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The Work-Life Balance of a Single Mother and Secondary School Principal

Amy Cochran

The Work-Life Balance of a Single Mother and Secondary School Principal

by

Amy Cochran

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Dissertation Chair: Dr. Kim Hartung
Reader: Dr. Margaret Flathmann
Reader: Dr. SueAnn Glover
Reader: Dr. Danielle Thompson

ABSTRACT

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As more women enter the workforce and move into leadership positions, understanding the conflicts between balancing work and family life is essential. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to focus on the lived experiences of single mother, secondary school principals and how they face the challenges of balancing work and family. Through semi-structured interviews, the study focused on four single mother secondary school principals. It aimed to answer the research question: *What are the internal and external drivers of effective single-parent female secondary school principals that allow them to face the challenges of balancing work and family?* The study concluded with the key finding that there are competing demands between home and work life, and finding balance can be extremely difficult. The women in this study are dedicated to both roles' success and have shown high perseverance in managing both domains of life. They have determined that although they might not have balance, they have found a variety of support systems and management strategies to neutralize the stressful demands of both roles. Key drivers in their success were having relationships with their own children, their staff and finding the perseverance and tenacity to push through any challenge they face. This study provided insights and suggestions for other single mothers or those who support single, working mothers around the strategies and systems that can be used to help successfully manage being a working professional and a mother.

To my beautiful, brilliant daughters, Adria, Alexis and Aubrey. Thank you for being my motivation, my reason why, my biggest cheerleaders, and my support. Everything I do, I do for you. Always remember, the world is yours, and you can do anything you set your mind to.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The culture and demographics of the workplace have changed dramatically over the last century. According to the United States Department of Labor (2016), "In 2015, women's overall labor force participation rate was about ten percentage points higher than forty years ago" (p. 1). In addition to women entering the workforce at a much higher rate, statistics also show that women with children are also deciding to work more. "In March 2015, 69.9% of mothers with children under age 18 were in the labor force, up from 47.4% in 1975" (United States Department of Labor, 2016, p. 1). The dramatic increase in mothers in the workforce has struck debates, research and conversation about the impact this has on children, families and the challenges of work-life balance.

In addition to the challenges of raising a family at home, school leaders face many responsibilities and challenges in managing a school. These include the responsibility for planning, organizing, leading and orchestrating everything that occurs within their school and often leads to long work hours, evenings to attend school-related events, board meetings, responding to crises, planning and completing paperwork (Sergiovanni, 2009). Sergiovanni (2009) states, "Successful leaders- principals among them- are not afraid of hard work. By putting in large amounts of time, they demonstrate that they are not afraid of hard work" (p. 21). Putting in the time needed for success at school can lead to difficulty finding time to manage the responsibilities at home.

With the demands high in both, raising a family and leading a school, how

are some women able to find balance and success? To answer this question, there is a need for an increased understanding of how female principals negotiate workplace demands and parenting responsibilities.

Statement of the Problem

Each day more women are deciding to enter the workforce. According to the United States Department of Labor, Women's Bureau (2016), "In 1948 only 28.6% of women were in the workforce, compared to 57% of women in 2016" (p.1). With the increase in women entering the workforce, the level of awareness and conversation about the demands this can place on families, personal lives, and careers occur more. There has been an increase in research about what happens when people combine work and family as the interest grows to find work-life balance (Marshall, 2009).

Although women make up 57% of the workforce today, only 39.8% of managers in the United States are women (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). In addition, only 21% of senior-level leadership positions in the workforce are held by women (Grant Thornton, 2018). This number is daunting when we know that women earn more bachelor's degrees than men (McKinsey & Company, 2018). Although there may be multiple reasons that there are fewer women in leadership positions, the struggle to balance work and family is a major one. According to Sandberg (2019), women often "turn down projects, don't apply for promotions, or choose more flexible paths to accommodate families they plan to have someday, closing doors to opportunities and limiting their options even before they become parents". It

is no question that this only continues once children are born. The difficulty of balancing work and family can be challenging and many choose not to do it. McKinsey & Company (2017) find that senior-level women often have more household responsibility than senior-level men, specifically 5.5 times more likely than their male partners to do all or most of the household work. "Doing a disproportionate share of household work may dampen women's career aspirations: women with partners and children have significantly lower aspirations to be top executives than men with the same family structure" (McKinsey & Company, 2017, p. 18). Therefore, women opt out of leadership positions to be able to maintain life at home.

