I felt like every crumb of my soul was indebted to someone or some job, some wedding list task, or some student. I turned to Andrew to help me fix what I couldn’t fix by myself. Even he, who is my God-assigned helpmate, could only respond to my desperation by saying things like “it’ll get better” or “you can do it”. It wasn’t because he is incapable of sincerity; it is more likely because he truly cannot mirror my emotions because he is not a product of my lived experiences. It was at that moment that I finally felt what it just might be like to be a mother academic. It was at that moment where synthesis finally appeared and the connections I presented in my papers finally had the clarity and personalization I desired. I connected to what it might feel like to be fully aware that you have zero control over what is happening except for the excellence and togetherness you must exude. I began to be broken down by what it might
feel like to try not to run over any students walking on campus as you zip off campus to pick up a sick child all while calling everyone you know to see if they can help you out and babysit because you have to get back to campus to teach a class or two and sit through a mundane committee meeting and smile like nothing in the world is wrong and deal with students and other faculty members and administrators who think that their problems are more pressing than yours. I am now evolving to understand what it just might feel like be an expanding, flowing, sloshing, messy mass of liquid in a sealed square glass box: everyone can see that you need more room and that space simply does not work, but ultimately there is no room in the box for you to go. After all, you chose your mess. You chose to work towards tenure at a rigid university and to have children at the same time. The square box has no desire to be flexible and you have no ability to be a square. You have to be fluid because every task you perform day in and day out runs together. But you are a mother first. Society may forget bad professors, but they rarely forgive bad mothers. So you try to bend your life to fit your job in small pieces at a time. It’s actually been reduced to job because it’s easier to forgive yourself for messing up at just a job, than mishandling your career is an academic. The world will accuse you of wasting your gift. So you push on, you reign in your feelings, you write all night, you cook all morning, clean the soccer mud out of your car as often as you can, and try not to forget dates, deadlines, and your flash drive everywhere you go. You make it to as many school functions and plays and games as you can, and feel so bad about the ones you just can’t make it to. All you can do is apologize one too many times. You do whatever you have to do to be everything everybody needs you to be. More days than most everything works out, but some days it doesn’t. Sometimes you might feel like a failure. And that doesn’t make you different from every other woman, but it probably makes you differ from other academics. Nonetheless, in the midst of it all, you try to remember
who you are as woman and a human being and an academic. And in all the spaces where these three met, you celebrate. And in the spaces where one has to die for the others to live, you make it work. And you hope that it is only temporary. And when you get moments like this to purge for feelings onto paper, you thank God for the catharsis. And hope it gets published.

So now when I ask another female doctoral student what it feels like to have a desire to enter the professoriate and a simultaneous desire to have children, my truths will be in the room with me as I record her thoughts and will be in my heart when I write a paper using her words. I think that’s what they mean when they say to immerse yourself in your environment and to re-create the participant’s responses. I think I am finally beginning to understand what it takes to conduct a qualitative study.
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VITA
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the attitudes of current female doctoral candidates who express an interest in pursuing a career in the professoriate, as well as express a desire to have children. The participants will explain how they conceptualize the intersection of academia and motherhood, by detailing how they negotiate and navigate their current status in as a graduate student and their future career and family goals.

A limited amount of literature has been published that specifically explores the intersection of academia and motherhood as conceptualized specifically by female graduate students. Therefore, the intent of the literature review in this project was to explore the relevant topics that would best provide the background on the impetus of the study. The review of literature concludes by introducing Feminist Critical Policy Analysis (FCPA) as the theoretical framework for this study followed by an explanation of the tenets of FCPA and the impetus for employing it as an analysis tool in this study.

The six participants in the project expressed interest in pursuing a career in the professoriate as well as a desire to start a family, among other specific criterion detailed in chapter three. The participants represented three academic clusters: (1) science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), (2) humanities and social sciences (H&SS), and (3) professional and applied sciences (Professions).

Data was collected by means of one-on-one individual unstructured interviews. The participants provided rich detail about how they navigate the notion of starting a family while beginning a tenure-track position. They also detailed their feelings on the policies and structures of the academy as it relates to supporting dual-career faculty. This study has a three-stage data reduction plan described by Madison (2005) for analyzing the data: identifying codes using a
coding strategy, reducing codes into themes, and creating a point of view by incorporating the theoretical perspective. Concluding the project are suggestions for applying this research to the greater higher education community.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Women who enter the academy single and without children statistically fare better than their female counterparts. Further, women who begin a family within five years of receiving their doctorate are less likely to earn tenure than both male and female colleagues who delay or opt to not have children at all (Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2008). However, some women end up having the decision made for them. The average age for a woman in America to obtain her Ph.D. is 34 years old (Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2008). The American higher education tenure system prescribes tenure to be earned by a six year mark (Mayer & Tikka, 2008; O’Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005). The probability of conceiving decreases 3.5% each year after the age 35 (“Aging and Reproduction”, 2008). According to Mason and Goulden (2004) women who give birth within the first five years of receiving the PhD are 38% less likely than men to achieve tenure. The math is irrefutable: the odds of the average female academician being able to have children while having a successful career are stacked against her. These are the types of statistics that a female doctoral candidate faces as she moves towards her goal of joining the academic ranks.

Women in Higher Education

The battle cry for equity and access for women in higher education has not been in vain. Higher education for women in America has come a long way from the days of female seminaries to the times we are living in now where women hold high profile positions at internationally recognized universities. Women are now internationally renowned scholars, educated in the finest institutions they were never meant to attend. Female faculty members now serve on editorial boards for journals that at one time would not consider the work of female scholars. Female students have fought for and earned a seat in the front rows of classrooms in
the most prestigious institutions in the country, creating spaces for themselves in both the public and private workforce. Female students have historically shown an earnest interest in education and the doors of opportunity an education can open (Solomon, 1985). In 1870, the height of the Reconstruction era, women represented 21 percent of the national undergraduate student population. By 1890, 35 percent of the undergraduate population was female students, illustrating a progressive climb in higher education accessibility for women. By the 20th century, female students represented 47 percent, nearly half, of the undergraduate population, a trend of accessibility and persistence that has yet to be reversed (Schwartz, 1996). It is now quite widely publicized that women have surpassed men in the numbers receiving bachelors’ degrees (Barnett, 2004). In fact, by 1982 the scale was tipped indefinitely in favor of female enrollments, marking the last recorded year where male student enrollment surpassed female student enrollment (National Center of Education Statistics, 2009).

Women have now transitioned this progress into the arena of graduate work (Mason & Goulden, 2002). The number of female students pursuing graduate degrees has been steadily increasing since 1966 (Mason & Goulden, 2002). In fact, the 2008-2009 school term, marked the first time more women than men earned doctoral degrees (Washington Post, 2010). A report by the Council of Graduate Schools lists that female students constitute 58.7% of total graduate enrollment of public, private not-for-profit, and private for-profit institutions (Bell, 2011). Specific to the doctoral level, female students constitute 67.7% of the total enrollment of public, private not-for-profit, and private for-profit institutions (Bell, 2011). The majority of female doctoral students are completing their studies the humanities, social sciences, and the arts (Wilson, 2004).
Women in the Professoriate

The number of women in the faculty ranks is similarly significant. The 2009 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Center study informs that women account for 47% of tenure track faculty at 2-and 4-year public, private, and private-for-profit institutions (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2009), a percentage that is higher than ever before (Mason, Goulden, & Wolfinger, 2006). Yet, Mason and Goulden (2002) stated that the current landscape of the ranks of female faculty members is statistically similar the landscape in 1975. Mason and Goulden (2004) hold that the number of women both entering the professoriate and climbing in tenure rank does not adequately represent the accomplishments of female scholars, and is disproportionate when considering the number of women with terminal degrees. In their popular article entitled, “Do Babies Matter?”, they explain “while gender equality may be the reality for graduate students, it is a far different story for ladder-rank faculty, non-ladder-rank academic personnel, and staff” (Mason and Goulden, 2002, p.1). Although women are pursuing terminal degrees at rates competitive to males, male faculty outnumber female faculty, which shows that women are underrepresented among the faculty ranks (August & Waltman, 2004; Gardner, 2012). August and Waltman (2004) conclude that “relative to men, women tend to be hired less frequently and hired disproportionately into lower ranked positions within the institution” (p. 177). Similarly, Perna (2005) stated:

Women continue to be underrepresented among the nations tenured and highest ranking faculty. Not only is share of women full-time faculty who hold tenured positions smaller than the share of men, but also the gender gap in tenure rates does not appear to be closing (p.277).

Joan Williams is noted as saying:

This is a job structure that systematically excludes mother. It shows that so long as we continue to identify the ideal academic worker as someone who works full time, 60 hours a week for 40 years straight—surprise—that will overwhelmingly be men.
Societal structures and influences say that in the case of female who is a mother and an academic, something will ultimately be denied the attention it needs to flourish as prescribed. Researchers have noticed that the next generation of academic females is less than enthusiastic about their place in academia as it is now, and that many of very qualified academicians are opting out of academia or are not interested in research intensive institutions. This generation has been considering if academia, with its archaic structures and policies, is a place that can embrace dual career women who want to excel at both of their careers: mother and academic. Nonetheless, some current female faculty members believe that the situation is not as hopeless as it may seem to the next generation. Wilson (2004) noted:

Young women may be opting out of the research-university jobs for personal reasons. Many would-be female scholars, particularly in the sciences, seem to believe that children and a hard-charging research career don’t mix...a lot of us look like we’re running around all the time...young women aren’t seeing the fun, the flexibility, the rewarding stuff” (p.8).

Significance of this Study

Research targeted at understanding the inclusion on women in academia as it related to work and family is limited as it a relatively new line of inquiry, and the results thus far are sobering (Fotherhill & Feltey, 2003). The impetus for this study is not specifically found in the disproportionality of women amongst the faculty ranks, though this is the foundation of this inquiry. There are studies that outline the reasons why female graduate students leave school at a higher rate than their male counterparts, or take longer to complete their degree (Daniel, 2007; Ferrer de Valero, 2001; Golde, 2005; Sato & Hodge, 2009; Seagram Gould, & Pike, 1998). However, there is a lack of exploration as why female graduate students begin graduate work
with the intention of entering the faculty rank, yet begin to foster disparaging feelings toward the academy, specifically as it relates to having children and starting a family. This void in research serves as an impetus for this study. To that end, this study considers female doctoral students who are in the decision-making process regarding their future and are weighing how much having a family plays into that decision. There is an emerging subgroup of doctoral students with dichotomizing career and family outlooks: female doctoral students who once aspired to a dual career, mother-academic, but now feel the need to decide whether or not having children is a reachable goal while aspiring to tenure status. As a member of the subgroup of female doctoral students who aspire to enter the faculty ranks, I began to notice that we seem to be using the magnitude of our desire to have children to determine or gauge our future ability to succeed in the professoriate. Through this study, I expanded my understanding of the thought processes these women engage to weigh this decision. Ultimately, throughout this project, I sought to begin to conceptualize what it looks like to battle through making a decision to pursue your career aspirations with the full knowledge of the uncertainty of a dual career-mother and professor. I posit that this project will be a catalyst for more conversations about the ways in which these women engage this decision, the obstacles they feel they can and cannot overcome, and the extent to which the academy is accountable.

**Purpose of this Study**

There is a wealth of literature that informs us that the male-centered policies, curriculum, and culture of the American university are unfavorable for female faculty and staff members. Specifically, much of the focus has been on the gender inequity amongst the tenure track faculty ranks (Jones & Taylor, 2012). These studies have viewed these conditions from the lens of the faculty members, and were written for the explicit benefit of that particular sub-group in the
academy and their male counterparts. While this line of inquiry is foundational for this study, there is a lack of attention given to aspiring female faculty members and their understanding of these conditions and how she navigates her conceptions of them.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes of current female doctoral candidates who have expressed an interest in pursuing a career in the professoriate, as well as have expressed a desire to have children. The participants provided detailed descriptions of how they negotiated their current status in graduate school, and how they conceptualized their future career goals and the academic and motherhood spaces they wish to occupy. This project sought to provide an understanding or interpretation that will begin to inform how this space is ultimately constructed. It was also the intention of this project to problematize particular aspects of the politics, policies, and structures of the American academy that are perceived as a barrier or roadblock to the success and inequality for future female faculty. Second, by exploring the attitudes, conceptions, and concerns of the participants, I provided a presentation of the types of pressures these women face, and the extent to which these pressures influence their future career aspirations.

The objective of this project is to explore the participant’s conceptions and understanding of academe’s gender-specific policies and positions, spoken and otherwise, on motherhood while in the academy. The stories presented are through the lenses of the participants, chosen based on their close proximity to the topic. This project presents a narrative that helps readers gain insight into the ways in which each participant conceptualize the intersection of academia and motherhood.
Research Questions

The following research questions were constructed to guide this study:

1. How do female doctoral students who desire to enter the professoriate at a high research activity university describe the intersection of their future plans of career and motherhood?

2. Where are the interconnections between the participant’s personal aspirations, professional goals, and the climate of the academy?

3. What types of pressures do the participants describe?
   a. Which pressures do the participants perceive that they feel more acutely?

Research Design

This blueprint for this project derives its intentions from qualitative traditions. This section introduces the theoretical framework which is also used as an analytical tool, the strategies of inquiry and the outline for selecting participants, and the method of data collection.

Theoretical Framework

The research questions, data collection, and data analysis of this study are constructed as a critical feminist policy analysis project and are subsequently interpreted through this lens. Critical feminist policy analysis (CFPA) is the theoretical and methodological framework that seeks to relieve the dichotomization of gender in the analysis of post-secondary policy, culture, and curriculum. Bensimon and Marshall (1997) refer to this as “women-centered policy analysis” (p. 3). This framework is centered in feminist thought, and attempts to problematize conventional policy analysis theories by exposing its male experience-centered ideology (Bensimon & Marshall, 1997).

Also for the purposes of this project, I will also draw on the tenets of cultural feminism, one of the feminisms employed by critical feminist policy analysts to deconstruct the culture and
policies of post-secondary education (Bensimon & Marshall, 1997). Cultural feminism asserts that the “preferences of women are subordinated to the inclinations of men toward traditional ways of building careers” (Armenti, 2004a). This male preference is also present in organizational cultures. Further, women have their own ways of knowing and organizing the world (Armenti, 2004a). Cultural feminist theorists believe that the biological differences in males and females attribute to cultural and social differences that cannot be considered by the tenets of one umbrella of (male-centered) ideology; insomuch as women have their own cultural norms and traditions that are different yet not inferior to that of men (Bank & Hall, 1997; Bensimon & Marshall, 1997).

Strategies of Inquiry

The data for this project was collected using traditional qualitative methodology, and is based on narrative inquiry traditions. Traditional qualitative research methods will empower the essence of the women’s stories. Additionally, qualitative studies on this topic have been shown to provide a clearer picture of the difficulties of a dual career (Armenti, 2004b). The research methodology for this project will have recognized influences from narrative research because the participant’s data will be combined with the researcher’s experiences. The goal of the project is to analyze and interpret the ways in which female doctoral students conceptualize the intersection of the academy and motherhood. To that end, the participants in this project are female doctoral students at a very high research activity university in the southern United States. They represent one of three academic clusters: (1) humanities and social sciences (H&SS), (2) science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, which are referred to as the STEM fields, and (3) the professional and applied sciences (Professions). The participants in the project must
express interest in pursuing a career in the professoriate as well have either have children or desire to start a family, among other specific criterion detailed in chapter three.

**Specific Methods**

To collect the data for this study, one-on-one open-ended interviews were conducted (Armenti, 2004a; Creswell, 2009). The interviews were conducted using a list of prompts that informed the research questions and an interview protocol of standard questions for each participant. The conversational interview atmosphere allowed the participant’s input to affect the thematic direction of the research by introducing new topics, or expanding on existing themes established in the study (Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The voices and stories of the participants are the data of this research. Therefore, this project lends itself well to considering the participants as co-researchers, which was critical in the processes of analyzing that data. The interviews were audiotaped by a digital voice-recording media so that they could be transcribed (Creswell, 2009). The recorded interviews were used in the analysis phase, resolving questions regarding such points as intonation and the speed at which the co-researchers responded. As a researcher, I acknowledge my bias in that I am, too, a member of the targeted population. As a female doctoral student, my relation to the research questions was influenced my interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2009).

**Relevant Terminology**

**Dual career or mother-academic**- In this study, these terms refer to a female who considers the employment in the academy and motherhood as simultaneous roles in her life.

**Graduate student**- In this study the use of the term graduate student is specific to doctoral-level students obtaining research and philosophy doctorates (PhD, EdD). It excludes masters-level students and student obtaining professional terminal degrees (J.D., M.D., DVM).
**Mommy-track**- refers to the notion that an employed mother will adopt a career path that allows her increased work time flexibilities (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004). This notion is often stigmatized because it could provide fewer opportunities for advancement. It is often introduced in academic literature as an antithesis to the tenure-track.

**Tenure-track**- It is the classification given to an academician who is pursuing a tenured status through research, publications and academic engagement. This is an allotted time frame, which is on average, 7 years (Armenti, 2004, Perna, 2005).

**Structure of the Dissertation**

This proposal is organized into five chapters. Chapter one lists the current statistical trends of women in higher education, focusing on female graduate students and female faculty members and introduced a brief historical background on the emergence of women in higher education. The significance of the study, as well as the purpose and objective of the study are outlined. The research questions of the study are stated. The research design, including the theoretical and methodological framework, is introduced and will be expounded on in subsequent chapters. Finally, relevant terms are defined to provide clarity of their use in this study.

The second chapter is a review of relevant literature on in the intersection of motherhood and academia from the viewpoint of tenure-track female faculty members. The chapter begins with an outline of the tenure process. Following, are reviews of literature in relation to the characteristics, experiences, and expectations of female professors; motherhood in the academy; and university policies, including explanations of their usage or lack thereof. The chapter concludes with an abbreviated exploration of the types of pressures felt to female tenure-track faculty members.
The third chapter details the methodological framework of this study. It includes a discussion of the qualitative framework and theoretical paradigm. The research plan is thoroughly presented. It also includes the interview topics of interest for the unstructured, one-on-one interviews. It concludes with an outline of the data analysis procedures.

The fourth chapter is the analysis of the data and the presentation of the themes that emerged from this study. It is broken into three main sections: (1) the introduction of the participants in the study, including each woman’s field of study and main impetus for deciding to work toward entering the academy, (2) the presentation of dominant themes built using the words and experiences of the participants, and (3) the utilization of the Critical Feminist Policy Analysis as the analytical tool to highlight its connections between the literature and the dominant themes.

The fifth chapter concludes this dissertation. In this chapter, the research questions are re-visited by expounding on the ways in which the data collected provided clarity or insight to each research question. This chapter will also outline the implications for practice, or the ways in which this research is applicable to the field of higher education. It will then present the areas where further research into the intersection of motherhood and academia may be applicable. Finally, general observations from this study will be presented.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter is a presentation of existing literature on specific topics related to this study. There is a general lack of literature pertaining to the intersection of academia and motherhood as conceptualized by female doctoral degree-seeking students. Although there is an abundance of information and data about this topic in regards to women who already hold professorial positions, much less has been discussed in regards to how female doctoral candidates conceptualize the hegemonic nature of the tenure process and its rigidity, and where they expect to find themselves within the system. Therefore, this review of literature explored several topics relevant to the study and which also provides a background for the impetus of the study. The rationale for presenting these selected topics is to create a portrait of the professoriate that can be presented to the cohort of future female faculty members as a general picture of what family-related obstacles she may face when entering the professoriate.

The review is divided into four sections. The first section includes a general overview and definitions of the academic tenure. The second section presents the attributes and requirements of a professor and those for female professor with a family. The third section explores the relevant literature on issues related to parenthood in the academy, including current data and trends of female academicians. The fourth section outlines university policies dedicated to family and maternal needs.

Overview of Academic Tenure

In the academy, tenure is viewed as both a legal entity and a lengthy and specific process. In this section, I will briefly define tenure in the context of both of these descriptors, including the three tenets for achieving academic tenure: research, teaching, and service. A discussion of
the controversy surrounding the academic system, though relevant, is beyond the scope of this study.

**Academic Tenure as a Legal Entity**

Academic tenure is a unique concept in that the professoriate is one of two professions in which permanency can be legally guaranteed as long as the recipient remains within the boundaries of legality. The second entity that recognizes job permanency is the United States Supreme court, in that justices are appointed to life terms. Academic tenure is a contractual agreement between a university and a faculty member that insures his or her continuous employment through promotion (Loope, 1995; Park, 1996). Issues of job security and academic freedom became pressing in the era when university trustees, philanthropists, and religious representatives were taking advantage of firing or blocking employment based on arbitrary reasons (Thelin, 2004). The American Association of University Professors (AAUP), officially formed in 1915 in an effort to address such issues, released a declaration of principles that same year regarding the issue of academic freedom (www.aaup.org, retrieved March 24, 2012). The organization later released the 1940 Statement of Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure, which is still widely accepted as a pinnacle document on the subject throughout the profession, although academic tenure did not become nationally utilized until the 1940s (Kaplan & Lee, 2007). However, as stated by Brown and Kurland (1990):

“Tenure, accurately and unequivocally defined, lays no claim whatever to a guarantee of lifetime employment. Rather, tenure provides only that no person continuously retained as a full-time faculty member beyond a specified lengthy period of probationary service may thereafter be dismissed *without adequate cause*” (as cited in William Van Alstyne, pg. 325).
Structure of the Academic Tenure Process

The track to full tenure is in no way a modest one. Loope (1996) explained that a tenured faculty member dedicated thirteen or more years to education and teaching, beginning with eight or more years of formal education and adding the five to seven years probationary period. There are four posts along the tenure track: assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor, and distinguished professor. An incoming tenure-track professor starts at the rank of assistant professor. The American higher education tenure system is a generally a six year process, with the professor applying for the promotion by the end of the sixth year (Clark & Hill, 2010; Mayer & Tikka, 2008; O’Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005; Patterson, 2008; Young & Wright, 2001). However, the AAUP states that it can last no longer than seven years (AAUP 1990, p. 22). This timeframe is recognized as the reasonable probationary period (Lewis, 1980; Loope, 1995), wherein the faculty member commits his or her career to research, teaching and service, the three critiqued areas for tenure and promotion (Clark & Hill, 2010; Park, 1996).