When we look closer at the number of women in school leadership, the trends are similar. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 29% of secondary principals were female, compared to 71% who were male (Aud et al., 2011). There are many implications for the shortage of female secondary administrators, specifically for school districts that need strong female leaders. However, with school administrators working an average of sixty hours per week, women can find that career choice extremely challenging when balancing school leadership with a family, only allowing for the shortage of women leaders to continue (Lavigne, Shakman, Zweig, & Greller, 2016).

The challenges that women in leadership positions face balancing life at home when they have partners to help out is doubled for single mothers working to do the same. In 2015, 31.3% of families were maintained by

mothers only, and the majority of them are in the workforce because they have to support their families (U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, June 2016). Although we know that many single mothers are also working, there is a gap in the research about the number of single mothers in leadership positions, specifically school leadership. Due to this, there is also little research that exists to discuss what motivates or drives them to face the challenges, as well as the support systems and management strategies used to balance their higher-level careers with their families. This study aims to find a deeper understanding of those issues and provide guidance for other single mothers on how they can have a high profile career and still raise their family.

Purpose of the Study

As more women enter the workforce and move into leadership positions, understanding the conflicts between balancing work and family life is essential. How do women who succeed at the top of their professions balance their family responsibilities when they are single parents? What can we learn from single mothers leading successful lives by raising thriving families and achieving occupational success?

The purpose of this study is to focus on what internally and externally drives single mothers who are also secondary school principals to face the challenges of balancing work and family. It will also seek to understand the support systems and management strategies they use in balancing both. This study intends to increase understanding of single mothers' needs who are

secondary principals and provide new insight into the strategies they use, which could help other educational leaders who are currently mothers or considering motherhood. While the study will guide other single mothers seeking assistance to provide better balance at home and work, it will also contribute to the body of research on single mothers and their work-life experiences.

Research Questions

1. What are the internal and external drivers of effective single-parent female secondary school principals that allow them to face the challenges of balancing work and family?

2. What support systems do effective single-parent female secondary school principals utilize to achieve work-life balance?

3. What management strategies do effective single-parent female secondary school principals utilize to achieve work-life balance?

Background and Context

The topic of female-principals and work-life balance is one that I wrestle with daily. My interest in focusing on this topic is primarily due to my lived experience and curiosity to dig deeper into how other single-parent female principals have managed the principalship and their personal lives. I believe that each woman's personal story about balancing work and home life helps pave the way for other women to come. In the book *Women Who Work: Rewriting the Rules for Success*, Ivanka Trump shares,

You are a woman who works at prioritizing your family and your passions

alongside your professional aspirations. And though you may not even realize it, doing so is helping to change the conversation around women and work. By setting a positive precedent for generations to come, you are helping to create a work environment that is aligned with our values as people and more supportive of our choices, whatever they are and however they vary for each of us (p. 167).

This powerful statement helps us understand that it takes women in the workplace to begin to change and shape the conversation around the values and norms of being a female in the workforce. With that, my journey has had a strong influence in choosing this research question.

My personal story. At the age of sixteen, I became a mother to a beautiful baby girl. I have spent the last twenty-four years raising her to the best of my abilities, often struggling for money and moving around to find some stability in our life. When I was pregnant with her, I was told by many others that I would be a statistic, just another teen mom on welfare my whole life. With determination at the forefront, I was committed to doing something different and took action. The more I was told I could not, the more I continued to say to myself that I could and would. That is exactly what I did. My first milestone was graduating from high school on time with my class and then going straight to college. I earned my bachelor's degree and then master's degree, all while being a single parent.

During my undergraduate years, I got married and had two additional daughters. I thought it would be the best decision of my life to marry the man I

loved; instead, I found myself in an abusive marriage. Physical and verbal abuse landed my daughters and I in and out of hotels seeking shelter. All of these trials and tribulations in my life could have been reason enough for me to give up, not to go on. However, the same mentality I had when I was sixteen is what seemed to push me through. It has given me the mindset that these events have not caused deficiencies in my life; instead, they have become assets that have helped me develop as the person and leader I am today. My daughters are my reason for pushing through the trauma I have experienced. I am determined to be a good role model for them and teaching them skills they can carry through life. Knowing that the dedication, resilience and persistence I was showing my daughters regularly would transform them and show them that they can do anything they set their minds to.