Research

Carmichael (1988) identified that research is one of “the most important roles of the university” (pg. 455). It is considered the most heavily weighted criteria for tenure and promotion (Hattie & Marsh, 1996; Park, 1996). Producing quality research is paramount for a tenure-track faculty member (Root, 1978). Similarly, publishing is considered the indicator of productivity in academia (Armenti, 2004a). Park (1996) insisted “no amount of teaching or service will compensate for [inadequate research]” (pg. 48). She also stated the research performance is the only factor of the three that can be “objectively evaluated, even if [faculty] are unequal in other respects” (pg. 50). Additionally, the income, and subsequently the prestige, of an institution amongst the academic community are most often determined by the quality and
significance of the research produced by its faculty members (Carmichael, 1988; Youn & Price, 2009).

**Teaching**

Teaching is the second criteria evaluated as a criterion for tenure. Teaching is a faculty member’s opportunity for engagement with the students at their institution. However, as it is related to tenure and promotion, the quality of teaching is not weighted equally to research (Clark & Hill, 2010). As Park (1996) stated, “though all faculty are expected to do some teaching, outstanding teaching will not by itself guarantee someone tenure” (p. 48). It is also important to note that the amount of courses and of students is not regulated among institutions, colleges, departments, or even faculty members (Park, 1996). At many institutions, departments delegate a considerable portion of the teaching load to entry-level tenure-track faculty (Park, 1996), non-tenure-track faculty members such as instructors and adjunct faculty members (August & Waltman, 2004), and graduate students (Armenti, 2004a; Ferrer de Valero, 2001). Nonetheless, researchers still contend that there is a positive and reciprocal relationship between prolific research and quality teaching (Hattie & Marsh, 1996; Park, 1996).

**Service**

Service is the third criterion for tenure and promotion consideration. Service opportunities can be found in community outreach or partnership, participation in professional organizations, and committing to departmental and university-wide committees and student and student-organization advising. Parallel to teaching, service is undervalued and unequally weighted in comparison to research productivity (Park, 1996). Again, Park (1996) states that “though all faculty are expected to do some service, few (if any) faculty members have ever been denied tenure on the basis of insufficient service” (p. 48). However, Curtis (2004) iterates that
many faculty members, attracted to the profession by a desire to better society in some way, “volunteer to serve because [they] care about [their] institutions, [their] students, and [their] communities” (p. 1).

The Professoriate

A professor employed at a research intensive institution is the subject of this profile. The job of full-time professor exists in a male-identified culture and is still centered on the male life trajectory, especially for the purposes of tenure and promotion (Armenti, 2004a; Mason & Goulden, 2002; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). The demands of research, teaching, and service abound, leaving little time for outside activities, especially for entry-level faculty. This lack of time often includes personal time for family. The average work week reported by male and female assistant professors is 50 hours (Colbeck, 2006). Mason and Goulden (2002) extended a work model which included a 60-hour work week, compounded by travel obligations. Further, Jacob & Winslow (2004) found those faculty members who reported working 60 or more hours a week also reported very high research productivity. Succinctly, Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004) stated that “the ‘ideal worker’ in academe was married to his or her career” (p. 3).

Most academic positions are accompanied by flexible or self-assigned schedules. Yet, one sacrifice for this accommodation is making oneself available to work evening and weekends, often to teach courses or work on research endeavors (O’laughlin & Bischoff, 2005). However, the academy has taken-for-granted parameters and expectations that are solely based on the male life trajectory, many of which are found in the ways in which women maneuver to align with tenure and promotion practices and workplace ethics (Armenti, 2004a; Armenti, 2004b; Bensimon & Marshall, 1997; Park, 1996; Probert, 2005). These standards serve to “maintain ‘unapologetically… [the] able-bodied, white, heterosexual, middle class’ male model of an
academic” (Heald, 2002, as quoted in Armenti, 2004a). There remains little recognition or understanding that the life cycle of a woman is different from that of a male (Armenti, 2004a). Nonetheless, a study by English and Avakian (2012) acknowledges that the main component in overall well-being is the “quality of the individual’s personal relationships” (p.2).

**A Profile of Female Academics for Incoming Female Professors**

In this section, I use existing literature on family formation and career expectations for academics to craft a profile or a portrait of the potential career trajectory of a female professor, as it relates having children. Female faculty members in general are often viewed as “outsiders” (Armenti, 2004c). She states, “[women] occupy a position of difference that complicates their professional and personal lives because these aspects of their lived experiences are intertwined” (p. 66). Ultimately, research has shown that female faculty members at “doctorate-granting universities advance more slowly on the tenure track than men do [and] are paid less than their male counterparts” (Wilson, 2004). Additionally, there is an assumption that women are gender-obligated to sacrifice their lives as women for their lives as mothers (Armenti, 2004a). It also well-documented that women note having the greater share of family responsibilities, including household tasks and childrearing (Probert, 2005). Although, women have documented having successes in combining their family responsibilities and work obligations (Castle & Woloshyn, 2003), most research indicates that this is an exceptional task with personal, professional, and biological implications. Tenured female faculty members are far more likely have no children or have less children than they desired to have when compared to their male counterparts (Mason & Goulden, 2004). Mason and Goulden (2004) note that “only one in three women who takes a fast-track university job before having children ever becomes a mother” (p.1). To this end, some feel that children and career is actually an either/or proposition (Patterson, 2008). Female
academics with children report that they have less time available to work to meet career expectations, as well as less leisure time than do their male counterparts (Armenti, 2004c; Perna, 2001), and that the main reason they “subordinate their careers” is for responsibilities related to childrearing (Armenti, 2004c; p.66). They often note that time for personal attention is often sacrificed for their children (Young & Wright, 2001). Female academics have always been known to make adaptations and sacrifices to make their personal life more conducive to their professional life (Armenti, 2004b).

Dueling Clocks

Female professor have to at least acknowledge the notion of the “dueling tenure and biological clock” (Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006, p. 495). As stated by Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004), “biological and tenure clocks have the unfortunate tendency to tick loudly, clearly, and at the same time” (pg. 1). The average age for a woman in America to obtain her Ph.D. is 34 years old (Clark & Hill, 2010; Patterson, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004; Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2008). Considering the tenure-track reasonable probationary period of six years and not to exceed seven years, the average female professors will not achieve a tenured status until she is 40 years old (Clark & Hill, 2010). To complicate this timeline, the probability of conceiving decreases 3.5% each year after the age 35 (Luke & Brown, 2007). Other risks include infertility and pregnancy complications (Clark & Hill, 2010; Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006). This ultimately means that a female academic is often working towards tenure in the midst of her child-bearing years (Sullivan, Hollenshead, & Smith, 2004; Young & Wright, 2001). A high proportion of new female tenure-track females have dedicated a considerable portion of their 20s to pursuing her education, making the time in her 30s critical and decisive as it relates to family or career priorities (Fotherhill & Feltey, 2003).
Female tenure-track faculty members are less likely to have children at the beginning of their career in comparison to their male counterparts (Mason, Goulden, & Wolfinger, 2006). Female academics that have children are considered to be potentially affecting their chances of achieving tenure in negative ways (Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006; Mason & Goulden, 2004). Women who enter the academy single and without children statistically fare better than their female counterparts (Armenti, 2004b). According to Mason and Goulden (2004) women who give birth within the first five years of receiving the PhD are 38 percent less likely than men to achieve tenure. Further, women who begin a family within five years of receiving their doctorate are less likely to earn tenure than both male and female colleagues who delay or opt to not have children at all (Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2008). Fox, Schwartz, and Hart (2006) agree that the notion of the competing biological and tenure clocks may cause many faculty members to delay having children or to opt to not have children at all. A study conducted by Mason and Goulden (2004) surveying faculty at nine very-high research activity institutions reported that female faculty members were twice as likely as male faculty members to have fewer children than they ultimately desired to have. As it relates to young children, Mason, Goulden, & Wolfinger (2006) state that new tenure-track female faculty members in their first position are 17 percent less likely to have a child under age six. Further, Mason & Goulden (2004) found that among new female PhD recipients, those with children under age six are the most likely to forego a tenure-track position entirely. As is relates to academic productivity, a study by Fothergill and Feltey (2003) found that 71 percent of their study participants conceded that they are having a less productive career and it is attributable to starting a family.

Comer and Stites-Doe (2006) stated that many female faculty members choose to hide their family commitments in an effort to be perceived as committed faculty members. These
women find that acknowledging their motherhood is sometimes perceived negatively (Young & Wright, 2001). A study of career impediments for female assistant professors conducted by Frankel and Olswang (1996) found that 40 percent of the participants perceived raising a child as a threat to attaining tenure. McElrath (1992) noted that when a female faculty member interrupts her academic trajectory, there is a decrease in the likelihood of achieving tenure, and an accompanying increase in the timespan to achieving tenure. She also notes that those who take extended career breaks may incur cumulative disadvantages. McElrath posited that such interrupts may serve to unfairly gauge her seriousness about her career. Mason, Goulden, and Wolfinger (2006) found that postponing career aspirations to have children also negatively affects career trajectory. They note there are difficulties in obtaining a tenure-track position. This may be due to faculty hiring committees viewing such applicants as “suspect because of gaps in their vitae and the time that has elapsed since they received their PhDs” (p.25).

**Workload**

Researchers have found that female academics have a tendency to be overworked with gender-assigned tasks (Acker & Feuerverger, 1996; Armenti, 2004c). Park (1996) finds this may be influenced by gender and ethnicity. Female academics found more often than male academics to be advising or supervising students and serving on a larger proportion of university and departmental committees, and are the more active in daily campus governance processes such as faculty senate (Park, 1996). Armenti (2004c) suggests that this overrepresentation may be due in part to the low numbers of female academics in relation to the high number of female students. Female academics are usually sought out by female students and other female faculty and staff members as mentors and role models (Park, 1996). This may be indicative of the traditional expectations and stereotypes that women are better suited for caring roles and are expected to be
more sensitive than males (Armenti, 2004a; Armenti, 2004c; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004; Park, 1996). In relation, teaching responsibilities are disproportionally absorbed by female faculty members (Park, 1996). Park (1996) notes, however, that this disparity may be attributed to the prevalence of women in teaching-intensive institutions as opposed to research-intensive institutions.

The “Second Tier” of Faculty Members

Women now constitute about 42 percent of all college and university faculty (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). However, there still exists a structural inequity in academe. Female faculty members are ultimately more likely to leave academia to devote time to rearing their children than are their male counterparts (Armenti, 2004b; Patterson 2008). However, in relation to those who choose to remain in academia, female faculty members are still disproportionally located in lower academic ranks and full- or part-time non-tenure track positions (Fox, Schwartz, & Hart 2006; Lobel, 2004; Mason, Goulden, & Wolfinger, 2006; Perna, 2005), in community colleges (Jones & Taylor, 2012), less research-intensive institutions, small liberal arts colleges, or teaching colleges (Curtis, 2004; Gardner, 2012). These types of appointments may be viewed by some as less prestigious and less secure, often identified as the “second tier” faculty positions (August & Waltman, 2004; Park, 1996; Perna, 2001). Between 1976 and 1993 the number of full-time non-tenure track female professors increased by 142 percent (Perna, 2001). However, it must be noted that not all women in these positions feel they have been slighted or marginalized. Some have made the conscious decision to accept these positions or serve at these institutions (Perna, 2001). Researchers agree that many female academics accept or seek out these positions in the interest of better balancing her family and career (Curtis, 2004; Patterson, 2008; Perna, 2001). However, that does not negate the fact that
she had to make a choice, or physically show a prioritization, which illuminates a structural inequity (Williams & Cooper, 2004). Male academics are less likely to have to make these career decisions based on family obligations alone (Curtis, 2004), which ultimately illuminates a structural inequity in academe as well as its underlying male-centered cultural ideology (Bensimon & Marshall, 2007).

**Mommy-Tracking**

Women oftentimes navigate their professional careers amidst the stereotype that mothers cannot be serious professionals, or that having a child immediately deters her professional trajectory. This notion is referred to as the mommy track (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004). Mommy-tracking refers to a female professional who makes the choice to limit her time at work or on work-related tasks to focus on childrearing. Some women elect to resume a part-time position after child birth. Others make it clear to colleagues that they are working a maximum number of hours per week. This often leads to assumptions that the mother is no longer committed or serious about her career. Although this term is most often found in association with corporate or legal careers (Stone & Lovejoy, 2004), it is also applicable to careers in academe. Sullivan, Hollenshed, & Smith (2004) found that the overrepresentation of women in the non-tenured, non-research intensive positions is as a result of mommy-tracking.

**May Babies and Posttenure Babies**

Many female faculty members succumb to a lifestyle known as “hidden baby phenomenon” (Armenti, 2004b). This term is used in reference to female academics that have employed certain techniques to hide their pre-tenure pregnancy from colleagues (Armenti, 2004b; Nelson, 2005). Some women give examples of wearing inconspicuous or over-sized clothes or keep a low-profile amongst her colleagues. Others women have attempted to engineer
the timing of their child’s birth to have little to no interference with tenure pursuits. Ultimately, it seems that women academics have hidden their maternal desires to align with an “unwritten professional standard” (Armenti, 2004b, p. 219), as well as a belief that pregnancy would hinder their career trajectory. In a study using participants from the nine schools in the University of California system, Mason, Goulden, & Wolfinger, (2006) found that female faculty members try a number of techniques for merging family and career, including trying to time childbirth to coincide with summer break. This technique is referred to as having a “May baby”, aptly named because of the intended month of childbirth (Armenti, 2004b). The strategy for having a May baby is to use to summer months that usually have little to no teaching and minimal campus activity to re-cooperate from child birth, rather than taking any leave time during the fall and spring terms (Armenti, 2004b; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). However, Ward & Wolf-Wendel (2004) point out women who plan to have May baby or have a baby and return to work as quickly as possible are assuming that there will be no pregnancy or birth complications.

Posttenure babies is a term that refers to an academic’s decision to delay having children or adopting children until after they have achieved tenure (Armenti, 2004c).

**Motherhood in Academia**

Fotherhill & Feltey (2003) noted that the career paths and trajectories for female faculty members seemed to be stifled or re-routed as a result of family responsibilities. The prevalence of female academics who are either single or have opted to delay having a child may be an indicator of the difficulties of combining family and career responsibilities in a fulfilling way (Armenti, 2004c; O’laughlin & Bischoff, 2005; Perna, 2001). August & Waltman (2004) agree that the “challenges of balancing one’s professional and personal lives are serious issues for female faculty and female graduate students considering academic careers” (p. 178). There is a
dual career that exists, motherhood and professor, and each has needs that are important. These women strive to take care of their family and simultaneous flourish in the career they have dedicated many years preparing for (Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006). Many express becoming “frustrated in their inability to do all that needs to be done for their children while also striving to advance their careers” (Comer & Stites-Doe, p. 496). Some have even expressed feeling a sense of inadequacy (Young & Wright, 2001). Mother-academics must constantly negotiate both of these roles (Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006; Perna, 2001), with the knowledge that she cannot afford to fail at either (Young & Wright, 2001). Both roles are complex and intricate and balancing family and professional duties are found to be a challenge for female academics. Motherhood, or duties outside of academia, is sometimes referred to as the second shift (Young & Wright, 2001).

Many express that they feel time constraints are a bigger obstacle for them than for their male counterparts (Armenti, 2004c). They also feel that having to renegotiate academic responsibilities or decline activities that would leave them unavailable to care for their children, leaves them at a disadvantage in their departments compared to both male counterparts and women without the second shift (Armenti, 2004c). However, many have felt they must remain silent about their conflicts as they “feared that they would be seen as incompetent or unable to handle their professional responsibilities” (Young & Wright, 2001). Female faculty members with children admit they often had to miss overnight conferences, or bring their child(ren) to work functions or classes, in an attempt to prioritize childcare (Perna, 2001). There is a sense of schedule flexibility in academia. At the majority research-intensive institutions, faculty members do not have a particular start-time or end-time to their work day. Therefore, people inside and outside of academia assume that the professoriate is an ideal work environment of a parent (Fotherhill & Feltey, 2003). However, Comer & Stites-Doe (2006) indicate that this
assumption is not always true. Female academic with children are found to bear a larger responsibility for caregiving and household duties in comparison to male academics with children (Mason, Goulden, & Wolfinger, 2006; O’laughlin & Bischoff, 2005; Perna, 2001). The study noted that a proportionate number of hours for male and female participants were not identified until age 60, presumably when the majority of childrearing is complete.

The purpose of this study to explore the experiences and expectations of motherhood should not negate the contributions or responsibilities of fathers. There is documented increase in parenting participation by males (Comer & Stites, 2006; Fox, Schwartz, & Hart, 2006). However, as it relates to motherhood and academia, researchers note the physicals considerations of childbirth and childrearing, such as the pregnancy and childbirth, post-partum recovery, and lactation, of which men biologically cannot endure (Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006). Additionally, many researchers find that generally speaking mothers have a greater responsibility for duties related to the child(ren) and for household activities, both of which will physically draw her away from the school or divert her attention from research productivity (Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006). The Mason & Goulden (2004) study found that female academics with children dedicated over one hundred hours to child responsibilities, housework, and her career, while male participants with children dedicated an average of 85 hours to these tasks. The experiences of balancing parenthood and academia seem to be characteristically different for men and women (O’laughlin & Bischoff, 2005).

A number of studies, both qualitative and qualitative in nature, have examined the relationship between motherhood and academia. Many of these illustrate that a strained or difficult relationship exists (Armenti, 2004c). Fox, Schwartz, and Hart (2006) asserted that tenure and promotion are among the most disadvantageous practices and policies to female
academics adopt a duel career. Several circumstances surrounding having a child while pursuing
tenure have been highlighted by the literature.

Geographic Mobility

The desire to productively balance motherhood and career has been noted to reduce
are the potential for higher salaries, and the increased likelihood of securing a tenure-track
position. The freedom to search for jobs nationally is important for a faculty member (Comer &
Stites-Doe, 2006). Many find that the desire to provide children with a stable home environment
renders a faculty member less mobile for job-seeking purposes (Armenti, 2004c). Female
professors are more likely than their male counterparts decline offers that would uproot their
families (Armenti, 2004c). Additionally, there are other activities pertinent to an academic
career that require a certain level of mobility and flexibility, such as travelling for professional
conferences and presentations, concentrated time period for writing or researching, and tasks
related to data collection or fieldwork. These particular sacrifices of flexibility may also limit
the ability a female academic has to collaborate with others in her field (O’laughlin & Bischoff,
2005). These, too, may add to the difficulty of balancing motherhood and career, as appropriate
or long-term childcare may be hard to secure (Mason, Goulden, & Wolfinger, 2006). In their
study of University of California faculty members, the researchers found more than half of the
female participants expressed this concern, and that less than 30 percent of the male participants
expressed that long-term childcare was problematic (Mason, Goulden, Wolfinger, 2006).

Support Systems

Some female academics feel pressure to remain silent and not ask for help because they
perceived a lack of support or understanding from colleagues or from their department (Young &
However, many in the professoriate have found help and a sense of strength in balancing motherhood in academia by constructing their support system independent of the university. Such tools as extra support from her spouse when necessary and building a network of childcare arrangements has been found to be critical to helping better organize her first and second shifts (Castle & Woloshyn, 2003; O’Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005).

**University Policies**

Universities now have policies, practices, and family-friendly initiatives in place to accommodate faculty members who need personal leave time and simultaneous career security, specifically as it relates to female faculty members (Armenti, 2004c; Clark & Hill, 2010; Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006; Probert, 2005; Quinn, Lange, & Olswang, 2004). Research universities are more likely than other types of institutions to recognize family-friendly policies (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Additionally, these types of support programs are not widely available in other professions (Young & Wright, 2001). However, researchers agree there are still inadequacies in implementation and use (Armenti, 2004c; Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006; Quinn, Lange, & Olswang, 2004; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Quinn, Lange, and Olswang (2004) note there is a difficulty in regulating the use of these policies in the academy because it is a “workplace that values decentralized decision making” (p.1). Researchers have also found that communication between the university or departments and faculty members is not always consistent regarding the availability of such policies or instructions for use (Quinn, Lange, & Olswang, 2004; Sullivan, Hollenshead, & Smith, 2004).

Mason and Goulden (2004) have suggested reducing the teaching load for new parents to give them time to adjust to their new dual career life. Some universities specifically provide paid maternity leave, which differs from other leave policies as it is “given to a woman to recuperate
from childbirth” (Sullivan, Hollenshead, & Smith, 2004, p.3). Other implemented programs not specific to new parents are elder-care support, dependent-care assistance, and programs that support for faculty members who experience personal crises (Quinn, Lange, and Olswang, 2004; Sullivan, Hollenshead, & Smith, 2004; Young & Wright, 2001). When employees are offered opportunities to better balance their personal life and professional career, a marked improvement in the morale of the workplace is observed (Sullivan, Hollenshead, & Smith, 2004).

Mother-academics generally have two types of policy and program needs: (1) child-birth accommodations and, (2) childrearing accommodations (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). The policies and practices below are accommodations that are applicable to these needs. This section concludes with a discussion of the reluctance of use for these policies.

**Family Medical Leave Act of 1993**

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993 is a federal mandate that provides up to twelve weeks within a twelve month period of unpaid leave to all employees, during which time their job structure and appointment must remain unaltered, and they must be offered interrupted access to their current health insurance plan (Wage and Hour Division). However, this is not always expressed properly on all campus, some over-expressing a six week time allotment as opposed to the twelve weeks legally allowed (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). Additionally, most academic semesters are longer than the allotted twelve weeks, leaving faculty members combine additional provisions where applicable to cover the remained of the academic term (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006).

**Stop the Tenure Clock**

Stopping the Tenure clock is a policy recommended by the AAUP that allows both male and female faculty members to formally halt their tenure clock for personal and professional
purposes. This can be used to add a maximum of two years to a faculty member’s tenure clock. The outline for this provision is a component of the AAUP 2001 Statement of Principles on Family Responsibilities and Academic Work. Although, its use most often associated with the childbirth and childcare needs of female faculty members, it can be used when the pace research productivity is affected by causes beyond the researchers control, such as natural disasters, extended travel, or personal emergencies or times of special attention such as the adoption of a new child (Quinn, Lange, & Olswang, 2004). A faculty member can petition to stop their tenure clock even when no formal leave is requested.