Showing my daughters what hard work and persistence can bring to their own lives has also been a direct result of the support systems I have utilized in my life. These support systems have helped me reach my goal of becoming a principal. Over the years, I have realized that I need to rely on those around me who were willing to help. Specifically, building my support system helped me be able to work through college and parent my daughters. My parents, who have been married for forty-seven years, are always willing to help with whatever I need. Relying on my parents to help pick the girls up, watch them for the weekend while I worked or studied and supporting them by attending their activities and events has been necessary. In addition, I have utilized a friend that we now joke about being my co-parent, who is willing to be there for my daughters and help me

whenever needed. Being able to rely on them has helped tremendously ensure that my daughters were being cared for while I was working or at school.

In addition to building my support system at home, it was equally important to develop my professional support system. I am fortunate to work in a school district that has many females in leadership positions. With that, building a coalition with them, who understand the balance of work and motherhood, has been extremely beneficial. This support network allows me to share the stressors of juggling work and family, easing some of the guilt I feel about the long hours I often spend at school.

That certainly does not mean that I do not have "mom guilt" regularly! The guilt of being a single parent weighs heavily on me. Being a principal means that there are many evening hours at work, such as concerts and events I have had to balance with my family. When events are happening at school, my youngest daughter typically spends her evenings at work with me. If it is something that she cannot attend with me, I rely on my support system to help me; needless to say, I feel guilty about missing out or being away from my daughters regularly because I am working.

Learning how to balance my family with my work as a principal has been extremely challenging for me. Part of this challenge comes from the stress of wanting to be sure I am doing both effectively. Being an effective principal means being a leader and not just managing the pieces of the building. As an effective leader, I believe in creating a vision for success, promoting a positive culture and climate focused on supporting the whole child, bringing out leadership in others,

serving as an instructional resource to help teachers improve and setting high expectations for student learning. I feel the importance of supporting and building relationships with staff, students and families and understanding the time it takes to do all of this effectively. I am interested in learning more about how other single mothers who are secondary administrators balance and feel effective in doing both; the internal and external drivers, the challenges, support systems and management strategies they use.

Theoretical Foundation

Understandably, most working adults need to balance personal and professional responsibilities. I have identified two theoretical frameworks to study work-life balance in single mothers who lead secondary schools. To answer the research questions in this study, I will use work-family border theory and spillover theory to frame the study. By examining these theoretical frameworks, I hope to be able to have a better understanding of how female secondary principals also balance being single mothers and what strategies they employ to find success at home and school.

Work-family border theory. According to Clark (2000), "the work-family border theory explains how individuals manage and negotiate the work and family spheres and the borders between them in order to attain balance" (p. 750). The theory takes into account that people are border-crossers, and although the domains of work and home can be drastically different, people can tailor or shape the nature of work and home domains as well as the borders between them to achieve the desired balance (Clark, 2000). The theory attempts to provide an

understanding of crossing borders between the different domains of life and the "complex interaction between border-crossers and their work and family lives, to predict when conflict will occur, and give a framework for attaining balance" (Clark, 2000, p.748). This theory is relevant to working single mothers because to create and maintain the desired balance, the borders between work and family must be appropriately managed (Karassvidou & Glaveli, 2015).

Spillover theory. Spillover theory helps explain the impact of work on family life, either positive or negative (Lakshmypriya & Krishna, 2016). It transfers positive and negative experiences from one role to another (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). For example, if an employee experiences a negative interaction at work, they may continue to worry about it when at home, thus impacting their family and home life. Understanding that there is a potential for both positive and negative spillover to occur from work to home and vice versa is critical in knowing how single mothers could be impacted.

Spillover theory can also be used to explain career advancement for women. According to King, Botsford, & Huffman (2009), "The current findings suggest that mothers who experienced low levels of positive spillover and high levels of negative spillover (i.e., the lowest levels of family-work balance) perceived fewer advancement opportunities than did their male counterparts" (p. 888). Understanding the impact that spillover has on single mothers' advancement in their careers can help conceptualize women's continued low level in leadership positions. Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Collins (2001) finds that single mothers' sole purpose for working centers around financial support; therefore, they

experience a low level of career involvement and advancement.