On-Campus Day Care

Though many universities have on-campus day care facilities (Clark & Hill, 2010; Quinn, Lange, & Olswang, 2004) or partnership or referral options with local childcare providers (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004), they often have lengthy waiting lists (Patterson, 2008), and are expensive (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Mason and Goulden (2004) suggest implementing emergency back-up child care programs, providing childcare that for improving university-provided childcare to bridge the gap in times where the child is on a break, but the university is not. They also suggest summer camps and summer enrichment programs.

Active Service with Modified Duties

Faculty can negotiate with department chairs for a temporary modification in duties that will allow for more flexibility in time commitments at work to allow for more personal time for family responsibilities (Sullivan, Hollenshead, Smith, 2004). A faculty member opting for this accommodation is not petition for a halt in tenure clock or a part-time tenure track position (Probert, 2005). Some modifications include a temporary reduction in teaching load (Ward &
Wolf-Wendel, 2004) or a temporary leave of absence for committees or department-wide projects.

**Reluctance of Use**

A culture persists that discourages parents from taking advantage of the policies and programs available to caregivers (Clark & Hill, 2010). A survey given to assistant professors at Ohio State University reported “one in three women and one in five men were interested in reducing their working hours...yet only 23 out of 3000 had ever taken advantage of the part-time policy [in ten years]” (Williams, Alon, & Bornstein, 2006). Bailyn (2003) recognized that the presence of these policies “do not alter the underlying expectations for promotion and tenure” (p. 140). Additionally, many female faculty members feel discouraged from using family-friendly accommodation because they often must negotiate the terms themselves, rather than having the accommodations automatically offered to them (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). Relatedly, the study by Fotherhill and Feltey (2003) echoed this sentiment. In their qualitative study of twenty-four tenure-track women, 87.5 percent did not asked for a reduced teaching load; 87.5 percent did not ask for parental leave; and 91.7 percent did not ask to stop their tenure clock (Fotherhill & Feltey, 2003). They also found that many faculty members elect not to activate such policies stopping the tenure clock, for fear that the institution would actually require more from them as it relates to research and productivity at the time of tenure review (Fotherhill & Feltey, 2003).

Many faculty members, both male and female, prefer to not be seen as dependent upon special support while on the tenure track (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Those chose to forego opportunities such as stopping the tenure clock or a reduction in teaching loads, are often concerned about the perceptions of colleagues or departments (Clark & Hill, 2010) and fear that it will deter their career trajectory. They often fear that taking extended leaves while on the
tenure track or reducing their teaching loads may foster resentment from not only their male counterparts, but also from other female faculty members (Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006; Sullivan, Hollenshead, & Smith, 2004; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004; Williams, 2004), who may have to incur many of their duties in the interim (Armenti, 2004c; Williams, 2004). In a study by Finkel, Olwang, and She (1994), the researchers found that at the sample institution, only one-third of female faculty members used the full amount of paid time off they were offered. And 40 percent reported refusing the paid time off entirely. Such results infer that many female faculty members are taking on the physical and emotional demands of new motherhood and the rigors of the tenure-track simultaneously (Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006). Ward & Wolf-Wendel (2004) insist that “top-level academic administrators need to do their part by establishing a positive climate for balancing work and family responsibilities” (p. 4).

**Feminist Critical Policy Analysis**

The purpose of this project was to attempt to validate the voices of this particular sub-group of graduate student: the single female with hopes or intentions of a dual career in academia: mother academic. The data analysis process began once the conversations were transcribed as a result of the constant comparative methods employed, as well as the coding and re-coding of the completed transcripts that I did while actively conducting the remaining interviews. The coded data was subsequently organized into three dominant themes and presented therein. To that end, I have chosen to employ Feminist Critical Policy Analysis (FCPA) as a theoretical frame to better understand and validate the participants’ conceptualizations of the intersection of motherhood and academia. FCPA posits the policies that govern the institutions are written from an objective and neutral stance as is the practice of the positivist paradigm, with no regard to the notion that public policy can never be neutral.
(Shaw, 2004). The academic structures, practices, and most importantly policies are biased and are in no way gender-blind despite the neutral ways in which they intended to be carried out (Bensimon & Marshall, 1997). Further, the traditional methods of policy analysis do not have the tools necessary to understand that certain policies negatively affect women or ignore us all together (Bensimon & Marshall, 1997). In other words, conventional policy and structure methods do not use the language necessary to uncover such disparities. It has also been noted that structures, norms, practices, values, and cultures that comprise the higher education environment are androcentric (Bensimon & Marshall, 1997) and these components have marginalized the feminist critique (Marshall, 1999). As stated by Shaw (2004), “The methods and theoretical frameworks that dominate current policy analysis have been developed and implemented by those in power who, particularly in the world of policy formation and analysis, are overwhelmingly white [and] male” (p. 58). Therefore, I have selected FCPA as an analytical tool because it recognizes that the lack of attention to gender in policy construction and analysis means that “the differential experiences of women and male academics is attributed to individual differences rather than to the consequences of a male ordered world” (Bensimon & Marshall, 1997, p. 2). As Marshall (1999) noted, policy implementation cannot “aim at some universal target to fix the ‘woman thing’” (p. 63). FCPA combines tools of critical theorists with tenets of feminism and feminist thought to analyze public policies and structures and “reveal both the intended and unintended effects such policies have on women” (Shaw, 2004, p. 57-58). The tools of the critical theorists give this frame the power to act as a change agent and the structure of feminist principles gives credence to the female voice as its own entity and not simply a female version of an ultimately male perspective. Bensimon & Marshall (1997) offer this
explanation of FCPA and the need for such an analytical tool in higher education policy analysis which I rely on as an impetus for use:

in feminist critical analysis there is a recognition of how patriarchy is manifest in the control of women’s identities…We see the project of feminist critical analysis as being two-fold: 1) to critique or deconstruct conventional theories and explanations and reveal the gender biases (as well as racial, sexual, social class biases) inherent in commonly accepted theories, constructs, methodologies and concepts; and 2) to conduct analysis that is feminist both in its theoretical and methodological orientations (p. 6).

Shaw (1994) recognized the necessity for this frame to analyze policies and practices by noting that “critical policy analysis when overlaid with feminism results in sustained attention to the ways in which the interests of women and the interests of the state intersect and most often contradict each other” (p. 59). I contend that as it relates to the line of inquiry for this project, the interests of the state can be assumed by the tenure and promotion interests of the institution, thereby indicating that employing FCPA as an analytical tool will uncover the spaces where the institutional culture may not coincide with the personal interests of some female faculty members.

There are three key tenets of FCPA that researchers who employ it must understand. First, gender is a fundamental category in (re)studying policies and practices. This aligns with its feminist foundations by promoting awareness of the gendered practices embedded within policy-making (Bensimon & Marshall, 2003). As Flax noted, “Gender connotes and reflects the persistence of asymmetric power relations rather than ‘natural’ (biological/anatomical) differences” (as cited in Bensimon & Marshall, 2003, p. 340). Traditional policy analysis regards gender as an environment variable, which when used this way problematizes women. In response, FCPA “problematizes practices and decisions that are assumed to be gender neutral in order to show that they can and do result in perverse consequences for women” (Bensimon & Marshall, 2003, p. 344). The goal of utilizing FCPA as an analytical tool is to reposition where
gender is placed in discussion and in writing. Second, to engage in this feminist and critical analysis, we must commit to making use of a gendered lens to judge or evaluate institutional policies, structures, and practices (Bensimon & Marshall, 2003). In other words, gender differences must be recognized and given dimensions and not ignored (Bensimon & Marshall, 1997). The third tenet leans on its critical analysis limb, in that the ultimate goal is the “transform institutions and not simply to ‘add’ women” (Bensimon & Marshall, 2003, p. 339).

In comparing this feminist and critical analysis to conventional policy analysis, the authors found “whereas conventional policy analysis problematizes women (blame-the-victim approach), feminist policy analysis problematizes taken-for-granted practices such as the tenure system” (Bensimon & Marshall, 1997, p. 10). Ultimately, FCPA reframes questions, not problematizes the subjects (Bensimon & Marshall, 2003). There are two other important characteristics of FCPA that are necessary to thoroughly utilize this analysis. The first characteristic relates to the way data is collected. The data a researcher collects is primarily as a result of the lived experiences of women and the questions asked should provoke women to talk about her experiences and frame her world as a woman and not just as a member of an androcentric world (Bensimon & Marshall, 1997). The second characteristic relates to goal or intended outcome of engaging in this type of analysis. The authors contend that “the aim of feminist critical scholarship is to dismantle systems of power and replace them with more preferable one...[and] to render patriarchal systems and presumptions unable to function, unable to retain their dominance and power” (Bensimon & Marshall, 1997, p. 10-11).

**Summary**

This chapter presented relevant literature that created a picture or portrait of a tenure-track female faculty member, which can be presented to a female doctoral student interested in
the professoriate. The first section explored academic tenure as a legal entity and a rigorous process. Next, data on the timeline tenure process was paralleled with the female reproductive timeline so that female doctoral students understand the biological and career implications for having a child while still a tenure-track faculty member. The third section presented a literature review of the difficulties faced by female academics with children. The final section explored the policies, practices, and programs available for faculty member who are parents. Further, a discussion was presented that detailed the reasons why many female faculty members have shown in the literature to be reluctant to take advantage of such tools of support. The last section of this chapter was dedicated to introducing Feminist Critical Policy Analysis as both a theoretical frame and an analytical tool, as well as an introduction to how it will be implemented in subsequent chapters.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN METHODOLOGY

Chapter three is dedicated to detailing the research methodology and research design of this study. This chapter begins with the re-statement of the purpose of the study and the subsequent research questions. A discussion of the selected qualitative methodological framework and theoretical paradigm will follow. A rationale for selecting the research design will be extended. Following is a presentation of the research plan. Detailed explanations of the research methods, the research’s position, target population, target participants, and target data collection site, sampling procedures are provided. The chapter will conclude by detailing the data analysis procedures, giving consideration to issues of validity and issues of ethical consideration. All of these elements are key components to a traditional qualitative study.

Purpose of the Study

This study has two interconnected research goals outlined as the purpose of the study and identified through three associated research questions. The over-arching purpose of this study will have a better understanding of the intersection of career and family concerns of female doctoral students by exploring the attitudes of current female doctoral candidates attending a high research activity university who have expressed an interest in pursuing the professoriate, as well as who have expressed a desire to have children. From this exploration, I was able to acknowledge the societal structures and institutional policies and politics at research-intensive schools that hinder the success and acceptance of women who intend to have a dual career. I also identified many of the social, societal, and career pressures felt by the participants, and the extent to which this pressure affect how the participants conceptualized their desired profession and their personal space within it.
Research Questions

The research questions constructed to address the purpose of this study are:

1. How do female doctoral students who desire to enter the professoriate at a high activity research university describe the intersection of their future plans of career and motherhood?

2. Where are the interconnections between the participant’s personal aspirations, professional goals, and the climate of the academy?

3. What types of pressures do the participants describe?
   a. Which pressures do the participants perceive that they feel most acutely?

Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative methodology is the term that identifies a research project that follows the tenets of a qualitative research and employs qualitative data collection and data analysis methods. Qualitative methodologies and design are often embraced as the antithesis to quantitative research, in that quantitative is research with numbers and qualitative is research with words (Creswell 2009). There are a number of definitions outlining this methodology. Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined it as:

Any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means quantification. It can refer to research about persons’ lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings as well as about organizational functioning, social movements, and cultural phenomena (pg. 10-11).

It is also defined as “an interpretive approach to data, study[ing] ‘things’ within their context and consider[ing] the subjective meanings that people bring to their situation” (“What is Research Design?”, pg. 10). Qualitative research is appropriate when a researcher intends to “explor[e] and understan[d] the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2009, pg. 4). In this study, I am working towards an understanding of the intersection of the personal and career aspirations of this particular sub-group of female graduate
students. Specific to this study, Miles and Huberman (1994) extended that a qualitative design is applicable when a researcher wants to present a new perspective on an already established line of inquiry. Research on the positions of women in higher education and personal and professional environments in which they work in is plentiful. Specifically, qualitative studies are found to clearly define the difficulties in combining motherhood and academia (Armenti, 2004b). Also, research exists that explores such areas as socialization (Daniel, 2007; Sato & Hodge, 2009), mentoring and support (Gasman, Hirschfeld, Vultaggio, 2008; Patton & Harper, 2003), attrition rates (Golde, 2005), and time-to-completion (Ferrer de Valero, 2001; Seagram, Gould, & Pyke, 1998) for women in graduate programs. A study even exists which explored the experiences of graduate student mothers (Lynch, 2008). However, this study sought to understand a specific group of women in and higher education, graduate women, and how they conceptualized these topics, and the ways in which they may or may not affect their career and reproductive desires. And as noted by Armenti (2004a), quantitative or numerical studies “only tell part of the story” (p. 3). Therefore, I find that a qualitatively structured study is an appropriate way to approach this line of inquiry and these specific research questions.

**Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, it is imperative that I recognize my role as the researcher, identify my place in this research, and acknowledge my biases or own history as it relates to this inquiry. Creswell (2007) states that the “researcher [is a] key instrument” (p.38), meaning the researcher is the method through which data is collected, and not standardized data collection methods such as questionnaires or surveys. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) offer that a qualitative researcher should “become autobiographically conscious of our own reactions to our work” (p. 46). I acknowledge that as a member of the targeted population for this study, I am inherently visible
throughout the project. I have such an investment in the topic because I am having many of the the same experiences as the participants and I am at a point in my life where I have to weigh similar options as the participants for my personal and professional life. Nonetheless, I was careful to reduce my biases in the instances when they conflicted with data collection and interpretation. I had to hold myself accountable for times in the conversation when I wanted to abandon the researcher role and adopt the role of the confidant and friend. But, to preserve the integrity of the data collection process, I committed to allowing the participants to tell their stories without the benefit of my opinion or interpretative lens. However, I was cognizant that my proximity to the research inevitably presented itself throughout the project. Most noticeably was the use of “we” in chapter four in sections where I am acknowledging that not only are the participants and I were co-researchers in this project, but we are members of the same sub-group of female doctoral students at the research site and as such had similar observations and experiences.

**Narrative Research**

A research design is the blueprint that guides a research project from data collection through interpretation (Adams & Schvaneveldt, 1985). I have chosen to employ narrative research to influence the qualitative nature of this study (Creswell, 2007). For this study, narrative is the method, in that the data collected is expressly and explicitly the stories of the participants (Cresswell, 2007). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that narrative inquiry “is the best way of representing and understanding experience” (p.18). Castle & Woloshyn (2003) note that “personal narratives serve as a primary way to make meaning of our lives” (p. 35). Narrative research is recognized as a collaborative project whereby the experiences of the
participants are merged with the experiences and views of the researcher through the re-storied narratives of the final project (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) outline basic methods for conducting narrative research. The first activity is to determine if narrative research is an appropriate method for conducting a study. Employing a narrative method of data collection, analysis, and interpretation is appropriate to use for this study because allow me the tools to gather “detailed stories or life experiences of...the lives of a small number of individuals” (Creswell, 2007). The second activity is to select the participants who embody the message or characteristics that are necessary to enrich the research topic and collect the raw data of their experiences or stories. The sampling procedures section of this chapter details the steps I took to solicit participants that I thought would provide the richest and most relevant raw data. Additionally, the data collection section of this chapter details the use of open-ended one-on-one interviews as the method of data collection, an appropriate method as prescribed by proponents of narrative research. The third activity involves allowing each participant to situate themselves and their experiences through the presentation of their social space. In chapter four, I presented specific background information on each participant that allowed me to better understand each person’s experiences and conceptualizations of the academy. The next step involves the process of analyzing the raw data provided by the participants. The data analysis strategy section of this chapter outlines the procedures I underwent to ultimately organize the raw data into dominant themes. The last activity relates the relationship between the research and the participants. Narrative research allows a great level of closeness between the research, the researcher, and the participants. In an effort to cultivate this closeness in this project, I recognized the participants as co-researchers and actively involved each person in the shaping of the topics of conversation.
Research Plan

The following section details the steps I took to construct this study and the rationale for employing certain techniques. Detailed descriptions of the target population and target data collection site as well as the sampling procedures are provided. Finally, an outline of the intended data collection methods is presented and includes the rationale for selection.

Research Site

The research site for this study was a Very High Research Activity Institution as categorized by the Carnegie classification system ("Carnegie Classification", 2010). This institution is located in a deep southern state. The research site is the only institution at this specific Carnegie classification level in the state where this study is being conducted. The impetus for selecting to this type of institution was to conduct the study at the type of institution that researchers have found career progression most difficult for female faculty members. Wilson (2004) noted that “the higher up the academic-prestige ladder a university is, the fewer women it usually has in tenured positions (p.2). Another factor the made this site desirable is convenience, as the researcher is a student at this university and as access its faculty and students.

Population

Students at an institution listed as a very high research activity institution were targeted for participation in this project. This selection aligns with the literature informing that women are less likely to excel in a dual career at an institution classified by the Carnegie Foundation as a having high and very-high research activity ("Carnegie Classification", 2010). The target population for this study was female doctoral-level graduate students at a four year, very high research activity classified, and doctorate-granting institution in the Southern United States.
More specifically, I sought out participants from this population who have expressed a desire for the dual career lifestyle: balancing motherhood and tenure pursuits.

There are five towers of academic disciplines generally recognized in American higher education institutions: (1) Humanities, (2) Social Sciences, (3) Natural Sciences, (4) Formal (Hard) Sciences, and (5) Professional and Applied Sciences (“Academic Disciplines”, 2012). The target institution has doctoral degree-granting programs within each of the five towers. At the target institution, the thirteen Humanities disciplines are as follows: Aerospace, Communication Studies, Communication Sciences, English, Foreign Languages, French, Geography & Anthropology, History, Military Science, Philosophy & Religious Studies, Political Sciences, Psychology, and Sociology. For the purposes of this study, I have consulted the list of the eleven doctoral-degree granting colleges at the target institution, merged them with the five towers and identified three academic clusters from which the target populations are matriculating:

(1) science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)

(2) humanities and social sciences (H&SS), and

(3) professional and applied sciences (Professions).

The STEM cluster merges fields of study from the natural sciences tower, formal sciences tower, and engineering from the professional and applied sciences tower. The H&SS cluster includes fields of study the humanities tower and the social sciences tower. Finally, the Professions cluster represents as is, not including medical and law degree-granting. Students from these areas comprise the target population (Table 1).
Qualitative studies use purposeful sampling techniques in order to locate individuals who will be able to provide the richest detail possible towards the topic or query. As is standard with qualitative studies, generalizability to a larger population is not a goal (Creswell, 2007). I identified four requirements that each participant must have met. I believed these that if a participant met these requirements, her responses would contribute the richest data for this study. I also believed a person who met these requirements would have had more opportunities for observations of motherhood and career, more conversations with current faculty members from which to draw on, more exposure to the academic climate, and more experiences that related to pressures and making definitive plans for her future.

First, each participant was either no less than one semester away from taking her qualifying exams as set forth by her degree-granting college, or have completed her qualifying or benchmarking exams and be in the dissertation phase of her program. This criterion was set in order to identify participants who are potentially more familiar with the culture and climate of the academy by virtue of her observations and interactions with colleagues and current faculty members. The second criterion is that each participant’s age fell within a specific age range. I labeled this age range as typical child-bearing years. The average age for a woman in America...
to obtain her Ph.D. is 34 years old (Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2008). The women in this study are doctoral candidates who have persisted from undergraduate through graduate studies with minimum interruption or are working and going to school simultaneously. At the target institution, 37 percent of the graduate students are between 25-29 years old. Therefore, I used the parameter of 25-34 as the age criterion. I acknowledge that participants may have fallen outside this age parameter. Third, each participant represented a department within one of the three academic clusters. The fourth selection criterion is that she must not have children at the time of data collection, as the purpose of the study is to understand how these women navigate the intersection of possibilities.

A minimum of two and a maximum of three participants from each cluster were selected for interviews. This created a sample size of six participants. Because it is beyond the scope of this study to identify every female doctoral student within the target population who has an interest in a dual career, a two phase sampling technique was created to identify participants who meet the criterion. During the first phase, I re-contacted the potential participants from various fields who expressed interest in this line of inquiry at the point of its inception. These students were then re-screened and selected as study participants based on their adherence to the new criteria set forth and their willingness to continue to participate in the study. At the second sampling phase, I contacted faculty and graduate students from programs within each of the three academic clusters and ask them to recommend participants who may fit the criteria. I then initiated contact with these potential participants by introducing myself to them and explaining the purpose of the study. Finally, I identified the remaining study participants by their qualifications and willingness to participate. Additionally, availability to be interviewed during the time frame allocated for data collection was a critical criterion.
Data Collection

Creswell (2007) informs that qualitative studies are appropriate when the researcher desires a detailed understanding of an issue. The researcher adds complexity by enlisting the help of the persons who are directly experiencing the phenomenon or have lived through it. The researcher assigns the role of data to the stories and visual and written aids provided by the participants. Most qualitative data collection will fall into one of five categories: (a) direct observation, (b) interviews, (c) document analysis, (d) audio-visual materials analysis, and (e) participation in the setting (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). To collect the data for this study, I chose to conduct an open-ended, one-on-one interview with each participant. This particular variation of interview data collection was selected because it “encourag[ed] deeper reflection and lengthy responses on the part of the interviewees” (Armenti, 2004a). I asked each participant interview prompts rather than interview questions which created a conversational environment and allowed the participants the power to create their own meanings and the space for deeper personal exploration (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Corbin & Morse, 2003). The topics of interest were: (1) the opinions of the participants regarding the academy’s views or handling on female academics; (2) the inter-narratives of the participants regarding joining the professoriate; (3) the strengths and struggles of known mother academics; (4) the types of advice or models available for the female doctoral students and how this influenced her decision; and (5) they types of internal or external pressures she is experiencing, be they negative or positive. The stories told by the participants was the critical data collected of this study, with information such as relationship status, belief system(s), and place of origin being collected as well for future analysis and theme development. The interviews were conducted and analysis began.
immediately to allow for flexibility and possible interview technique revision, as suggested by Coffey and Atkinson (1996).

**Data Analysis Strategy**

Qualitative data analysis is ultimately charged with two tasks: helping us to understand the meanings of the participant’s responses, and addressing the research questions. To that end, Creswell (2007) identifies what he found to be the core elements in qualitative data analysis: (a) organizing the data, (b) creating a system of codes to code the data, (c) reduce the coded data into themes, and (d) presenting the data graphically. I selected Bensimon and Marshall’s feminist critical policy analysis as the theoretical lens of this study. Subsequently, I have chosen to adopt the data analysis procedure crafted by Madison because it requires the researcher to incorporate the theoretical perspective used in this “critical theoretically oriented” study (p. 148) into the analysis (Creswell, 2007). Madison (2005) outlines a four step process for analyzing data:

1. Identify the codes using abstract or concrete coding
2. Identify themes or patterns
3. Create a point of view by incorporating the theoretical perspective
4. Display the data (See Appendix G).

I chose to transcribe the interviews immediately after each interview. This allowed me to review each interview and the data being collected in real time in order to make adjustments or identify building themes or topics of importance. This allowed me to make best use of the constant comparative data analysis method (Creswell, 2009). To fulfill the first step of data analysis, I coded each transcribed interviewing using abstract codes derived directly from the words, phrases, or connotations of the participants. As I coded each new transcribed interview
and found new codes, I returned the previously coded interviews to look for all undiscovered codes.

**Validity of the Results**

Qualitative research is critiqued as not being a standard measure of research. Many proponents of other research methodologies believe that qualitative research lacks strength and reputability because it often does not contain the standard quantifiable data that can be compared using reliability measures, and it lacks the ability to be validated by other researchers because the conditions often do not lend themselves to identical recreation. However, this is not the case. Qualitative research is deemed reliable and valid by its “trustworthiness”, a term used by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Trustworthiness includes several tenets, yet Creswell (2007) recommends that a qualitative researcher a minimum of two validation techniques in a study.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation is a method of adding validity to qualitative studies (Creswell, 2009) in which researchers cross-check data using multiple data sources or multiple data collection procedures (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006) “to build a coherent justification for themes” (Creswell, 2009, p.191). I compared the data provided by each participant to the collection of data as a whole and established relationships between the dominant themes and the literature and deconstructed them using the analytical lens. Employing this technique allowed me another method of ensuring the richness of the data was not loss in the process of building the dominant themes, yet also ensuring the project was thread together and presented a complete picture.

**Member Checking**

I have chosen to recognize the participants themselves as critical data analysis tools as well as data sources. As such, I including member checking as a means of validation (Creswell,
Member checking is considered “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, in Creswell, 2007, p. 208). Throughout the analysis and interpretation phases of this project, I used the small number of participants to my advantage and solicited their corroboration to ensure that I interpreted their meanings the way they intended them to be interpreted (Gardner, 2012). In this project, this was done during that data collection phase by working with each participant to ensure that she was saying exactly what she wanted to say and not what she thought I wanted to hear. I also was meticulous to maintain the authenticity of their words by presenting their words in their totality and not selecting the sections of their sentences that fit my needs and omitting others. I also utilized the participants from interview to interview to hone in on which topics would yield the most relevant data. Finally, I also reconnected with many of the participants after the data collection phase was complete and allowed them the review the analysis section or petitioned their aid in the data interpretation phase.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are paramount in qualitative research because of the propensity of personal revelations (Creswell, 2007; Madison, 2005). Because the participants in a study are important throughout the entirety of the study, the researcher should commit to maintaining the integrity of their relationship. To that end, I assigned alias names to the participants and chose not refer to any unique identifiable traits, memberships, relationships, or assets, including her department, in order to protect the participants. It was also paramount that I maintained the anonymity of any faculty members that were discussed by the participants, including refraining from acknowledging departments or notable research projects. Each participant submitted a signed consent form (see appendix D). I upheld the ethical considerations of the research by
submitting to all stated qualifications for conducting human research as outlined by the research review board at the target institution.

**Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the proposed methods of initiating data collection and transitioning to data analysis as outlined by the literature on qualitative research methodology and design. The theoretical paradigm was introduced. The rationale was selecting a narrative research design was stated. Great attention was given to defining the target population and the sampling procedures. Finally, the data analysis procedure was introduced, with consideration given to techniques for addressing both validity and ethical considerations.
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

“I just think that we have competing priorities when you’re in this kind of field and you’re doing what you’re good at doing. But that also means that you have to make a lot of choices”--Maggie

A Fork in the Road

We have all experienced moments in our lives where we have to make a decision that will affect our future armed with only the guidance of our past experiences and the past experiences of others. The kind of decision that no one can make for you because no one has your exact set of the experiences and of course no one can predict the future. An actor in a recent Hollywood film said it like this: “[we] leap and hope to God we can fly” (Hancock, 2008). That similar sentiment was echoed by the participants of this study. Each described in her own words the feeling that so many of the desires of their hearts were conflicting with one another. They have reached a fork in the road, or a decision-making time. This is not a decision that can be made with little thought into repercussions that may or may not happen in the future. The decisions that are made now have immediate effects in a number of ways. We¹ all knew that choosing a career within certain veins of academia will have concrete effects on our personal pursuits. This is also further solidified for certain disciplines within academia. My personal conceptualization of this is as a selection/de-selection: By selecting a career in academia, I may have de-selected having children. We have each toiled through arduous graduate coursework and milestone requirements to reach the top of a mountain and ¹we can begin to see what is on the horizon; the life that we worked so hard to achieve and the accolades we have desired to be given. But we are at a fork in the road and the next decisions we make may directly inform elements of our future that we never thought would have to be negotiated in such ways. Will I

¹“We” is used throughout this chapter to reference that the participants and I are co-researchers in this project.
be able to have the family structure that I’ve always wanted? Have I need to re-affirm what makes me happy? This is point where we introduce this study and the narrative that follows.

**Introduction**

This chapter presents the data collected through the interviews with the participants. Each participant was given a venue to explore the different ways she conceptualizes the space(s) that the academy makes for motherhood. It begins with the introduction of the six participants, the co-researchers for the project. Demographic details and information about the participants’ degree-completion progress is presented. Each participant has been assigned a pseudonym so as to maintain confidentiality. I will also vague references to the participants’ departments and colleges for the duration of this project so as to mask the identities of the academic units represented. This is an additional measure to assure anonymity and uphold confidentiality. While being able to make connections between the participant and her department would have given a space for deeper analysis within certain topics or themes, I prefer to proceed cautiously so as to further reduce the chance of the participants’ identities being exposed. From the analysis of data, three dominant themes were found and will be presented. Throughout this section I refer to the interviews as conversations as a way of highlighting the co-researcher relationship I cultivated with the participants and the role they played in developing the dominant themes. Following the presentation of the dominant themes is the analysis these themes using Feminist Critical Policy Analysis (FCPA), the conceptual framework of this project.

**The Six Women**

The purpose of this section is to introduce each participant. For each participant I have included information regarding her hometown, age, and the academic cluster she represents. I have also given provided details about how I met her, my perception of her personality, and the
environment of our interview. Finally, there are details about how she became interested in a career in academic, for which I have elected to use her own words to preserve authenticity.

Maggie

When I petitioned Maggie to grant me an interview, I just knew it was going to be an amazing session. She is such an accomplished student and scholar and she is never without insight. And accompanying her theoretical rhetoric is a sassy disposition and bottle full of quips. Even as I was designing this project, I often reflected on how Maggie would answer each question. She was actually the first participant with whom I was able to schedule a meeting. During the interview, I asked her how she became interested in a career in academia. She explained that while working at the university an opportunity came to take graduate classes at no charge. She went on to explain:

I was like, shoot, I’m single, I don’t have any kids, I don’t have a husband, I might as well take this opportunity. And I started taking the classes and that world of academia opened up to me and seemed like a viable option or something that I wanted to do.

We met one afternoon in a conference room on campus a few days before commencement. At the time of the interview, Maggie had just successfully defended her dissertation and had accepted a tenure-track position at a Very High Research Activity institution. Maggie is a 31 year old Black female from Louisiana. She represents an academic unit within the Professions cluster.

Rebecca

I knew petitioning Rebecca to participate in this study was a great decision. She is a wonderfully outspoken critical thinker, especially on such socially-centered topics. We often had candid conversations about aspects of this topic which may have given me the impetus to begin this study. We had the pleasure of having our conversation using a video interface, which gave a unique perspective to our usual face-to-face conversations. Rebecca is a 28 year old
Black female and she was born and raised in Missouri. She represents a field within the Professions cluster. At the time of the interview, Rebecca had just successfully defended her dissertation. After weighing job offers from both private industry and academia, she decided to accept a tenure-track position at a Historically Black College and University. In finding out more about how she became interested in the professoriate and ultimately choosing to accept a tenure-track position instead of a position in the private sector she explained:

So being in academia but on the other side, on the administrative side, I would see the faculty members go home for the summer and come back refreshed…And for me personally I realized that I wanted to be on the other side of the equation.

Amber

Amber is the third woman interviewed in this study. Much like Maggie and Rebecca, Amber was no stranger to this topic, as we had multiple candid conversations about these issues. I had a notion that Amber would present some rich data for this study because she is very outspoken with family and friends, as well as her department colleagues about her desire to start a family. She often mentions that her desire for a dual career is not always in line with the culture of her department. She allowed me to meet her on campus for the interview and we met in her department-provided office space. Amber was born in raised in Louisiana and identifies herself as Creole. In response to my question of why she chose to pursue a doctorate she said:

The only way to do the job I wanted to do—I wanted to be a [omitted]—is to go to graduate school. So it was almost a moot point. If I wanted to be a [omitted], this is what I got to do.

At the time of the interview, she had just successfully defended her departments qualifying exams. She is 28 years old and represents that H&SS cluster.
Kimmy

Kimmy is the first participant to be found in the second phase of the sampling technique as she was referred to me as a possible participant by a faculty member. We actually met for the first time on the day of the interview. She is a 30 year old Black female and she represents a STEM field. When I petitioned Kimmy to participate in the study, I was very excited to learn how she observes the intersection of motherhood and a career in the sciences. She provided a wealth of rich data for this study. Again, she allowed me to meet with her at her on-campus graduate assistant space. Kimmy is a native of Texas. At the time of the interview, she was in the process of completing her dissertation. Having chosen a field where degree-related employment outside of academia is not only a viable option, but for some a more desired route, I asked her why she has chosen to pursue an academic appointment. She responded:

I’m really passionate about teaching and student learning. I think the flexibility of higher education and the opportunity to teach and to learn and cultivate younger researchers and things like that are very appealing to me. Like that falls in line with what I really want to do or what I found that I enjoy the most; that’s where my passion is.

Jessica

Jessica is the fifth participant to be interviewed for this study, and was recommended by a faculty member. Again, I did not know Jessica prior to her participation in this study, but I was excited about data she would provide from the perspective of a STEM field representative, and I was obliged that she agreed to participate in this project. Jessica is a 28 year old White female and is a native of Minnesota. At the time of the interview, Jessica was in the midst of writing her dissertation. She allowed me to meet with her in a conference room on campus. She expressed that she would in fact be able to give a more candid interview if she was in a neutral space, and not within possible earshot of members of her department. Though not expounded on in this analysis, is very insightful for me as a researcher to have the opportunity to compare Jessica and
Kimmy’s experiences as they represent different disciplines within the STEM fields. Like Kimmy, Jessica is in a field where positions in the private sector, even private sector research positions, are often seen as more desirable than academic positions. In response to my inquiry as to why she selected to pursue an academic appointment, she said:

I tend to go more to the teaching side and service side. I think research is really important, but I think the teaching side is more important because those are out future leaders. Those are the people that are going to really solve the problems.

Tellin

Tellin was the sixth and final interview for this project. She is a 29 year old Black female and a Louisiana native. She also represents the Professions. However, she is also completing a minor in a field representing the H&SS cluster. During the interview, Tellin expressed that she has still has a vested interest in pursuing a tenure-track position or a university administrative position. I asked her about the start of her interest in joining the professoriate. She confidently responded:

I don’t know if this is arrogance or confidence or faith, but I think I was created to be a woman in a leadership position… I feel like my training had prepared me for a leadership position but I also think I’m competent enough to be in the classroom.

At the time of our interview, Tellin had successfully defended her departments qualifying exams a few days prior. Tellin allowed me into her residence to conduct the interview, which provided a very unique and candid conversation in a very comfortable setting. I definitely sensed an atmosphere of freedom to conceptualize. Throughout the conversation, Tellin had a number of “ah ha” moments that as a researcher I was humbled to be a part of. Despite the fact that all of the prior interviews had been transcribed and were in the midst of being coded and compared, Tellin provided data and perspective that I had not considered and the other participants did not mention.
Presentation of the Dominant Themes

The dominant themes, or ideas that carried across participants, began to emerge as a result of the questions or topics of interests I prepared going into each interview, as well as topics that were introduced by the women. The open-ended questions and conversational atmosphere of the one-on-one sessions afforded me space to allow the questions to evolve throughout the interviews or to be adapted during a conversation to allow the themes I recognized as dominant to be explored in greater detail than the women may have intended. The development of dominant themes as described by the voices of the women is both a tenet of narrative research and of Feminist Critical Policy Analysis and provided rich descriptions of the intersection of motherhood and family and the faculty desires. I uncovered three themes that carried across the six conversations and could be reinforced by examples and testimonies directly from the participants: (1) spiritual foundations or spiritually-based life patterns, (2) the culture of tenure-track positions at a tier-one institution, and (3) the intersection of the tenure clock and the biological clock. Within each of the themes, sub-categories were created to aide in better presenting the words of the participants and their own reflections.

A Fervent Belief. A Righteous Hope.

“...basically there’s a verse that says God makes everything beautiful in His own time. So I don’t have to worry...”—Tellin

The first dominant theme was found in the deep ways in which each participant described her personal relationship with a spiritual being or a higher power and the powerful ways in which this connection impacts her personal and professional desires. In an attempt to un-wrap this theme and present it more clearly, three sub-categories were created using the language of the participants and their descriptions: (1) a spiritual calling to join the academy; (2) the foundations of her spiritual connection; and (3) a spiritual place where she finds hope.
This is What I’m Destined to Do

I asked each woman a rather blunt question because I hoped it would really provoke each of them in different ways: “Why are you pursuing a tenure-track position when you know that it may mean a sacrifice of your personal goals?” My intention was not to make her change her mind about her professional goals, but rather to give her a moment to create her own port in the storm if she ever needed one. Maggie gave a very full response, in where she does not agree with my notion of a sacrifice:

These are the desires of my heart: I want to be a professor; I want to be a tenured professor I want to have a great husband; I want to have beautiful children; I want to have peace; I want to have it all.

She revisited this inquiry towards the end of our conversation in the context of passing on inspiration to the next generation of female graduate students:

All I can tell you to do is pursue your passion, do what you’re good at, do what you’re built to do and prayerfully everything will fall into place…I think if you do good work and you do what you’re built to do, then the other pieces will fall into place.

Tellin without hesitation approached my inquiry with Christian steadfastness and said “I think that whatever I do, no matter where I go God will make a way for me and there will be no barriers or obstacles to what I’m destined to do.”

These participants focus on the fact that they feel a calling to the professoriate above all else. While they did acknowledge the trials that they may face, or the decisions that they will have to make and those that may be made for them, these women have created a space where they can display their goals or dreams without fear of inevitable human failure. This is a display of how God controls the lives and the destinies of those who allow Him.

“But God.”

During my conversations with the women, this idea of a spiritual connection was brought to the forefront both in conversations about personal desires and about professional desires. That spoke
volumes to the significance of spirituality in their lives. Ultimately, we discovered that each participant referenced a notion that an outside force or a spiritual being was somehow guiding her steps and intervening on her behalf and was a dominant factor in the decisions that she makes. At the beginning of each conversation, I tasked each woman with critically addressing a very broad question: “What are your guiding principles or from where does your moral compass originate?” My intent was not finding a biblical reference; in fact, I intentionally avoided referencing spirituality and religiosity. I purposely presented these broad questions to hopefully help them find their center or to help them situate their conversation. However, a biblical or spiritual reference was exactly what I received. When we have to pause to give reflection to a response like this, it sometimes means that we have to give ourselves a deep inner analysis that can be either rewarding or intimidating, as what often happens when we consider the demographic types of ways we identify ourselves. I found through analyzing the conversation that the ways in which each woman approached this line of inquiry, set the pace for the rest of the conversation. In fact, this question ultimately served in the capacity of a demographic question, insomuch as spirituality is how they identify themselves in the same vein as gender or ethnicity. When I asked Maggie these questions, she firmly situated herself without hesitation, responding that “my [her] guiding ideals are most significantly biblical…my faith in Jesus Christ is the most significant part of how I identify myself. So my principles always go back to the word of God.”

Parallel to the Maggie’s response, Tellin situated herself within that opening question in saying, “I am a Christian. So that contextualizes my actions and the way I see the world.” She re-visited these questions later in the conversation by going on to say “guiding principles, really
how I interpret that is I do what I have to do today and God will do what He has to do tomorrow.”

It held true that at many points throughout my conversations with Maggie and Tellin, we came back to a “but God” moment. Many Christian preachers use this phrase to affirm to their congregations that among other things God is in control of their situations and everything will be alright. That is exactly what I sensed when I was with them. Spoken well by Maggie later in our conversation:

I say to people who are in the church that the Lord guided me to my purpose without even letting me know…[and] I think that part of my faith and part of my—the way that I interpret faith mean that I have, like the presidents says, audacity to hope.

Later on in our conversation, Rebecca expressed that her relationship with Christ serves as a place of security for her:

Do your part and everything else will fall into place the way it should especially if you follow some sort of spiritual doctrine. A lot of people believe in some sort of higher power. You have to leave the rest up to the higher power. Um and like I said what’s what helps you sleep at night.

Maggie used a biblical scripture to illustrate how her relationship with Christ serves as her personal and professional guide:

There’s several scriptures that guide my life—but um Philippians 4:6-7 says “be anxious for nothing. But in all things through prayer and petition submit your requests to the Lord, and a peace that transcends all understanding will guard your heart in Christ Jesus.”

I found that this idea that having a relationship with Christ is what the participants’ anchored to in moments of uncertainty or during that selection/de-selection period. I contend that a purposeful connection can be made that the participants who identify as black and their prominent affinity for a spiritual relationship. I am not contending the Jessica’s identity as a white female does not entitle her to a deep spiritual connection. However, I am contending that
the spirituality literature does confirm that there is a strong relationship between those who identify as black and their affinity for a strong spiritual relationship (Mathis, 2000).

“I’m Letting it Work Itself Out”

I asked each participant about her future as it relates to her career trajectory or where she desires to be professionally. I then asked how her career desires do or do not impact her personal desires for her future after graduate school. I posited at the beginning of the study that joining the professoriate may have negative implications on personal aspirations, especially for female academics as indicated in the literature. Having accepted a tenure-track position, I asked Maggie to critically reflect on her position based on the findings in the literature. Nevertheless, her response was directly in-line with the spiritual way in which situates her actions and thoughts. She offered, “I just have a fervent belief that it will all work out. I have a fervent belief that if it is the desire of my heart it will come to pass; God will make it come to pass and work these issues out.”

We revisited her conceptualization of the possibilities in combining an academic career and a family later in the interview. I asked her if she ever felt any trepidation about not seeing any roads on the horizon that lead to getting married and having children. She answered by saying:

The saving grace for me is I really feel like I’m called to do this. Because of my faith, I feel like I ‘m called to do this. So I don’t have those ‘what ifs’ in my head because I know that whatever is going to be is going to be because this is what I’m supposed to do. Although she said that she starting a family may have to be postponed, Maggie never said she has given up on having children, despite such potential obstacles as her age and her position as a newly appointed tenure-track faculty member. In fact she insists that the desires of her heart are to have multiple children.
Again I asked Rebecca to address her opinion based on the less than favorable findings in the literature, especially since she is a newly appointed tenure-track faculty member set to begin in the coming months. She actually illustrated her position succinctly during a portion of our conversation regarding being a mentor to the next generation of female graduate students. Her response was a combination of spiritual reliance and personal responsibility:

It’s all about seeing your own personal goals based on your own moral compass and doing the best you can to achieve those things. And I think that although everything may not turn out exactly as picture perfect as you had hoped, it helps us sleep at night knowing God is in control too.

She later added, “I’ll speak for myself…if I know I’ve done all I can do, that’s all I can do.”

Like Maggie, Rebecca has not indicated that she has given up any hope whatsoever of having a family. In fact it was the opposite. Throughout our conversation, she always referenced “when I have my family”, rather than “if I have my family.”

Kimmy expressed a rather moving sentiment when we spoke about her conceptualization of her intersection of family and career. We were talking about how this intersection is complicated by being in a STEM field. She leaned back in her desk chair, closed her eyes, and after a brief pause said:

It just makes me realize that I need to keep what I value—it helps me remember that I have focus on what’s important to me and you know really do some self-evaluation and focus on those things that are most important to me which…while a career is important, I don’t want life to pass me by and I’ve missed all the beautiful things going on around me.

She is not showing any fear of the future, rather she is showing that a dual career as a mother academic is a priority for her.

Tellin also rooted her conceptualization of the possibilities of incorporating career and family in her faith and spirituality:

…ok well so according to what I believe—basically there’s a verse that says God makes everything beautiful in His on time. So I don’t have to worry about let’s say finding a
husband one day because if I take care of what I have to take care of today God will take care of His part tomorrow...So I put in work towards my career.

We picked up this thread again just a few moments later. When asking her to speak specifically towards her career, she stated “you always know that your future is going to be taken care of so it doesn’t matter where I go because I think it’ll be where God have placed me.”

Amber expressed multiple times throughout the conversation just how important it was for her to have a family. Ultimately, she came up with a simple line to express both her trepidation about joining the professoriate and her spiritual reliance. After a moment of reflection, she sighed. She then simply said “I just have to keep moving…it’s possible to live that life. I’m just letting it work itself out.”

I found her sentiment to be rather poignant and summative. The participants to have found a momentary place of peace and rest in the fact that what is happening to them, what will happen to them, and what is happening around them is not fully dependent on their actions. In a situation where it is plausible to desire to be in control of a potentially negative situation, rather than letting things happen, these participants have found an impetus for bartering complete control for the notion that with God things will work out better than with without Him. The spiritual connection is integral to their lives.