Two other theories about work-life balance could also explain how personal and professional lives overlap are enrichment theory and segmentation theory. These theories have opposite viewpoints on how work and life intersect.

Segmentation theory. Segmentation theory believes that work and family are two distinct and separate entities and do not impact one another (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014). In 1960, Blood and Wolfe were the first researchers to study this early theory and apply it to the workforce (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014). Their theory states that when workers have low job satisfaction or stressful positions, they can create boundaries and separation between the two roles. Workers are able to compartmentalize and keep work and family separate. The belief that one does not impact another is one of the oldest theories in the work-life area.

Enrichment theory. On the other hand, enrichment theory digs deeper into the idea that one domain of life can enhance or enrich the other, having an enormous impact in both areas. According to Rincy & Panchanatham (2014), privilege, status security, psychological energy and personal growth are benefits that may come from assuming multiple roles and one can have a positive impact on the other. In this theory, experiences from one role can improve the quality of life in another role (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Both segmentation theory and enrichment theory could explain how one balances their work and life and their impact on each other.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this study, I will use terminology that could have multiple meanings. For clarity and understanding, the following terms will be defined as:

Work-Life Balance: satisfaction and good functioning at work and home, with minimum role conflict (Clark, 2000).

Spillover: the transfer of positive and negative experiences from work to family and vice versa (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Single Mother: a mother who has a dependent child or children under the age of 18 and who is widowed, divorced or unmarried (Collins English Dictionary)

Secondary School Principal/Administrator: middle level or high school level school principal (Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals)

Summary

The importance of being a successful secondary principal and still raising my children is of utmost importance to me. Giving my time and energy to both roles and having them enhance one another is what I strive for. Modeling for my daughters that they can hold any career they would like and still be successful mothers is a valuable lesson that I hope to teach them. I understand that there is a constant push and pull between the two worlds. I am interested in digging deeper into how other single mothers who are secondary administrators strive to achieve balance. I aim to understand what the internal and external drivers of facing the challenges of balancing work and family are and the support systems and management strategies that others use to balance it all.

In summary, this is a five-chapter research study. This chapter aims to introduce the work-life balance of school leaders who are single mothers, understand the purpose of the study, share the research questions that will be answered and the theoretical frameworks of the study. Chapter 2 digs deep into the literature that exists regarding the themes and issues presented in the study. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the research design and methods used in the study. Chapter 4 presents the research, findings, results, and connections to the literature achieved from the study. Chapter 5 shares the conclusions, implications and limitations of the study and considerations for further research based on the study.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to focus on what internally and externally drives single mothers who are also secondary school principals to face the challenges of balancing work and family as well as the support systems and management strategies they use in balancing both. In the book *Women Who Work: Rewriting the Rules for Success*, Ivanka Trump writes

> Work/life balance simply does not exist. The sooner we accept that it's not
> a feasible goal to pursue, the less stressed we'll be. Balance implies a
> scale, which by its very nature cannot remain level for more than a brief
> second, at which point the weight shifts and the scale tips (p. 144).

Her book's focus encourages women to identify goals in both personal and professional areas instead of finding balance and building structure within our lives to find fulfillment in both. The literature shows that work-life balance has many different meanings and implications for each individual, and many have begun to agree that it may not exist. To fully understand work-life balance and the position of a secondary principal a literature review was completed.

The literature that was reviewed was scholarly and non-scholarly journals, books, census reports and websites. This literature review will attempt to create an understanding of the complexities that secondary principals face when they are single parents and how they successfully balance both. In addition, it will explore ways in which the following topics are addressed within the literature: work-life balance, work-family border theory, spillover theory, segmentation theory,

enrichment theory, history of women in the workforce, women in leadership, the secondary principalship, women as secondary principals, single mothers, and support for working single mothers. The topics included in the literature review support the study's purpose, which seeks to determine the challenges, support systems, and methods used by single mothers, secondary principals to balance work and family. More specifically, it will answer three research questions:

1. What are the internal and external drivers of effective single-parent female secondary school principals that allow them to face the challenges of balancing work and family?

2. What support systems do effective single-parent female secondary school principals utilize to achieve work-life balance?

3. What management strategies do effective single-parent female secondary school principals utilize to achieve work-life balance?