Kimmy spoke to me about being one of only a very few minorities in her department. She feels that being a black female in a predominately white field and industry. She often feels pressure to pursue advanced and rapid professional pursuits in a way that would definitely delay having a family. She is acutely aware that her presence on campus will make a difference for minorities in the STEM fields and is already fielding offers from research universities. But after a few moments of quiet considering, she settled on a response gleaned from conversations with
her academic mentor about this very subject and offered, “she reminded us of our faith and make
sure we keep God first and that those things will come to you.”

Interestingly, Maggie also calls this particular female faculty member an academic
mentor and attended the same session where she was speaking with graduate students about
balancing professional and personal pursuits. During our conversation, Maggie recalled
something she said that she still meditates on. The faculty member is remembered as saying:

You don’t have to give up hope-not be hopeful about certain things. But you make not be
able to have the white picket fence and this and that and all these other accoutrements at
the same time in your life. There may be certain season where you acquire these
different things.

I think that is a sentiment that each of the participant has spoken to in her own way; the notion of
hopefulness. I cannot claim that each of them feels that her hopefulness is solely because of her
relationship with Christ, or if portions of it is as a result of her professional preparation.

However, I will contend that the relationship with Christ is integral. As an example, Tellin
stated that she knows she wants a family one day and she is hopeful that it will happen. In
another moment in the conversation, she again referenced a contribution from her belief system:

That stuff is just on the horizon…I need to make sure I’m taking care of what I need to
take care of today. If you have a Christian belief system there is this idea that God is
always guiding your steps, the steps or a righteous man are ordered by the Lord. He also
says be anxious for nothing. So that’s my overarching idea.

“I have all these goals and dreams and I’m not going to change them...that’s how I get through
my day because I know I’m not wasting my life or I’m not making a sacrifice. The world makes
you think that I’m picking my career over my family. But I’m just being patient.”

This Just May Be Too Much

“They can talk about socially just the institution is, and how much they focus on this and focus
on that, but at the end of the day, the institution is the institution. This is the United States and
this is the way the universities function”—Maggie
The second dominant theme was found in the participants’ perception of the culture and politics of the academy. Through analysis I was able to pinpoint their perceptions in three specific regards: (1) the politics of earning tenure; (2) the environment of tier one research institutions; and (3) the existence of family-friendly policies for faculty members. I have used each participant’s experiences and her words to create a picture of the ways in which the culture and politics of tenure and promotion affect these participants and the ways in which she anticipates the academic environment affecting her family related decisions.

That’s How I Talk About It, Chasing Tenure

I invested time in this project presenting a robust picture of the literature regarding the high demands of the tenure track position. The focus for graduate students preparing for a tenure-track position is now grasping the gravity of the tenure timeline. Maggie referred to this space as the four plus six or the five plus six. She was underscoring the idea that for those desiring to begin the tenure track right after graduate school, the four or five years it takes achieve the doctorate will be immediately followed by the 6 years the institution allots to earn a tenured status. This is also the time frame for most faculty members, in particular female faculty to think about starting a family. To that end, the women and I spent time discussing their perception of the way that academe functions and the spaces it makes for the familial pursuits of female faculty. We referenced the perceived rigidity of academe as it relates to the tenure track. Maggie provided her understanding of this rigidity by saying:

I think that there are certain requirements that are there and it doesn’t…it doesn’t really matter if you are a woman. This is what it is and this is the way it’s going to be. You have to get tenure in six years. We don’t care if your biological clock stops at four years. You have to publish this amount every year.

After a brief pause, she added, “I think this is sort of an overarching theme. Nobody cares. Like this is what we do here and you just need to fall in line.”
I asked Amber to explain her perspective of academe. Her focus was on the gendered politics that she perceives. Her first explanation was given with a hint of trepidation:

So um…I really think that academia is geared kind of against females. [Look] around any of the major institutions, especially the tier ones, the research institutions. Um…it’s really…the policies are really stringent as far as publications and things…life happens and if you’re responsible for a family or you are trying to have a child it’s very difficult.

A few moments later she extended her conceptualization to include a more generalized critique of the culture of academia as it relates to policy and said, “I actually feel like the policies are not geared toward anyone having any external issues.” Later in our conversation we revisited the topic of non-gender neutrality of the academy, where she provided some clarity to her perspective:

I think it’s less about being a woman or being married—and I think this is across all disciplines unfortunately—and it’s more about you know the demands. And in this modern era…I was reading something about how despite all this modern whatever women still have the lion’s share of the taking care of the kids and people know that. Um people know that and they don’t want that perceived loss of productivity.

Maggie also gave an account of her perception of the cultural nuances of the academy in regard to the tenure and promotion timeline that was in accord with Amber’s perception:

They said six years. You know and in some cases they’ll give you more but then a lot of times the culture frowns upon—you know they look at you like you’re kind of a liability now because you’re a woman and you go pregnant and so, and now we have to go through all the rigmarole to extend your tenure time because you decided to get pregnant or whatever.

Amber’s views the academy as a place where the dual career may not be as easy as it may seem. She and Maggie both iterate that the environment is sometimes a cold one in that the goals and objectives for which you earn your paycheck, may not always give perceived room for outside interests, of which having a family is viewed at as an outside interest. To this end, Amber went on to provide some clarity on her perspective of the academy:
In a sense I think it’s family-friendly—I think it’s family friendly once you’ve got tenure. Maybe I should rephrase. I think until you get tenure, you know you’re on a string, you’re on a wire, you’re going nuts.

Jessica provided a two-prong answer to her perception of the academy in regards to tenure and promotion. In her first response she seemed to echo the gendered perspective of Maggie and Amber:

I’ve seen a lot of negative articles and statistics showing that women with PhDs are leaving academia because it’s not open for flexible—well not necessarily a flexible lifestyle, it’s just so rigorous to get tenure and to be successful that the women are leaving and going elsewhere because of balancing a family or the expectations that you would have as a woman at home versus in your career.

Nonetheless, a few moments later she gave an account that the academy is not completely against women. In describing how she felt regarding the presence of women in tenure-track positions, she said:

I feel there are more programs to get women in PhDs and get them into these types of situations and to help them and to get them more successful. I feel that people are moving in the direction. They want women to be here.

Jessica recognizes that while women have created spaces in the academy for themselves, these spaces exist within an organization with policies that are not written with respect to the female perspective.

Tellin also offered a two-pronged explanation of women in the academy that echoes Jessica’s perspective. First she did acknowledge that spaces exist for females in academia by recognizing that “I think that there are opportunities that exist for females in leadership positions on college campuses.” However, she concluded her critique by pointing out that she recognizes that hegemonic tendencies are still prevalent in institutional cultures, specifically the culture at this institution. She added, “um conversely, I see that good old boy syndrome still going on…So I think those gender politics continue to be prevalent.”
Maggie also proposed another critique of how selecting to enter the professoriate may impact her ability to create the family she desires. In this excerpt she is referencing how critical selecting a mate is to her and ultimately his effect on her familial desires. She stated:

Some of the worries that um that circulate in my brain as I’ve chosen this profession is it also limits the mates-the potential mates that I may have. I may as an academic to have better opportunities and I need to pick up and move to other universities. But what if I go there, I meet a mate, but then a better opportunity comes up in another state, will he be able to move? Does he have the kind of job that offers that kind of flexibility? Are his roots firmly planted where I am at? I think about that.

Kimmy also mentioned a similar situation wherein her selection of potential universities is limited to a certain area because of her current mate’s professional mobility. She recognizes that the geographic constraints will limit the number of universities in her access, which will not only limit her career mobility, but ultimately limit her options in work environments that may better suit her personal desires. Kimmy and Maggie have both emphasized that the desire to have a family is already made them contemplate how their professional goals will have to be altered or reconfigured.

I Can Tell You Something About This Tier One Environment, I Don’t Want This

The focus of this project was to look primarily at the intersection of motherhood and academia from the vantage point of a female graduate student desiring to work at a tier one institution. During our conversations, I had to make sure that we were all juxtaposing the family desires to the tier one desires. When I asked them to specifically speak to the Very High Research Activity environment they most often used their experiences at their current tier one institution as a reference or model of the tier one experience.

In our conversation, Rebecca explained why she moved from an administrative position at her previous university to a full-time doctoral student with desires of entering the tenure-track
faculty ranks. She explained how she admittedly glamourized the flexible schedules that faculty members seemed to have. But, she went on to admit that she had a bit of a reality check:

Once I got into the doctoral program and I started talking to people and I found out more about the real life of a faculty member, it wasn’t so glamorous. Um there were some things what I wasn’t exactly happy to learn. Um sometimes the environment is not that friendly and it can be a tough balance.

Kimmy is a star performer in the program at the tier one research institution and subsequently has fielded outstanding tier one offers. I asked Kimmy to elaborate on in what ways, if any, has her desire to be at a tier one institution has changed throughout her time at the university. In a very resolute tone she said:

I guess being at a research institution has made me realize that I do not want to be at a research institution. That is probably the number one thing. Like I know that I cannot be at a research institution [like this one].

Kimmy’s feelings are as a result of the experiences she has had and the climate and processes she has seen at her institution and in her program. Her reservations are directly related to the policies that are set forth.

I asked Amber how she finds the environment at this Very High Research Activity institution. She did explain that while her specific field of study is not considered by outsiders to be as rigid as others within her department, her department head is a staunch proponent of internationally competitive research productivity. The climate he has created has caused her to seriously consider changing her career trajectory. She said:

As far as the professoriate, I can tell you something about being in this tier one environment, I don’t want this. Send me to a small liberal arts college where I’m teaching five classes, but I’m only expected to publish maybe twice a year. And that would be my ideal situation now. And I know I’ll make less money and I won’t have the big lab, and all the equipment, but that would make me happier because…I can’t take the stress. This academic environment is so stressful that it’s hard to even kind of function.

I pressed her to elaborate more on the tier one experience from the perspective of her discipline. She explained that she once heavily desired to earn a position at the tier one research institution
and has even received interest from a prominent research program in her field. However, based on her experiences thus far she has concluded:

I would be afraid of going [to a tier one] and failing; that I would be unable to manage everything. And even if I was successful in my career, that I would be unable to find a husband because I’m so busy.

The participants also presented a relationship between tier one institutions and the publication requirements, which they perceive as intimidating. Kimmy, for example, has been recognized within her department and on campus. During our conversation, she explained that there were not many female students or faculty members in her program. And the female faculty members in her program and in her department, she confided, do not live the type of the work/life balance she desires. She admitted that her professors feel she should not have any complications in earning a tenure-track position at tier one institution. But, now that she is nearing the end of her doctoral program she’s definitely feeling less inclined to pursue a position at a tier one institution. She gave her resolve:

This environment [very high research activity] is not appealing because of the work/life balance. That’s why it’s not appealing. I wouldn’t mind doing the research if that…if it weren’t so I guess stressful, or that monkey wasn’t always on my back.

Amber also pointed to the publication requirements as a large part of her reason for no longer desiring to pursue the tier one positions she once coveted. She explained:

For me it’s all about the requirements of…it’s the publication requirement. It’s not even academia in a general sense. For me it’s the publication requirements. That’s where I feel like the effort required to publish is so great that you end up working from home. It’s not the teaching requirements, it’s not the mentoring requirements, it’s the level of research necessary is what-where my system shut down occurs.

She added commentary on the intensity of academia, commenting that, “cause you know they can talk all that noise about leaving it in your office, nobody in academia leaves it in their office, ever.” She is stressing that the time constraint of the tenure track often requires professors to extend beyond the standard 40-hour work week. She may have also been referring to such off-
campus activities as conference presentations and off-campus data collection tasks. However, later in our conversation she gave a point of contention for her that was followed by what she feels to be her resolution. In her opinion, “I think there is so much emphasis placed on us to go tier one; be the best. And I think sometimes you have to be OK with…it’s OK to not be tier one. That’s OK.” Considering the rigid culture of her department, being able to say this is such a relief for Amber. It is evident to me that this is more a personal revelation for her than anything else.

Jessica also spoke about the culture of research institutions. She referenced it as her view on academia. As she stated, “my view on academia is not good. My view of what I thought it was to teach and to actually educate has changed…A large portion is because of the tenure process.” Jessica is highlighting the fact that her experiences as a graduate student have already begun to shape her perception of what the academic environment will be like, regardless of the institution. I believe this speaks to the pervasiveness of the very high research institutional environment and culture.

The participants have not doubted their intellectual capability to succeed in a tier one institution. Rather they are questioning the rigidity of the tenure process. Some have even decided that they will not let the tenure and promotion define their professional and personal pursuits.

I’ve Never Heard Anything About It

When I created the participant selection criteria, I sought out candidates that represented both the more industrious or hard science fields and the humanities or social science fields. While the intention of this project was not to compare and contrast the responses of the participants based on their disciplines or academic units, I am cognizant that including the
disciplines as a point of interest may add an additional layer of depth to the analysis. During our conversations, I asked the women questions about the ways in which their specific discipline or academic unit allowed spaces for recognizing and discussing what are considered family friendly policies, such as stopping the tenure clock. By reviewing the literature, one may contend that the hard sciences have a less progressed cultural climate than the social sciences in regards to embracing these policies. Amber represents an H&SS discipline, but one that has departments within it that are aligned more to the hard sciences in terms of research protocols and theoretical leanings. Amber and I had a rather disconcerting dialogue about her interaction with family friendly policies while at this institution:

SR\(^2\): Do they ever talk about some of the policies that are available for…
AH: For women? Never.
SR: Oh, so there’s no talk about it?
AH: Never. I’ve never heard anything about it…and um we’re generally discouraged from getting pregnant while we’re here.

She elaborated that all of the faculty in her department are male except for one female who happens to serve as her advisor. Although she works closely with her advisor on a daily basis, she explained that she has never spoken to her about such topics as balancing family and career. Her advisor, she elaborated, earned tenure in the 1980’s and has always been in a staunch minority of female faculty members in her department at each of the institutions she’s worked. It seems like the atmosphere in her department which is perpetuated by the faculty members is akin the atmosphere described by Maggie, where she pinpointed “this is what we do here and you just need to fall in line”. In her department and the other departments in her college, there is little variance from that “publish or perish” mentality. She even mentioned that her department head is even “pejorative against people who don’t publish a lot”, and that this ideal is indoctrinated in

\(^2\) SR denotes my dialogue with Amber
the graduate students in the department. However, she concluded her evaluation of her
department’s culture by saying:

The weird thing about it is in academia it’s all about self-direction. So it’s as hard or as
busy as you make it. You know you can back up off it. You’re department might not be
very happy with you, but you can kind of back up off the drama.

Kimmie is from a STEM field and acknowledges that she is only briefly familiar with
such policies as stopping the tenure clock. She stated that the only way she even knew anything
about such policies is because the lone female faculty member in her department chose to take
advantage of the policy. In regards to the presence of female faculty members, she explains:

From what I understand, in not just the sciences, but in [my field], it’s still adjusting to
women in [my field] or female professors in the academy. There are many, many things
that with the long history of being a male dominated field, they’re still making
adjustments.

She did clarify that on the larger scale of her daily environment, there is no talk about such
policies. In further conversation she connected her family desires and her potential career
opportunities with family-related policies and contributed this analysis:

So if I decide I want to have a baby in a year or two, which is probably going to be the
case, if I were in academia—if I’m in industry or government of course I can take leave
or something like that and it’s not affecting anything. It doesn’t affect anything except
the fact that my pay maybe if I run out of leave money or time or whatever. That’s the
only thing that it’s going to affect; it doesn’t affect my performance. Whereas if I am in
academia, if the university doesn’t have a—if I can’t stop the tenure clock then it affects
my performance essentially.

Jessica, who represents a STEM field, also knows to some degree that these policies do
exist, but acknowledges that they are not readily spoken about specifically with female graduate
students. In explaining her interaction with family friendly policies, she explained:

I know for the faculty members there is a program that they can attend that talks about
balance and life and what university programs are here that can help you. I have heard of
programs that will delay your tenure if you get pregnant or whatever. But she [my
dissertation committee chair] doesn’t like that because she’s like why would I want to
delay my success. And she felt that was not a solution. And I’ve heard of people that really like it.

I was delighted to learn that Rebecca’s experiences in academia have afforded her a very positive perception of family-specific university policies, especially as they relate the impact they have on the culture of academia. She provided a very optimist critique in saying:

I’d say that the profession or academia has improved in how it treats female faculty members. After speaking to older more seasoned faculty members and scholars, I think that there are rules and regulations that have adapted as the times have such as stopping the tenure clock if you were to um have a child. Things like that where you’re not penalized or forced to vacate your position because of family interests. So those types of things are better.

However, I must note that it is disconcerting that she was the only participant to specifically recognize any positive outcome for family friendly policies. That further aligns with the negative outlooks found by researcher and illuminates the flaws in these policies.

Maggie, who represents a Professions field that aligns more with a social science field, provided that while she has had the opportunity with connect with female faculty members who are both mothers and upwardly mobile in their careers, she has not been as exposed to and versed on these specific policies as one might assume. In her further explanation, she extended her assessment of this situation saying, “I just think that—honest what I think it that there’s just so few. Like I think that there’s just not a plethora of women in that kind of situation in tenure-track positions.” Maggie also provided an interesting commentary on the culture and organizational climate of her department that both commended her experiences and yielded to the reality of the greater organizational culture of the university:

I’ve been blessed to be in an academic space that has been um very um has embraced a lot of feminist and cultural and race and class ideals and indigenous epistemologies and that things like that.
Nonetheless, she concluded this analysis by saying “I think at the end of the day, it’s the systems and the structures and the way that the university is organized—I just think there’s some things that we have to deal with.”

This dominant theme cultivates the notion that the organizational culture of an institution or an academic unit can impact the ways in which pre-faculty women anticipate the culture of their first academic appointment to be. Such fear or trepidation about the safeness of these spaces has even caused some to question whether or not a research position will even be a fit.

And a Baby Too?

“I’m gon’ have a husband and gon’ have kids. And ya’ll can do what ya’ll want to do, but this is what I’m gonna do.”

The final dominant theme was found in the participants’ discussions of the importance of starting a family, the various ways she has witnessed the work and family balance, and the methods she intends to adopt when she attempts to balance career and family in the future. Again, this theme was built by grouping the responses into subthemes: (1) her observations of mother-academics and society’s influence on motherhood, (2) the possibilities in dualities, and (3) a discussion of the biological clock/tenure clock race, and (4) the flexible academic schedule.

But We’re Graded on the Same Scale

It suits to begin with the participants’ perceptive as it relates to a dual-career of mother academic. I gave each person an open forum to discuss how she perceives the life of a dual career academic. Maggie gave an idealistic situation for herself as a dual career academic, than gave a reality in the end. She said:

I think about that fact that um I want to have a child um you know like in my brain you know I’m going to have a beautiful easy pregnancy and everything is going to be great and I’ll feel so inspired that’ll be writing six-journal articles for the nine months that I’m
pregnant. And then after the baby’s born I’ll be spending that time while I’m home writing more and more. But the reality is pregnancy is hard! And even after pregnancy, the demands of a newborn are very hard.

Other participants discussed that a reality of motherhood, even in a two-parent household, often consists of mothers undertaking an unequal share of the responsibilities. They elaborated on how that issue impacts them, often by using examples. Kimmy discussed how she views this inequality in responsibilities in relation to such instances as a sick child. In her observation of female academics, she gave this example:

Whereas women are the caregivers and caretakers of children, so if a child is sick no one expects the man to stay home, the woman has to stay home. But we’re graded on the same scale. So it’s certain things that will take away from our billable hours, as they say in the legal field.

In her observations, she is denoting that society is programmed to select mothers to stay home over fathers. Even in as she went on a bit further, she explained that she would automatically assume that she would be the one staying home with her sick child even though she and her mate both have professional careers outside of the home.

Maggie feels that the differences in time management for female and male academics may be as a result of mothers absorbing unequal responsibilities of child-rearing and home responsibilities. She observed this through her interactions with mother-academics in her field:

I’ve never seen a male academic as meticulous with their time, when they have to be her, when they have to be there, you know guarding their time and having so much structure as I have seen in mother academics, women who are mothers on the tenure track and have children under the age of 10.

To illustrate her observations, she used a real-life example of an experience had by a faculty member. Again, both parents had professional careers outside of the home. This example does well in highlighting the inequality of the societal expectations of mothers and provides an understanding of patriarchy:
I think this is the way patriarchy functions. The husband is a professor and the wife is physician. They have two small children that are somewhat demanding. She would clearly have more set hours than the professor cause his schedule is more flexible. I mean he has to spend as much time working, but the ability to leave the office is better—easier for him—because she has appointments and things like that. She had to specifically go to the daycare and school and sit down and talk to the administration and tell them not to call her when something happens with the children…But the way society functions is the school always called the mom first…even though he was the professor, even though he had the flexibility, his wife was getting the burden of the child care because she’s the mom…But it goes back to why I don’t think family responsibilities have as much of an impact on male faculty in general just because of the way society functions, they don’t put the same pressures on men as they do women.

Jessica pointed out the way society creates motherhood and how we should function. She is showing that she recognizes that patriarchy is prominent by emphasizing that “as far as society goes, sometimes I think there’s pressure for women that have to stay home and be the primary caregiver and I don’t really like that because I think that women can do both.”

The ease in which these women are able to recognize the societal influences on the roles of mothers points to the ways in which the academy may be failing to not only recognize these influences, but may be doing little to combat the inequities through the policies that it sets forth.

I Don’t Think It Has To Be One or The Other

Starting a family is a major life goal for these women; it has been important to her apart from her career aspirations. It is also a source of complication and confusion. It can be daunting to aspire for a dual career life which no one has found a perfect formula for success: mother-academic. Each of the women expressed their opinion very poignantly and candidly. Without respect to the planning or timing of birth, she has indicated that starting a family is something that she would like to place on the horizon. Nonetheless, she is acutely aware of the tedious balancing act it will be to manage career and family with some success.
Tellin, for instance, is not resolute in her ordering of the immediate importance of family or career. Both are important to her, but for her school is immediate because it is happening right now, whereas getting married and starting a family is not. She admitted her internal conflict:

It’s tricky because half of me wants to invest the time right now to pursue a relationship and to work towards starting a family. Um the other half of me says forget that it’ll be there you know. Get your degree, start working towards tenure and let everything else take care of itself. But I don’t know if I would wait to have a child or you know pursue tenure first. The idea of having to work for seven years to get tenure…it’s crazy.

She later added another component of consideration regarding how the job market for her field is impacting her family related decisions:

So I want a family, but at the same time I realize that teaching positions are not um abundant in this area for my profession, so I realize that I may have to move which might complicate a relationship that I could enter into right now.

A few moments later, she again mentioned an additional component which adds further complicates as she is trying to decide for herself which should be more important:

I might end up in an administrative position so I probably won’t have as much time to have a child—to think about conceiving um early on in my career if I am trying to, I don’t, know create an identity for myself at a university.

Days after our conversation, Tellin and I were able to revisit with one another to follow-up on our meeting. She told me that since we had our meeting she had been thinking about her future career and family dynamic in ways she never had before. However, I do not think I caused her to re-negotiate her decision to pursue her career with her full attention. Rather, I believe our conversation may have just given her pause to really solidify her conceptualization of her future goals and recognizes that each decision carried with it its own set of consequences and new realities.

During my conversation with Jessica I asked her to provide examples of how she has seen career and family balanced successfully by the mother-academics with whom she has spent
time. After a moment of thought she gave this example which gives an unfortunate reality of balancing motherhood and academia:

I have seen firsthand. Our department has many um women faculty members and I’ve seen examples of some who are trying to balance their family and they’re struggling and they’re on the chopping block of getting fired. My professor was more um she kind of gave up on her family. Her first year she shipped her family and they lived with her parents as a new newborn. So she was shipping milk home and they lived in a different state with her parents. Her parents took care of them. Then maybe when the kid was two years old she moved in with them cause then they could go to daycare or whatever. Um she talks about the struggles of balancing her kids, her kids associate more with their grandparents, but she’s successful. She reaching tenure um she’s reaching tenure fast. She is a star performer in our department. So you compare and you see those contrasts and it makes you wonder how am I going to fit in.

When giving this account, I noticed that this story was weighing on her a great deal. She went on to add that even though she is not yet a faculty member and has not had to make such burden-laden decisions, and for Jessica something about the prospect of not being able to raise her own children in a more traditional sense is a heavy possibility to consider. Nonetheless, she now knows that these types of decisions are made by women, specifically in her field, and this family dynamic is now a reality.

Rebecca is not opposed to starting a family at any point in the near future, especially since she will be beginning on the tenure track very soon. She did, however, point out that it will be a great undertaking. Speaking in a general term, she said “These two life goals are sometimes conflicting. And even if they’re—you’re able to work them together, it’s a lot at the same time. Um so I think again it’s about balance.” But she ended on a note of possibility and declared that “you can be satisfied in your career and in your personal life.”

Amber explained how she is struggling with conceptualizing the dynamics of starting her family in the future. She juxtaposed this with the intensity of balancing a family with the
demands of the tenure-track position in her field and gave her understanding of balancing a family in a research intensive academic space:

You just have to understand that this [your academic career] is going to be your whole life. This is not like a job that you leave at the office…I want those things and almost feel myself compromising because the difference between achieving a high level and being happy in a family.

She then said, “my daddy always says at the end of your life when your own your death bed, no ever says I wished I had worked more; everyone always says I wish I had spent more time with family.” Such sentiments illustrates how important family is to her and how she priorities family and career in a general sense. For Amber, the career pursuits and the personal pursuits may not be complementary. She expressed feeling overwhelmed already by just the prospect of a dual career. She recognizes with clarity in conviction that if family or career is ever pitted together, a decision may have to be made. She expounded:

So to try to go that tier one route with the extreme publication levels, and the high pressure environments to get grants and what not it just not…it would essentially mean that I would choose not to have a family. And…that’s a choice some people make, but it’s not a choice I would like to make. I have made it clear that family is just as important as work.

Later in our conversation she re-asserted her unbending position:

If I can’t make this work-life balance thing work, I’m fully—well not fully OK with—but I am fully aware, and I’ve even talked to my parents about this, I’ve got several back-up plans, one of which is real estate. Like if this does not work and I’m tired and I’m sad and I’m depressed and stressed and anxious, I’m not going to keep doing it and my family will come first before my career.

Family is very important to Amber and she is prepared to leave academia if she needs to as a means of self-preservation. However, she did give some hopeful resolutions to the issue of balancing family and career. She providing an example based of a former female graduate student in her program that she still speaks to often. She is three years into a tenure track
position and has a two year old child. Based on her interaction with this mother academic she said:

I would say this environment lends itself to those sort of type A personalities that can somehow manage to do it all. But if you have any sort of time management issues, you are not going to make it. You are just going to fall apart. What I reflect from her is that she really prioritizes a lot and you can’t do it all. It seems like her and other mothers in the field are all super organized. I feel like if you’re not just like perfectly organized you’re going to fall apart. But if there is anything that I gained from her is that it is possible, you just have to be really efficient with your time. I think that’s the biggest thing she taught me. And every minute that you have you use it efficient.

In her critique of this perspective, she assessed that “I think you just have to be OK with spillover in your life. And you just kind of have to let your life be fluid and be OK with that.”

Maggie and I talked about the importance of time management, a skill that like Amber that she has seen used by mother academics to balance career and family. We discussed how being able to delegate your time effectively is an essential tool to balancing life activities in general. Again, specific to mother academics, Maggie decided:

I guess it’s their time management skills. I find that women that I do know that are in tenure-track positions and have small, children, young children, I’ll say children under 10 years old um they are very meticulous with their time.

Jessica and I talked about her struggles with starting a family in this career path. She acknowledged that it will be difficult to maintain ideal family dynamic in such a high pressure environment such as a high research activity university. As she admitted, “I’m just concerned about going to a research university and the pressures being so high that it’s impossible for me to succeed and make a balance of all that and have a family.”

Similar to Amber’s perspective, Jessica also constructs her identity on the basis that family is ultimately more important than career. But she is not yet defeated by the potential impending difficulties. She went on to say, “I want to try both. And if I see that my family is struggling or having some issues then I’ll drop my career because family is more important.”
Tellin contributed a more positive outlook on the prospect of balancing her career and family. She said:

I think that were I to get married in the next few years while I’m beginning my job as a professor, I think that could be balanced. Like I don’t think it has to be one or the other. I think it could be both/and.

Throughout our conversation, Tellin did not negate that fact that creating a symbiotic space for family and career is not simple. However, in this instance she see possibilities in the duality which can be rewarding.

Rebecca presented a critique that a woman’s choice of work environment may correlate to her ability to balance career and family successfully. She explained she did not choose her upcoming position based on this notion, nor did she not choose others because of it. However, she did provide this assessment that seems to underscore Amber’s personal decisions for her future:

I think for those who um have more of a focus on family—not necessarily more of a focus, but they place more importance on family…not that others don’t feel like their family is important—but they would choose a family over a career, tend to go to more um understanding and flexible work environments. And those who value a career more than family—at least at this time—tend to go to more um structured, more strenuous environments. And again I don’t think there’s a right or wrong answer for that. I think it’s an important part of the balance is knowing yourself and your goals.

The common thread among these women is that while managing her life as a mother-academic is possible, the skills needed may be not be inherent or automatic. These participants have observed that it takes high organizational skills and time managements, as well as other attributes such as prioritizing needs and flexibility. Ultimately, there is a sense of possibility albeit confounded with difficulty.

I Just Realized How Old I Am

It is not unusual in any discussion about a woman’s desire to start a family to be coupled with a discussion of her biological clock. In this context, adding the tenure clock is necessary.
This three-strand cord similarly evolved during my conversations with the participants. I did not specifically ask any participant to discuss the biological clock issue, meaning I did not ask anyone about her age in terms of biological considerations. Yet most of the participants brought it into the conversation through discussing her personal goals. The biological clock issue also surfaced in the ways in which some of the participants critiqued the institutional culture. Scientifically speaking, once a woman reaches thirty-five years of age, not only does her chances to conceive decrease, but the chances of pregnancy and birth related complications increases.

Jessica spoke to this in relation to completing graduate school, saying, “I just want to finish so I can start that family because I know once you become thirty your chances, issues with having kids is different.” In her perception, completing her graduate work is actually impeding her from making the next commitments that would position her to start a family. From her interactions, she has found that it may not be practical to take on the responsibilities of a family while still in the doctoral realm.

Tellin, who is definitely unresolved on how well having a child will fit into her immediate future, is certain that her biological is not an immediate concern. In fact she admits that “I know how some women want children, especially around the time they’re 29-30 and not married, they start to think about their biological clock. I really don’t think about that. It really doesn’t bother me.” I must admit that I was taken aback by this because it is such an infrequently made assessment. But I can appreciate the space she has created for herself. She did nonetheless critique the culture of the academy in saying “It sucks that a job would dictate your biological clock to some extent”. She also added that, “with more universities stopping the clock or whatever for pregnant women in the academy, maybe they are more woman
friendly/child friendly”, pointing out that the existence of these policies may make the tenure track more pliable.

Amber and I discussed how she is concerned about how deciding to pursue an advanced degree has affected the amount of her late twenties and then thirties available to her to think about starting a family. As she described:

I think the biggest pressures that we as women face in the pressure of time constraints on our ability to have a child. Like there comes a point when you can’t have a kid anymore period. It’s game over, goodbye. And I know if I tried to do tier one, I just couldn’t…I’m 28, I’ll be done my program if God blesses me to do it quickly at 30. I have five years before the risks, all the birth defect risks start jumping.

For Amber, starting a family while in graduate school is not a feasible option or even something she considered. When she began graduate studies, she knew that it would be at the sacrifice of starting a family right away.

Rebecca also mentioned the biological clock in a discussion of family creation. However, in our conversation, she was speaking about alternate ways to traditional conception for starting a family. She went on to talk briefly about some of these options. However, for her the general consensus is that:

if your goal is to create that family, that can be with or without [a mate]. I mean if having a partner and doing things in a more traditional sense is a primary goal of yours, I think that can be more discouraging if that person is not there and you’re getting to the age where biology is starting to tell you it’s now or never…you can never control when that person is going to come into your life.

As introduced by Rebecca’s comment, another perspective brought forth by the women was the viability of employing alternative methods to create a family. Many of the participants feel that such methods may give her the option to have the family she desires and pursue the career for which she has invested so much of her life preparing. Rebecca talked about the seemingly balanced life she has seen mother academics create, specifically highlighting a few family planning techniques they have adopted. She elaborated with:
I think that it’s a careful balance. Most of them said they engaged in some sort of family planning um some to the extent of going through artificial or non-biological insemination um planning to an exact science, if there is such a thing.

She then returned to talking about her own personal family and career pursuits and concluded:

But I still decide that this [academia] is the best for me; this is what I want. And that if I am able to have family no matter what way it happened—maybe I adopt. Maybe I go through some sort of artificial methods, maybe I have it the traditional way—I’m not sure yet, but I think that being in academia is a good place to foster that in any way. I think that again having your goals of a family and a career—I think as long as you are pursuing everything you can on your end—it’s slightly less scary. Not to say everything is going to be OK and you’ll never have a day where you’ll feel like it’s never going to happen, that’s not realistic, but it’s slightly less scary if you’re doing all you can do.

Jessica lamented that her career pursuits, regardless of her intentions in selecting this path, may inhibit her desires that have a family in a traditional sense. She now thinks she may have to turn to alternative methods of creating a family, such as adoption, in order to have a family. Specific to her situation, she explained that “you have to come to the realization that maybe I won’t have my own kids; maybe I’ll have to adopt because you’re older and complications are higher at 35 and I’m still not married.”

Kimmy talked about planning her conception so that the pregnancy and birth to mirror the academic calendar, a method of career and family planning researchers refer to as having a May baby. The intention of having a May baby is to time the conception so that you will give birth at the end of the traditional spring semester, leaving the summer to devote to your newborn child. A mother would then report back to work full-time at the beginning of the fall semester.

She contended:

Of course I can decide to have my baby in the summer and do an extremely well planned pregnancy, which at my age is going to have to be the case because I’m a little older so I’m probably going to have to plan. So if I plan ahead I can have a baby in the summer hopefully.
We also talked about her reservations about the May baby plan. She explained that she is not completely comfortable with the idea of devoting only a three to four uninterrupted months to a newborn before diving back into research, writing, and teaching. As she elaborated, she said:

So I can probably plan around the schedule, but if I-I would have to take into consideration a lot of things, for example how much to I want to be in my child’s life. Like do I want to take a year off and actually enjoy my child, as opposed to you know sitting with the baby for the three months that I’m off in the summer and then racing back to get back to school so I can do research and teach.

Amber told me that she does have reservations in considering non-traditional methods of creating a family. Specifically, she does not think it is feasible for a tenure-track female faculty member who is unmarried or in a committed relationship to intentionally become a single parent. In this part of our conversation she was talking about the necessity for a strong support system when starting a family. In her time spent interacting with female faculty members, she has observed that:

they all [mother academics] have really strong support. The only people with children that manage they all have spouses. There’s not a single mother in the bunch. You know how some women were like ‘oh, it I don’t get married I’ll just adopt’ and yada, yada, yada. I think you couldn’t do that in this profession. You would have to have someone with you to do it. Like you couldn’t [sigh]…it’s just so much, there’s so many things pulling you in different directions.

Amber’s contribution to this section is fitting because Amber explained during our conversation that for her marriage is as important as or quite possibly more important to her than actually conceiving. Amber made it clear that she values companionship as a result of the importance of marriage in her family. So for a person like her, getting married in the critical first component to starting a family and being in school right now in her late twenties then embarking on a time-consuming career is hindering her from making this first step happen.
I’m Really Looking Forward to the Flexibility

Each of the women said one of the more positive attributes of an academic career is the degree of flexibility built into an academic environment. The type of flexibility that we mentioned most often was having the flexibility to structure your own work day or schedule in order to better accommodate family obligations, especially in the midst of pursuing tenure.

Kimmy explained that this type of flexibility is a major consideration as she decides between academic job opportunities and opportunities in the private industry or governmental agencies. When weighing these options with me, she said that “I recognized that I liked the flexibility. And the flexibility that you get in academia is so much more than you can get anywhere else.” Jessica also found flexibility in scheduling is a positive factor in joining the academic ranks, saying that “There are a lot of positives though. It is flexible. You can set up your own schedule; that’s what academia brings and that’s kind of why I liked it.” For Jessica, whose graduate experiences are causing her to rethink that value in seeking an academic appointment, the flexibility in schedule seemed to be like her saving grace in staying the course.

Another way the flexibility was defined was in terms of the ways in which an academic can choose to invest their time in terms of professional pursuits. Maggie, for instance, has accepted a tenure track position upon graduation. For her this type of flexibility is really exciting. As she explained, “I’m really looking forward to the flexibility of my new job and my research. You know, and I’m looking forward to doing the academic work but also having the flexibility to enjoy my life.”

Rebecca spoke about the positive attributes of a female-friendly environment of academe and she finds a strong relationship between environments like that and the flexibility an academic career provides. Based on her experiences in academia thus far, she explained:
I have found again with my peers and more senior scholars that the academy is actually quite friendly for females and mothers because as women we do tend to multitask and have a lot of different interests outside of our careers...there is a great deal of flexibility built into the system. And I think that part in itself is pretty friendly to women.

She elaborated more on how she feels having the flexibility to structure your own work day is great for mother-academics. She went on to say:

I think that the flexibility of academia and the newer idea and practice of the tenure clock stopping has been very friendly to women with small children. Um in that if they’re infants they have the time to take care of them without having to worry about job obligations. And if they are older, maybe pre-teen or elementary school age, they have the flexibility to attend functions. Maybe not all of them, but I would say more than women who are in more of a corporate environment.

Maggie also made an honest and realistic assessment about the potential underside of a position with such flexibility. In other words, she pointed out that there can be a downside to having that flexibility, especially being a mother. In recalling her observations of female faculty members, she said:

They have different levels of...so they’re blessed with the flexibility but it’s almost like motherhood takes a lot of the flexibility; so you don’t get a lot of the benefits that others—in my perception that other academics have.

What Maggie was explaining is that most of the free-time that non-parent faculty members can experience is not always the norm for mother-academics. Whereas she is in a position where she structure her day in more convenient ways, such as setting office hours or avoiding early morning commitments, being a mother means she often have to devote her non-work time to activities for her family. This ultimately may mean that she does not have as much free time as those outside of academia says she has.

Kimmy, who did say that she likes the idea of being able to live outside of a standard work day structure, also presented a similar assessment of her perception what having work schedule flexibility may actually mean. In this instance, she was defining flexibility in terms of the university’s productivity expectations of faculty members. As she explained to me:
I appreciate the schedule. I love the fact that you kind of have breaks and summers; however you decide to deal with them is on you. I like the flexibility and the freedom of academia. And I think in some ways it’s beneficial, but then in other ways that freedom can be abused or can be…cause problems. Because you have so much freedom the expectations are really high.

Summary of Dominant Themes

I found that the tones of the conversations could be best divided into three different strands: (1) spirituality and career, (2) a critique of institutional policies, and (3) the intersection of motherhood and career. The first theme regards the participants’ confidence in a spiritual calling to the join professoriate and the different ways in which that spiritual calling or spiritual connection serves as a tangible anchor during the trying times of graduate school and the knowledge of the inequitable or difficult moment ahead for them. The second theme was constructed by using the participants’ own conceptualizations of tenure and promotion requirements in the academy. It was also constructed by using the participants’ observations of the culture and climate of research institutions and how they have shaped each person’s perception of the academy. The third dominant theme regards becoming a mother-academic and draws from the participants’ interactions with mother-academics and knowledge of family-friendly policies. It also gives attention to the ways in which the participants’ anticipate how they will embrace motherhood in the academy.

Utilization of the Analysis Tool

Thus far in this chapter I have presented three dominant themes with accompanying subthemes. Ultimately, the goal of this project was to allow female doctoral students a space to discuss how she views the academy and how she feels that the space will embrace her and her family desires based on what she has observed of other mother-academics. The dominant themes created by the responses and commentary from the participants’ show how she conceptualizes the points where her future family desires and future career plans will intersect.
In this section, I will continue to provide an analysis of the participants’ responses and commentary. I will also deconstruct the dominant themes using particular tenets of Feminist Critical Policy Analysis (FCPA). Finally, I will introduce a discussion of the places in which FCPA were not adequate in providing validation for certain themes and sub-categories.

To begin to analyze these dominant themes, I challenged myself to highlight all the specific practices the participants’ have brought forth. I found that throughout the second and third themes the participants were often referring the institutional culture and the culture of their departments in a way the alluded to the notion of the patriarchal influences on the institution and how those influences have affected or will affect their personal and professional lives. The intended outcome for employing an analytical tool like FCPA is in fact to uncover patriarchal practices. FCPA was created to uncover the intended and unintended effects some institutional policies and structures have on female academicians (Bensimon & Marshall, 2003).

**Tenure and Promotion**

At the beginning of the second dominant theme, we took to task opening a dialogue about the type of space academe allows itself to create for familial-type pursuits. A few key elements were brought to the surface as a result of our individual conversations. The first element that dejects familial pursuits is the rigidity of the tenure track. A contributor to an article by Wilson (2003) explained the rigidity of the tenure track as, “it’s very rigid, up or not, and you have to get on and stay on or you’re penalized if you don’t” (p. 3). As the main proponents of FCPA have pointed out, the originating policies that still govern institutions were never designed to include women (Bensimon & Marshall, 2003). To that end, it suits that tenure and promotion guidelines were never designed to include women. FCPA utilizes gender as a component of analysis. So using this analytical tool, we can reframe the question in such a way that we can uncover the ways in
which gender is a factor in the academic socialization process. Cultural feminist thought insists that women and men have inherent differences in our norms and our knowledge is socially situated (Bensimon & Marshall, 2003), and in order for these differences to be recognized in policies and structures, we must be included in the creation of the policies and structures and not simply added on post-inception. Marshall (1999) referred to adding women to the policy discussion after inception as trying to “fix the ‘woman thing’” (p. 63).

As it relates to tenure and promotion policies at the high- and very-high research activity institutions we are using as the targeted institution in this study, there is not constructed space specifically for recognizing the necessity for a female academic to monitor her biological clock and tenure clock simultaneously. You could point to the existence of family-friendly policies as the institution’s response to the lack of consideration for the needs of all other faculty members who otherwise do not or cannot conform to the androcentric protocol of an ideal worker. FCPA proponents would argue two problems with the existence of such addendum-style policies. First, FCPA says that utilizing the term “family-friendly” indicates that these policies were written in response to allegations that the environment was in not recognizing that family is a priority in the lives of family. Second, “family-friendly” often is culturally and environmentally interchangeable with “female friendly”. As a result of the way society structures family, the survival of the family unit is entrusted to men, but the daily management tasks are assigned to women. The academic environment has not departed from this societal model. As Maggie indicated, “I’ve been blessed to be in an academic space that as…embraced a lot of epistemologies and things like that…[but] it’s the systems and the structures…I think there’s some things that we have to deal with”. In recognizing that it is the systems and structures that are the problem, I contend that she was pointing to the androcentric ways in which they function
to systematically ignore female; specifically since females were never intended to be recognized at the inception of the tenure and promotion process. Utilizing FCPA as an analytical tool highlights the embedded patriarchy in the societal influences that has a tenacious control on institutional policies and structures.

Utilizing FCPA, I was able to further discern the ways in which family-friendly policies are subject to the inequities brought forth by societal influences. The policy mentioned in chorus by the participants is the institution’s implementation of stopping the tenure clock. When a faculty member takes advantage of the opportunity to stop his or her tenure clock, they are given the opportunity to their focus time and energy on non-publication or research tasks for a specified period of time without said leave impacting the tenure clock. However, the fact that this policy is extended to both male and female faculty does not prevent it from being stigmatized as a female policy created in response the increase in female faculty unable to live and work in such an academically-devoted manner as their male colleagues. As one faculty member told Jessica, “why would I want to delay my success?” In this instance, Jessica and this particular faculty member were discussing her distaste and distrust of what she perceived as a crutch to female faculty members competing for equality. Her opinion may be underwritten by the way society and culture defines career success. Maggie recognized this definition when she said:

They said six years. You know and in some cases they’ll give you more but then a lot of times the culture frowns upon—you know they look at you like you’re kind of a liability now because you’re a woman and you go pregnant and so, and now we have to go through all the rigmarole to extend your tenure time because you decided to get pregnant or whatever.

What Maggie brought to the forefront was that in this instance gender is used as an environmental variable that allows for the blaming of the victim. FCPA allows us to recognize
that the way patriarchy functions in tenure and promotion policies and politics. Traditional policy analysis allows the dialogue that if the female faculty member would not have gotten pregnant, then she would be able to be evaluated under the same conditions as male academics, and not be in a situation where she has to alter her tenure track as an accommodation tactic, thus resulting in the stigmatization of her tenure pursuits as being less than. As a result of living in a patriarchal society, when a women departs from the tenure track her ability to produce knowledge and her dedication to her field is now questioned. FCPA contends that rather than blaming gender, analysts should be questioning what it is about the tenure structure which allows the traditional male academic career trajectory to still dominate the politics of earning tenure.

Another factor of tenure and promotion politics spoke of by the participants relates to the perceived rigidity of the timeline and inflexibility of the institutional environment as it relates to non-work related obligations. Specifically, the institutional environment has been found to be toxic for women, insomuch as the ivory tower has been referred to as the toxic tower (Fotherhill & Feltey, 2003) and is admonished for having toxic atmospheres (Wilson, 2004). During our conversation, Amber made her point-of-view clear when she said, “…the policies are really stringent as far as publications and things…life happens and if you’re responsible for a family or you are trying to have a child it’s very difficult.” Again, this illustrates that the policies that govern this specific institutional pillar has not been challenged for the ways in which they no longer mirror the new constituency of faculty members: women with families.

**Societal Influences on Motherhood**

The ways in which we are socialized depend on the controlling influences of the environments we are from. We are most often affected by androcentric influences, insomuch as the ways of living and existing in the world of males creates the dominant culture. As it relates
parenting obligations, society influences the differences in expectations of the responsibilities of mothers and fathers. Society also influences the expectations of men and women as it relates to balancing work and family. Reynolds (1992) documented that the differences in parental expectations are as a result of inequitable expectations of mothers and fathers indoctrinated from childhood. Specifically, she noted that, “Women and men may experience different things during the early years, such as others’ expectations concerning how they should allocate time to work and family life” (Reynolds, 1992, p. 638). A number of the participants also recognized that the demands of parenting and household responsibilities were not equally distributed between mothers and fathers, even when both parents had equal obligations outside of the home. I detailed a story Maggie told about a female professional who was dealing with unequal parenting responsibilities thrust upon her by those other than her husband. In that story, the mother was being expected to carry her family responsibilities in this specific manner that did not reflect her unique family structure. This illustrates the ways in which the structures or policies of a society are reinforced by its members; at times regardless of the effect perpetuating them will have on the members. The function of patriarchal influences in a society is to dominate the way a society acculturates the members. The school administrators in the story when requesting that the mother attend to the needs of her children despite her insistence that her husband’s schedule better adapted to their needs, were acting based on their socialization which taught them that mothers are the primary caregivers. I contend that these administrators were not acting maliciously, but rather they were simply perpetuating the only parenting model with which they were familiar.

The academy is also guilty of perpetuating these similar parental role assignments by not acknowledging how the model of the successful academician perpetuates the gender role
inequities. The ways in which the academy is presenting itself today as an inflexible and intolerant is as a result of the standards it set for itself long ago. The point at which a critical lens should is pertinent is that the structures and policies that the institution still uses today or gravely outdated because the particular group of people that it was built to serve are no longer the only group of people present. The new academy is a place where women need to be able to live dual life if she chooses and not have her productivity as a researcher called into question when she needs to focus on her family. Proponents of FCPA contend that in an effort not to perpetuate a double standard for male and female faculty members, the academy possibly has failed to understand to embrace that men and women have different sets of societal expectations and biological innate desires that deserve to be supported and not exploited. FCPA calls analysts to be critical and transformative, a two-step process: First, to call injustices and inequities out for what they, and second to construct a plan of attack for re-inventing the condition. One critique of FPCA labeled its proponents as “complainers” (Bensimon & Marshall, 2003). I can agree that during my conversations with the participants, we did complain about the condition at the research site. But, we did not give any attention to transformative call to action; we were in fact complaining. Bensimon & Marshall (2003) responded to this critique of producing ‘complaint scholarship by saying:

A ‘complaint’ suggests not an act of scholarship but an act of resentment or lamentation. To characterize our work as a ‘complaint’ is one of longstanding ways in which men of the academy have devalued the work of academic women, and the fact that this ‘tool’ can still be wielded in the pages of an academic journal shows that the ‘master’s’ house remains strongly in place (p.339).

The work for the new generation of female faculty members and scholarship contributors is to work to create new tools or a new language to begin to re-create the academic environment. In order to have a work space built by mutual respect and daily considerations that cultivate
creativity and individuality, FCPA prescribes to acknowledge the foundations of the academy, recognize that patriarchy is the dominant tool used to build and a perpetuate the inequity, and the begin to work with other scholars to insist on a new set of tools or a new language and way of thinking.

**Preparation for Chapter Five**

In the previous section, only data drawn from the second and third dominant themes were used. Excluding the first dominant theme was not an oversight. This theme was unique in that the data for this theme was not able to be constructed in such a way as to allow for FCPA to be employed to analyze the academy in a critical manner in order to be transformative. This lack of analytical space was created by the inability of FPCA as it has been researched and written to undertake a specific topic: Black women and spirituality. There is a plethora of literature that embraces this topic and rightly could have been employed. But there is not yet a space to make a critical analysis in the same manner that the other two dominant themes were expounded using this feminist and critical analysis. I posit that the inability of this tool to embrace the Black women and spirituality is as a result of the lack of recognition of Black feminism. This is will be explored in great detail in chapter 5.

**Summary**

This chapter was the detailing of the stories, perceptions, and conceptualization presented by the six participants. This chapter had two distinct purposes. The first purpose was to present the dominant themes built exclusively using the voices of the participants. This task was executed by grouping the participants’ stories into categories based on similarity, and then building the similar categories in to dominant themes. The second purpose of this chapter was to discuss the breakdowns in the institution as acknowledged by the participants using Feminist Critical Policy
Analysis as an analytical tool. Several inequities of the institutional policies and structure were recognized and critically evaluated using the analysis framework.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter begins with a restatement of the purpose of the study and a brief summary of the procedures methodological structure of this project. The next section is a presents a summary of the dominant themes as well as responds to the corresponding research questions. It also address the instances there a dominant theme and a research question were not able to be paired together. Next is a summary of the use of the analytical tool, Feminist Critical Policy Analysis, in analyze dominant themes and uncover the spaces where traditional policy analysis is inadequate. Following is the implications for theory which details the space in the theory for dominant theme one. Finally, I end with concluding remarks, including suggestions for future research and limitations of the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this project was to explore the ways in which female doctoral students who desires to begin a family after graduation conceptualize the intersection of motherhood and academia. In order to construct these conceptualizations, I gathered data regarding the participant’s opinion of the status of the academy, understanding the tenure requirements, interactions with mother academics, and personal desires and aspirations as they relate to family and career. The participants also provided detailed descriptions of how they negotiated their current status in graduate school, and how they conceptualized their future career goals and the academic and motherhood spaces they wish to occupy in the near future. I also intended for this project to provide an understanding or interpretation that informed how this space is ultimately constructed. I also sought to problematize particular aspects of the politics, policies, and structures of the American academy that are perceived as a barrier or roadblock to the success and inequality for future female faculty.
Summary of Procedures

In order to gather data, six female doctoral students agreed to participate in the study. One-on-one interviews were conducted each woman. These women agreed to divulge personal information about her life and goals as well as provide honest critiques of the university based on her knowledge, interactions with current faculty members, and observations of academic practices. Analysis of the data began at the onset of data collection as is the procedure when employing the constant comparative data analysis method. Each interview was recorded using a digital voice recording device. At the conclusion of each interview, the audio files were transcribed verbatim into a written transcript. Each transcript was coded and re-coded to support the formation of themes as the interviews were simultaneously being conducted. As a result of employing this method, the transcripts were analyzed and subsequent codes were developed that were immediately meaningful and reflective of the themes that were emerging from the data. This allowed me to tailor each subsequent interview to ensure that we were able to have meaningful and fruitful conversations.

Summary of Dominant Themes and Research Questions

In order to conclude this project, I need to return to the original research questions and determine if any connections were made between the research questions and the data collected from the participants then grouped into dominant themes. I selected three areas of interest in which to explore in this study: (1) The intersection of career and motherhood; (2) The interconnections of personal aspirations, professional goals, and the climate of the academy; and (3) The types of pressures felt, specifically those pressures felt most acutely. The dominant themes were constructed using the data that best addressed these areas of interest. However, the third area of interest, the types of pressures the participants’ described, was not specifically
addressed in a dominant theme. We did have fruitful conversations regarding the types of pressures and that information will be presented.

Following the coding and analysis procedures, three dominant themes were identified and cultivated using the words and expressions of the participants: (1) spirituality and career, (2) a critique of institutional policies, politics, and procedures, and (3) the intersection of motherhood and career. The second and third dominant themes are presented as a means of addressing the connections that were made in the second and third research questions, respectively.

**Dominant Theme One: Spirituality and Career**

The first dominant theme was found in the participants’ conversations about the way in which she prioritizes her spirituality or her relationship with God. For these women, the power and spiritual uplifting she derived from having a relationship with God informed the ways in which she experienced the academy and how she conceptualizes any intersections. Three subthemes emerged in this first theme that helped to create a deeper understanding of the intersection of spirituality and life goals and fulfillment. The first sub-theme was derived from the participants’ descriptions for feeling a spiritual calling to join the professoriate. Some detailed the ways which they’re desire to join the tenure-track as an important part of her destiny and purpose. This idea was cemented when Tellin and I were discussing that she thinks about the seemingly unsupportive nature of the academy as it relates to accommodating her desire to have family. As Tellin went on to describe, “I think that whatever I do, no matter where I go God will make a way for me and there will be no barriers or obstacles to what I’m destined to do.” Tellin highlighted to notion that for her a spiritual relationship with God supersedes any obstacle set forth—or not corrected—by the institution or social influences.
The second sub-theme references the participants’ reliance on the spiritual support and guidance from God as it relates to the decisions she makes in her personal life and her professional life. The participants who responded in this deeply spiritual realm have identified her spiritual relationship important and recognizable as any other identity categories, such as race and gender. Maggie and Tellin use to identify themselves not only the outside world, but to themselves as well. It is the source their inner critical narrative that helps them navigate through times of decision-making. Through this sub-theme, I have found that maintaining a relationship with God is critical to these participants because the relationship serves a compass in decision-making. It is not easy to desire to enter a profession that has documented cases on having a climate that promotes unfair promotion policies and can be overall unwelcoming to women who intend to live what is considered in this space to be an alternative lifestyle: full-time mother and full-time tenure-track researcher and teacher. These participants’ rely so heavily on their spiritual support system because it is to a tool of reassurance. It is also where she looks for that reminder that she is can work diligently to have the desires of her heart and that in the uncertain times she is not alone. This is I believe Rebecca meant when she said:

Do your part and everything else will fall into place the way it should especially if you follow some sort of spiritual doctrine. A lot of people believe in some sort of higher power. You have to leave the rest up to the higher power. Um and like I said what’s what helps you sleep at night.

The third sub-category speaks to the notion that these participants are fully aware that the trajectory of her career and the unfolding of her family desires, and the intersection of these two tracts is ultimately not up to her, but is up to God and His plans for her life. Through her Christian teachings, these participants have been taught that to walk with faith means to do all she can to position herself for the places she wants to go in life, but to also realize that whatever God intends for her life will happen. While some may perceive lack of control as an
uncomfortable space, these participants have found this space to be comforting. According to what each woman believes, living in a space where God is in control of not only her life, but in control of the environment she lives in is the most productive space to exist. Living in this space makes the failures easier to overcome because it each failure is pre-destined when you are operating within God’s will. Likewise, these women understand that the moment of triumph are all the more uplifting because she will be succeeding in a space where success is not expected, further indicating that God is in control of her life and the spaces where she goes.

In a later section of this chapter, I elaborate on the relevance of this dominant theme and where intersects with the others.

**Dominant Theme Two and Research Question Two: A Critique of Institutional Policies, Politics, and Procedures**

The second dominant theme was derived from the participants’ discussions of their perception of the culture of the academy and is effective for considering the second research question: The interconnections of personal aspirations, professional goals, and the climate of the academy are the topic of the second dominant theme. The most prevalent topic in our conversations was the tenure and promotion process, specifically at a research-intensive institution, which speaks to the climate of the academy and the ways in which it informs the perceptions of female doctoral students. To that end, this theme was built to address the second research question by collecting the participants’ critiques of the policies and politics surrounding tenure and promotion. This is also the topic of the first sub-theme. A majority of the conversations revolved around the notion of the plausibility of succeeding at this level of productivity while raising a young family. Based on observing and interacting with mother-academics, the participants feel that achieving this balance will be difficult and will not be with sacrifice and pressure to conform to the university’s prototype of an ideal faculty member. This
notion represents an interconnection between professional and personal goals and the climate of the academy. Maggie described this notion when she said, “I think that there are certain requirements that are there and it doesn’t matter if you are a woman…I think this is sort of an overarching theme. Nobody cares. Like this is what we do here and you just need to fall in line.” A similar perspective regarding this tenure, promotion, and family paradigm was that the academy, as it was originated and currently operates, is not a female-friendly environment. Amber suggested to this notion when she explained, “I really think that academia is geared against females…the policies are really stringent as far as publications and things…life happens and if you’re responsible for a family or you are trying to have a child it’s very difficult.” Additionally, Jessica also posited that there may be a connection between tenure and promotion requirements and the fact that capable academicians are leaving academia. In her opinion, she feels that “it’s just so rigorous to get tenure and to be successful that the women are leaving and going elsewhere because of balancing a family or the expectation that you would have as a woman at home versus in your career.” Finally, we discussed that a career in academia may ultimately alter the availability of potential mates. Some feel that in order to forge a successful balance of work and family, she must first begin with finding a mate who can adapt to the lifestyle of an academic.

The second sub-theme was constructed by compiling the participants’ responses regarding the perceived rigors of the tenure track at a very High Research Activity institution, akin to the environment of the research site. Some of the participants feel that completing doctoral studies at a university with as much as research activity and expectations as the research site has caused her to re-evaluate her desire to join this type of institution. As Kimmy proclaimed, “I guess being at a research institution has made me realize that I do not want to be
at a research institution.” Similarly, Amber explained that being at this type of institution has caused her to re-evaluate her place in this environment as an academician. As she explained, “I know I’ll make less money and I won’t have the big lab, and all the equipment, but that would be me happier…” Though not every participant questions the viability of a tenure track position like one at the research site, a majority of the participants did acknowledged that joining the faculty ranks at an institution with a rigorous research and publishing expectation is not what she thought it to be at the beginning of graduate school and is now questioning if this environment will fit her life expectations.

The third sub-theme was discovered when the participants and I discussed the notion of family-friendly policies. Amber, Jessica, and Kimmy each said that the topic of family-friendly policies was not readily and openly discussed in by faculty members in her department and they knew relatively little about how these policies function. Jessica said that although she was aware of these policies, specifically the stop-the-tenure clock policy, she had not observed it being used in a positive light. As told to her by a faculty member in her department, “[my dissertation committee chair] doesn’t like that because she’s like why would I want to delay my success.” Maggie talked about how being in a department that supports diversity in initiatives and research. Nevertheless, she recognized that the culture of the university can permeate into even an environment that promotes awareness.

Dominant Theme Three and Research Question One: The Intersection of Motherhood and Career

The third dominant theme focuses on the primary objective of this project of understanding the participants’ perceptions of the intersection of family desires and career goals. Relatedly, the first research question sought to discuss the participant’s perception of the intersection of motherhood and career. Specifically, I was interested in the spaces where they
meet both with ease and with adversity. I outlined three topics from the data into subthemes which speak to the intersections of motherhood and career. The first subtheme is composed of the observations and perceptions of the participants regarding performance evaluation methods. We talked about how dual careers impacts current mother academics as it relates to how having a family impacts the structure of their work day. Specifically, we began uncovering that the way society places pressure on mothers to undertake an unequal share of the child and household responsibilities. Kimmy made a contribution to this conversation using an example of a sick child. In her example, she stated, “Whereas women are the caregivers and caretakers of children, so if a child is sick one expects the man to stay home, the woman has to stay home.” Maggie astutely recognized for us that these unequal expectations are as a result the way patriarchy functions and the university has not escaped this functioning. Many of the participants were able to recognize that the rigidity tenure and promotion policies are not sensitive to the fact that many of a female academic’s interruptions are not desired interruptions, but are as a result of societal pressures that are not easily controllable.

A second sub-theme was discovered while we were discussing how the women envision balancing motherhood and their academic career as well as where she thinks beginning a family will fit best. Tellin admitted that while she wants to start a family, the career path that she has begun is very consuming right now and that creating an academic identity for herself is important to her. She recognized that creating a balance will take sacrifice, and that contrary to the expectations of other women in her position, she may have to sacrifice starting a family right after graduate school in order to concentrate on building her career. As Tellin stated, “I realize that teaching positions are not abundant in this area for my profession, so I realize that I may have to more which might complicate a relationship that I could enter right now.” Many of the
participants’ were able to recognize that being a mother to young children and working tirelessly toward tenure and promotion is not easily balanced, often from observing current mother academics that are currently on the tenure-track.

The third sub-theme was built while we were discussing the topic of the biological clock. For these participants, the ticking of her biological clock was of concern. Women who pursue these advanced degrees to enter the professoriate in her twenties often do so at the sacrifice of entertaining the idea of beginning a family. So it stands to reason that she might want to look to start a family after school. However, women desiring to enter to professoriate often have to decide whether the tenure clock or her biological clock will get her attention. Amber discussed how important it is for her to pay attention to her biological clock because of concerns for a healthy birth. As she identified, “I’m 28, I’ll be done my program is God blesses me to do it quickly at 30. I have five years before the risks, all the birth defect risks start jumping.”

The final sub-theme discussed the notion of flexibility in the work day. While the participants’ know that a career in academia affords her luxuries like the ability to design a work schedule to fits her lifestyle, they also recognize that a family has its own schedule that will undoubtedly craft her work schedule. As Maggie added, “so they’re blessed with the flexibility but it’s almost like motherhood takes a lot of the flexibility; so you don’t get a lot of the benefits that others—in my perception that other academics have.”

Emerging Idea: Internal and External Pressures in Desiring a Family and Building a Career

The third research question sought to explore the different types of pressures, if any, the participants described experiencing in this stage of their lives which are informing the next stages. While the participants did talk about experiencing pressures, these experiences were not as salient or abundant as the elements that emerged through the dominant themes. Therefore,
this topic was not incorporated into the existing dominant themes or into a fourth dominant theme. Nonetheless, there were pertinent conversations regarding pressures I was able to identify, including internal and external pressures and how each correlated with tenure pursuit and motherhood and career, the topics of dominant themes two and three, respectively. I identified six unique points of pressure from the participant’s descriptions: (1) pressure to pursue tier one; (2) career and family pressure; (3) pressure from family; (4) societal pressure on motherhood; (5) biological clock pressure; and (6) minority group pressure.

One participant described feeling pressured from current faculty members to strive for tenure-track at a high research university rather than at a less research-intensive university. However, this route may not fit the lifestyle and goals of every person. As highlighted by Amber, “I feel like there’s a lot of pressure to go tier one. But the older I get, I have to make choices.” The choices to which she is referencing pertain to deciding if going to this type of institution will aide or hinder her in managing her family goals. During our conversation she insisted that she knows the type of career trajectory she can set at a research-intensive university. But there are not any applicable programs in her geographical region, meaning she would have to move very shortly, and knows that moving plus starting at an intense program may delay starting family. She is at a point where she is deciding if this is the time to give precedent to her career goals or her family goals. In her own words, she explained:

So to try to go that tier one route with the extreme publication levels, and the high pressure environments to get grants and what not, is just not…it would essentially mean that I would choose not to have a family. And…that’s a choice some people make, it’s a choice you could make, but it’s not a choice I would like to make. Tellin described feeling a similar type of internal and external pressure as it relates to the decision of assigning precedence to personal relationships or career. She too is at a crossroads and went on to explain:
It’s like I want the relationship but I really, really want to make sure I can take care of myself in the future. So that’s something I’ve really been on the fence about. And everyone I know they’re like focus on your career, you’re almost there, don’t worry about a family, it’ll come.

Amber and Kimmy identified with the types of external pressures that a family can impose on you as it relates to starting a family. This pressure is often applied either purposely or inadvertently. Amber acknowledged that she feel an incredible amount of pressure from her family to finish school so she’ll finally be able to focus on what is important to them, which is settling down and getting married. For her family, being settled and in the confines of a safe family is the most important goal. Kimmy said that she too is feeling external pressure from her family to complete this solitary phase of her life so she can move on phases that are more focused on family. In other words, being in school is a time for her to focus primarily on her projects and other people in her life have had to yield to these priorities, including her mate. However, since she has spent all of her time following undergraduate pursuing an advanced degree, her family is now ready to have her attention on a more full-time basis. As she stated, “there’s pressure on me to go ahead and finish so we can get married.” Relatedly, Jessica identified with the external pressure to graduate, but from the different perspective of the academic expectations she has from her program and its faculty. As she went on the describe, “the pressure I feel right now the most is trying to graduate and how I can get all this done, and please a lot of people, [and] get the resources I need when resources are tight.

There is also a perceived degree of societal pressure to conform to its definitions of motherhood that proponents of FCPA speak about. Jessica recognized this pressure then provided a rebuttal. She indicated that “sometimes I think there’s pressure for women that you have to stay home and be the primary caregiver and I don’t really like that because I think women can do both.”
Several of the participants talked about different aspects of biological concerns in starting a family. However, Amber and Jessica identified these concerns as a type of internal pressure they are experiencing. Amber noted that, “I think the biggest pressure that we as women face is the pressure of time constraints on our physical ability to have a child.” Jessica connected this pressure to the pressure to graduate. As she lamented, “I just want to finish school so I can start that family because I know once you become 30 your chances, issues with having kids is different.”

There is one last type of pressure that two of the participants described in detail experiencing. This sixth type of pressure is unrelated to tenure and motherhood. Amber and Kimmy acknowledge that they feel the weight of the pressure of being a member of a racial minority group. Amber identified that she feels “added pressure to be a representative at a majority group institution”. This type of spotlight and pressure of being one of only a very few people of color in her department is in turn affecting the decisions she is making for her own life in terms of selecting a career trajectory. She feels pressure to be perfect. As she proclaimed:

It’s the strain between what I want and the pressure—and this is going to sound really antiquated—but the pressure of the community, the pressure of sort of the historical civil rights kind of pressure like you have to be the best you know…I feel an extreme pressure to reach the highest levels of academia, even past tenure track at a tier one. Like to be dean or president of colleges because who else is going to do it. You know there’s so much fewer of us that I feel like there’s even more expected of us of those of us that do break through and make it.”

Similarly, Kimmy is in a position where she feels she is the representative in her department for her racial group. As she described her experience with this type pressure, she said, “with me being one out of thirteen females in my department and the only African American female in my department everybody looks to me.” For her, this type of responsibility is a factor in the decisions she makes, including the types of jobs she is interested in as well as how she navigated her time at the graduate institution.
Dominant Themes and Feminist Critical Policy Analysis Relationship

Scholars have employed Feminist Critical Policy Analysis to uncover the ways in which females are underserved, misrepresented, or ignored in both public and institutional policies, as well as in others spaces such as structure and organizational culture. At the end of chapter four, I presented the places in the data where using Critical Feminist Policy Analysis uncovered the inequities in university policies and their subsequent application. I present in detail two different areas where specific policies were not presented or implemented in a manner that represented those constituents which they are affecting. The first area regarded the policies governing the tenure and promotion entity at universities. This section was primarily built using the data earmarked to compile the second dominant themes. FCPA gives me the tools to uncover the embedded ways in which patriarchal standards control tenure and promotion at universities through its rigidity, insomuch as it was never designed to represent the needs and differences of female faculty members. Additionally, specifically labeling policies as “family-friendly” may indicate that these exceptions were created to remedy the lack of recognition of the different needs of male and female faculty. This analytical tool provided a lens to recognize that such addendum-style policies are not a solution, rather they indicate that a complete re-structuring of the structure of tenure and promotion.

Second, a feminist critical analysis was successful in identifying that the ways in which society dictates what makes a woman a good and successful mother often does not correlate well with the expectations of the tenure-track faculty member. The profession was designed around people who are solely invested in their research, often at the expense of personal connections and outside interests. In our society, mothers are often expected to bare an overwhelmingly unequal share of family responsibilities which often require her to focus on tasks other than research and
However, when a woman does divert her attention from work-related tasks, even with permission, her capabilities and ability to contribute is questioned. Not only did the participants call these standards into question, FPCA wants those interested in policy analysis to recognize that this has created a double standard in tenure and promotion evaluation policies.

**Implications for Theory**

It was not by omission that I did not apply Feminist Critical Policy Analysis to the first dominant theme: spirituality and career. Underscoring its critical tenet, FCPA speaks to giving voice and credence to those who aren’t willingly recognized. It accomplishes this by exposing the biases and inequities that traditional policy analysis does not have to tools to recognize. However, through this project I have found that the researchers who are currently adapting FCPA have not yet created a space that acknowledges that race is another fundamental category in higher education policy analysis. I was not able to give the first dominant theme an applicable analysis using FCPA because it does not give the necessary language to address spiritual identity using the realm of racial identity as it was presented by the participants. Researchers contend that essentially you cannot separate a person’s lived experiences from their racial identity (Decuir & Dixon, 2006). While not all six of the participants in this study are Black women, when a Black participant spoke about her spiritual foundations, I am able to contend that it may be as a result of the historical connection to spirituality in the Black community. Mattis (2000) identified that empirical research cites that African American women are more likely to acknowledge and rely on a spiritual relationship than other groups. Spirituality has been shown to “influence African American people’s understandings of forgiveness, liberation, hope, justice, salvation, the meaning and purpose of life, and their responses to oppression…and their efforts to cope with adversity” (Mattis, 2000). Therefore, the fact that the Black participants upheld such
a strong spiritual connection is not an anomaly. Spirituality serves as a comfort zone. In other words, entering the academy as it is can be daunting and overwhelming. However, for these participants a relationship with God is a place a refuge from the confusion and uncertainty because God ultimately determines your path and guides your steps. For these participants, spirituality, ethnicity, and gender equally contribute to how she identifies herself.

Therefore, embracing a fusion of established theories may create a new space where the notion of spirituality in the realm of ethnicity and gender can be used an analytical tool in critical policy analysis. It may also present the correct language to add this analytical lens to the work of critical policy analysis. Critical race theory, as a theoretical lens and an analytical tool, ultimately contend that race structures every aspect of our lives because it is our socially constructed lens in which we view and interact with the world around us. As a theory, it recognizes that race is deeply embedded in societal structures and dominant cultures. As an analytical tool, critical race theory contends to uncover power structures that perpetuate the needs and desires of the dominant race while marginalizing people of color simultaneously. In the context of this project, understanding how race functions shows me that I cannot give such credence to the participant’s gender and ignore her race. While not all of the participants were women of color, those that are women of color seemed to reference their spiritual foundations in greater detail and incorporate it at greater lengths in her life. In critically analyzing policy, it is pertinent to acknowledge that not only are the voices not heard in policy analysis are female voices, they are also Black voices. Critical race feminism places women of color as the subject of critical analysis of policies and structures (Crenshaw, 1995). In this context, critical race feminism is an analytical tool in understanding how women of color conceptualize the policies and politics of the academy. If combined with Feminist Critical Policy Analysis and the racial
lens provided by critical race theory, it also may lend itself to giving language to how women of color use spirituality to relate the academic environment, or a feminist critical race policy analysis.

**Limitations**

There are limitations in this study that, if addressed, may help increase the power and applicability of this project for more women. First is the number of participants in this study. Initially, I thought that I should seek out twelve participants in order to provide the richness in data I sought. The six participants were phenomenal representatives of our sub-group of doctoral candidates. However, as I reflect on the project I now feel that given more time, I would incorporate the voices of more women. I know that it would only enrich the analysis by allowing for more co-researchers contribution and the discovery of perhaps more dominant themes. I recommend that if this study were to be tried again, whoever the next researcher is should consider seeking out more participants. As it relates to this limitation, I find that only collecting data from one source limited the depth of the narrative data collection. Employing more than one source of data collection, such as multiple interviews with each participant or other types of field texts, could have increased the breadth of the data collected which may have uncovered other dominant themes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The second limitation I find is in the ethnic representation of this group. Though I did not solicit participants based on race or ethnicity, the overwhelming majority of the participants in this study identified as a Black woman. While this presented an opportunity to immerse myself in some interesting theoretical implications, I still believe that considerable insight can be gained from engaging women who represent different ethnicities. Also, a majority of the women in this study were born or raised in states from the southern region of the United States. If this study
were to be completed again, I believe that incorporating women from different regions of the United States as well as different international regions would only enrich the data and expand the applicability of the project.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

Based on the outcome of this study as well as the limitations in the previous section, I can present suggestions for further research on this topic. Again, similar to the discussion of the limitation, I believe that any additional projects will increase the power and applicability of this topic. Only one-third of the participants in this study represented STEM programs. While these participants offered very useful insight and perspectives, conducting a study with more STEM field representatives will only enrich our understanding of the conceptualization of academia from the viewpoint of a STEM graduate student. A second area for further research may involve uncovering the degree to which spirituality or a spiritual foundation affects a person’s relationship to institutional policies and ultimately their desire to remain in academia. In other words, further research may give further understanding as to if having a spiritual relationship with a higher being intercedes on a faculty member’s behalf as it relates to negotiating institutional policies. Another area of future research incorporates ideas from this project into the existing literature on graduate student socialization for the professoriate and the effect the mentor has on the family decisions of the mentee. Several of the participants indicated that a considerable amount of their career and personal decisions have been affected by the experiences of their mentors or faculty advisors.

Additionally, I would like to suggest future research that details the conceptualization of the academy from different sub-groups of doctoral students who desire to enter the academy, including but not limited to:
First-year doctoral students (male and/or female) who desire to enter the academy

Male doctoral students

Doctoral students who have completed other post-secondary degrees in other countries

Female doctoral students with children

I contend that each of these sub-groups will have a different set of experiences and levels of interactions, both personally and academically, that affect how they interpret university policies and societal expectations of family responsibilities.

First-year doctoral students often have a limited understanding of how the university functions as it relates to tenure and promotion simply based on exposure. Completing a study utilizing this group of students may help to open a dialogue about the environment of the academy and what students know and need to know about the structures and policies of the academy. I contend that if students really had an understanding of the totality of a career in academia it may aide them in making more informed decisions. In turn, that would produce a more informed workforce which could ultimately impact the attrition rate of new faculty.

A second appropriate future study would be based on the conceptualization of the academy as it relates to family and career from the perspective of male doctoral students. As I have detailed in other chapters, male faculty members have a different set of experiences as it relates to balancing family and career as a result of the varying societal expectations of males and females. It may be pertinent to understand what degree of the ways in which male faculty members navigate the academy are as a result of societal expectations or university policies and politics.
The third suggested research population, comes from a conversation I had with one of the participants in which she detailed that her opportunities and interactions with the academy were all predicated on the limited interactions of her faculty chairwoman who is from another country. As this faculty member explained, it is essential that female faculty members only focus on career in order to succeed in the academy. In turn, many of the personal decisions that this faculty member has made are not favorable to the participant and have caused her to re-think her place in the academy right now and ultimately her future career goals. To that end, I would like to extend the line of research in this study to graduate students who have been academically socialized in different higher education systems in hopes of gaining a better understanding of the societal influences these students or faculty members bring with them to the American academy and how these influences inform their career and family decisions now that they are a part of this system.

The fourth direction in which I would like to suggest extending this line of inquiry is to the ways in which doctoral students who already have families (children) interact with the culture of a research-intensive university as well as the policies related to tenure and promotion. Superficially, I posit that these students will have varying interpretations of the academy based on the age of their children and their own age as a doctoral student. However, I know that extending this research by having conversations with this sub-group of doctoral candidates will definitely complicate this line of inquiry by adding depth the idea of how female graduate students transition into academic roles.

Additionally, having completed this project and worked through the more narrative frame I proposed, I posit that if this study were to be re-attempted, a case study design may be applicable method for presenting the experiences of the participants in a way that can position
the researcher to make more specific recommendations (Creswell, 2007). This study ultimately was a traditional qualitative study that employed the surface-level elements of narrative research, having reflected on the project. The data collection methods were suitable, but I now can contend that the analysis, as it is presented, may align more with other methods of qualitative inquiry, such as a case study design.

Finally, I would like to suggest that this study presents data that has the potential to be evolved and continued to add to the literature as it relates to graduate student advising and the ways in which current faculty can improve upon their advising tactics with female students. Changes cannot be made until advisors can be informed in what female graduate students feel like they are missing in their advising relationships.

**Concluding Remarks**

Conducting this study has been both rewarding and challenging. As a fellow female doctoral student who is also unsure of my all of my future plans, I found power in being able to converse with women who understood being in this space. It was also challenging for me to maintain the minimal, yet necessary line between researcher and participant. There were a few times where I had to re-address interpretation so that it reflected that I was a researcher first and a female doctoral student second. I had to learn to minimize myself to allow the participants’ voices to be clearly heard. There were also instances where I felt like diverting from the goal of the conversation to speak candidly with some of the participants about her experiences. This was an especially labored task during discussions about spirituality and a relationship with Christ. I am spiritual person like many of the participants and there were moments when I felt an internal yearning to break from the researcher role momentarily to serve as a comforting friend and to
encourage someone when she was admitting weaknesses or uncertainty in a specific area or aspect in her life.

I know that this project was a productive means for opening the dialogue about the academy and the perceptions of those who are a part of the academy yet not faculty members. From this study, I am able to conclude that there may be a lack of dialogue about the inner workings of the academy as they relate to the success of female faculty members. In other words, the information from which female doctoral students use to make predictions about their own future success in the academy may not be inclusive enough. There exists persistence among female faculty members of either choosing to only highlight the negative experiences she has had in the academy, or not sharing her experiences with balancing family and career openly with the next generation for female faculty members. This was observed by the participants, and many stated that given the opportunity, she will be forthcoming the incoming doctoral candidates about the academic environment and help them acknowledge that choices will have to be made. My hope for this project it that it serves as an impetus to encourage dialogue in among all women in academia. From this dialogue I hope women can be supported, uplifted, and most importantly, convinced to join the institutions that need her voice the most then made to feel comfortable enough to stay.
REFERENCES


Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Un fills qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from institutional review board (IRB) oversight, all LSU research projects using living humans as subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

-- Applicant. Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-F, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at [http://research.lsu.edu/compliance/policies/procedures/institutional-review-board#2890%28%29/item/47377.html](http://research.lsu.edu/compliance/policies/procedures/institutional-review-board#2890%28%29/item/47377.html)

-- A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:
- (A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of parts B thru F.
- (B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1 & 2).
- (C) Copies of all instruments to be used.
- (D) The proposal form, or a copy of the proposal and all recruitment materials.
- (E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB.
- (F) IRB Security of Data Agreement: [http://research.lsu.edu/files/item/20774.pdf](http://research.lsu.edu/files/item/20774.pdf)

1) Principal Investigator: Shaina Riser
   Dept: ELHC
   Phs: (337) 849-4227
   E-mails: riser1@tigers.lsu.edu
   Rank: Doctoral Candidate

2) Co-Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone, and e-mail for each.
   All student, please identify and name supervising professor in this space.
   Dr. Brian Bourke
   Assistant Professor
   (225) 578-779
   bbourke@lsu.edu

3) Project Title: The Intersection of Motherhood and Academia as Conceptualized by Female Doctoral Candidates

4) Proposal? (Yes or No) [No]
   If Yes, LSU Proposal Number
   Also, if YES, either (i) This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant, OR (ii) More IRB Applications will be filled later.

5) Subject pool (e.g., psychology students) Female doctoral candidates
   *Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: Children <18, the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, etc.). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature [Signature]
   Date [12/12/12]
   (No per signatures)

**I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changed, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the authorized representative of all non-LSU institutions with which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Screening Committee Action: Exempted [X] Not Exempted [Blank]

Signed Consent Waived: [Signature]

11/12/12

7/3/2012
APPENDIX B: FACULTY SAMPLE LETTER FOR PARTICIPANT RECOMMENDATIONS

August 23, 2012

Dr. Mike T. Tiger
Associate Professor
Doctoral-Degree Granting Department
123 Tiger Hall
Geaux, LA 12345

Dear Dr. Tiger

My name is Shaina Riser, and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education here at LSU. I am conducting a research project to help us understand the dynamic of simultaneously having a goal to become a tenure-track college professor and a desire to have a child during the tenure-track time from the perspective of a female graduate student. I am writing you in hopes that you may be able to recommend female doctoral candidates that I may solicit to participate in this project.

We will be discussing such topics as career and family goals and where she sees herself potentially being situated in the academy as a result. We will also discuss the state of the academy and its relations with female faculty members. This is a qualitative study and I will be conducting one-on-one interview lasting 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Participants must match four criteria:

1) have an expressed interest in both joining the professoriate and start a family simultaneously,
2) be in the later phases of the doctoral experience, meaning being at least 1 semester away from starting qualifying or special exams, or in the dissertation phase,
3) have no children at the time of this study,
4) be within child-bearing years.

I'm sure you're busy. But, if you could recommend candidates in your department it would be most appreciated. If you would like more information on the study or any details on the format, please do not hesitate to contact me:

Shaina Riser, Doctoral Candidate
Educational Theory, Policy & Practice
sriser1@tigers.lsu.edu
(337) 849-4227
APPENDIX C: STUDENT SAMPLE LETTER OF INTENT

August 23, 2012

Amy Isa Tiger
Female Doctoral Candidate
Doctoral-Degree Granting Department
123 Tiger Hall
Geaux, LA 12345

Dear Ms. Tiger,

My name is Shaina Riser, and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education here at LSU. I am conducting a research project to help us understand the dynamic of simultaneously having a goal to become a tenure-track college professor and a desire to have a child during the tenure-track time from the perspective of a female graduate student. I am writing you in hopes that you would be interested in participating in this project by lending your voice to this research.

We will be discussing your career and family goals and where you see yourself potentially being situated in the academy as a result. We will also discuss the state of the academy and its relations with female faculty members. This is a qualitative study and I will be conducting one-on-one interview lasting 30 minutes to 1 hour. We can conduct the interview in the private location of your choosing.

Participants must match four criteria:

1) have an expressed interest in both joining the professoriate and start a family simultaneously,
2) be in the later phases of the doctoral experience, meaning being at least 1 semester away from starting qualifying or special exams, or in the dissertation phase,
3) have no children at the time of this study,
4) be within child-bearing years.

I'm sure you're busy. But, if you are interested and have the time, I would enjoy your participation. If you would like more information on the study or any details on the format, please do not hesitate to contact me:

Shaina Riser, Doctoral Candidate
Educational Theory, Policy & Practice
sriser1@tigers.lsu.edu
(337) 849-4227
APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Name of Participant (Please Print)________________________________________________

I hereby consent to participate in the research project entitled: The Intersection of Motherhood and Academia as Conceptualized by Female Doctoral Students. Initial____

I was provided an explanation of the purpose of the project and the intended uses of my interview responses by: Shaina Riser, Doctoral Degree Candidate at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I am aware that the individual interviews will be recorded using audio technology and will transfer to written transcription. By agreeing to participate in this project, I hereby grant Shaina Riser and Louisiana State University all rights, title, or interest in the audio-recorded interview conducted for her dissertation. Initial____

I understand that my audio-recording will not be revealed to other participants in the study and/or the public, to ensure my confidentiality. Initial_____

I understand that my participation will be confidential and my identity will not be revealed; therefore, I will be assigned a fictitious name. Initial_____

I understand that I may ask to review of my responses via audio-technology and/or transcript at any time. Initial____

I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Initial_____ 

I understand that the all or parts of my written transcript may be used for the duration of this project, including but not limited to analysis and interpretation and visual presentations. Initial____

I understand that my written transcript may be used for publications including and not limited to articles, books, online magazines, or newsletters. Initial_____ 

Signature of Interviewee__________________________________________________________

Date_________________________

Contact Number__________________________

Contact Email__________________________
APPENDIX E: OPENING INTERVIEW SCRIPT

The purpose of this project is to help us better understand what it feels like to simultaneously have a goal to become a college professor and a desire to have a child. Your participation in this project will help to fill in gaps in the literature of graduate student experiences. The intent is to open a conversation that will inform the ways in which female graduate students feel they can navigate a dual career.

This is an unstructured interview, which means I want us to have a conversation about this topic. There is no interview protocol and I do not have any specific questions for you beyond demographic information. Instead, I have created four topics to introduce that are solely based on the research questions. I encourage you to create your own questions that we can explore as a team and ultimately create your personal narrative.

Demographic Information:

(1) How old are you?

(2) Where are you from?

(3) What are your guiding principles? From where does your values system originate?

Topics of Conversation:

(1) Your opinion regarding the academy’s views, policies, cultural environment or interest, etc. of female academics;

(2) Your intra-narrative regarding what you think about joining the professoriate. I want to listen to the conversation you’re having with yourself regarding the positives and negatives of making this transition from student to faculty member.

(3) The strengths and struggles of the mother academics you know or with whom you have spent time;
(4) The type of advice you have received or the models of balancing motherhood and academia available to you.

(5) Do you feel any types of internal or external pressures that are affecting your decisions, whether positively or negatively?

(6) Is there anything we did not cover or anything you would like to add? Do you have any comments about the study or suggestions for improvement?
APPENDIX F: CHART OF THE DOMINANT THEMES

**Spiritual Foundations**
- Destiny-Track: I was destined for the professoriate
- Blessed Assurance: God is in control of my life and knows what is best for me
- Contentment: I will wait until He works it all out for me

**Policies and Politics**
- Chasing Tenure: The intensity of being on the tenure track.
- This May Be Too Much: The high activity research environment may not be for me anymore
- Family-Friendly Policies: What are they and will they work in my favor?

**Motherhood**
- Same Answer Sheet, Different Test: Men and Women are held to same career expectations despite the differences in societal expectations
- Balancing Motherhood and Career: There can be a balance, but it may not be without sacrifice
- Tenure Clock Versus Biological Clock: Which clock is more important for a young female professor
- Flexibility in Academia: While there is flexibility in work day structure, does it always benefit mothers?
APPENDIX G: VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DOMINANT THEMES AND THE EMERGING IDEA

Spirituality is the consuming, encompassing entity

Enternal and external intersect the dominant themes
VITA

Shaina Airlia Riser was born and reared in Lafayette, Louisiana. She is the daughter of Charlie Riser of Cullen, LA and Brenda Wheelock of Scotlandville, LA. She proudly completed grades kindergarten through twelfth in the Lafayette Public School System. Shaina graduated with honors from Acadiana High School in 2002.

Shaina earned her Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology with a concentration in Athletic Training from Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge, Louisiana) in 2006. She continued on to Nicholls State University (Thibodaux, Louisiana) and earned a Master of Education with a concentration in Higher Education in 2008. Both of her years at Nicholls State University were spent as a Graduate Assistant Athletic Trainer. She also spent one concurrent semester as a Graduate Assistant in the Office of Student Life, assigned to Greek Affairs. In August 2008, Shaina returned to Louisiana State University as a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Counseling, concentrating in Higher Education with an emphasis on research and policy. Shaina has held graduate assistantships in the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Community Outreach (2008-2009) and in the College of Education (2009-2012).

In 2012, Shaina accepted a position at South Louisiana Community College-Lafayette, Louisiana campus, where she currently serves as the Career Center Advisor. In this capacity, she serves the technical education students, the students completing two-year degrees, and students completing transfer degrees. She also serves as a Career Coach, specifically serving high school students.

Shaina’s areas of research include female doctoral student persistence, female faculty acculturation and persistence, and intuitional policy and effectiveness. She also has vested interests in Black Greek Letter Organizations and minority student retention. Shaina has
presented at a number of conferences including, American Educational Research Association, Bergamo, and LSU’s Curriculum Camp.

The Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education will be conferred on Shaina Riser during the College of Education Spring Commencement on May 16, 2013.

Shaina is an eight year member of Zeta Phi Beta International Sorority.