Work-Life Balance

Understanding how individuals balance their work with their families has been a topic that has been spotlighted in recent years, especially as more women enter the workforce. The idea of what it means to achieve work-life balance truly is debated in the literature and what strategies individuals employ to make it possible are in demand as individuals must find a way to do it all.

The earliest theorists define work-family balance as work and family having no interaction or being completely independent of one another. Blood & Wolfe (1960) first found that the segmentation of work and family is a normal process that must occur to keep unsatisfying jobs from impacting the home. Other

theorists agreed and found that during their studies, work and family are distinct entities and do not influence one another (Young & Kleiner, 1992; Zedeck & Mosier, 1990; Lambert, S.J., 1990; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). According to Lee et al. (2009), "Work-life balance allows the fulfillments of work roles without the loss of personal life" (p.75).

Other researchers see work-family balance as entities that are continuously overlapping and influencing one another. Role accumulation theory proposes that engaging in multiple satisfying and rewarding roles can bring positivity and privileges to both areas of work and life (Sieber, 1974). Similarly, enrichment theory agrees that the experiences in one role improve the quality of life in another. In contrast, if work is positive, it can positively experience family life (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Within the literature, some researchers find that real balance is nearly impossible to accomplish and instead should focus on how to integrate the two successfully. Zigler (2007) shares that school principals should embrace the imbalance and should focus more on seeking meaning, not balance. Friedman and Greenhaus (2000) found that when work and family were integrated, the two roles could enhance each other, and managing each role's boundaries is more important than just reducing time spent at work.

Furthermore, some research points to the other side of the debate that balance is hard to find and ultimately, one will suffer if the other is out of balance. Shillingstad (2011) determined that all of our lives' roles compete for a limited amount of time and energy from a single individual. With each added role and

responsibility, the challenge becomes more difficult to manage until work or family suffers.

Much of the research on work-family balance covers a wide range of professions and types of workers. Cheung (2010) finds that "past studies of work-life balance rarely included leaders at the top with substantial family care responsibilities and have not considered their responses as a distinct group; partly because there are very few women leaders to be studied" (p. 186). Marshall (2009) believes that it is an urgent issue to include more women leaders in the field of work-life balance as women are primarily responsible for managing work and family and we must learn what strategies they employ to help others.

The research on work-family balance is wide-spread and differentiated by periods in which women are prevalent in the workforce. In more recent years, the study of work-life balance has become increasingly important as many women are looking to others for strategies and methods used to balance both positively.

As seen in the research, many work-life balance theories help explain how individuals balance their work and personal lives.

Work-family border theory. Work-family border theory is one of the many theories within the work-life balance field. It gives a framework for attaining balance in work and family life because of the complex intersection between them (Clark, 2000). This author explains that the central idea around the theory is that although family and work are in different spheres, they still influence each other and individuals are continually crossing the borders between them.

After studying existing literature on other theories, Campbell Clark decided that other theories were inept and created the work-family border theory (Clark, 2000). Clark (2000) explains, "people are border-crossers who make daily transitions between these two settings, often tailoring their focus, their goals, and their interpersonal style to fit the unique demands of each" (p. 751). Although many aspects of work and family are difficult to change, people will shape each domain to create their desired balance (Clark, 2000). Guest (2002) shares that work-family border theory "opens up a rich vein of analysis of the nature of borders, their permeability, the ease with which they can be managed or moved and so on" (p. 259). Acknowledging that technology and competition have often brought more intensive work because we are continually accessing them both at all times, work-family border theory attempts to allow the borders to be crossed and for individuals to control it (Guest, 2002).

Karassvidou & Glaveli (2015) conducted 20 in-depth interviews to support and attempt to extend the work-family border theory. Their research supported the theory and determined that there are borders between work and family that people cross; however, employees often cannot control the work-border, so it becomes deeply protected and impacts the home sphere (Karassvidou & Glaveli, 2015).

Lambert et al. (2006) completed a study that supported work-family border theory. These researchers surveyed 95 employees in a biotechnology company and found that employees' central participation and supportive communication were related to job satisfaction but not personal life satisfaction.

They also found high levels of work-family conflict tended to be associated with lower levels of life satisfaction. Work-family border theory explains that the more individuals are central participants and communicators in both domains, the greater their life-work balance (Clark, 2000).

Work-family border theory is relatively new in the work-family balance research area. Therefore, only a few studies can be found on it; however, it is one of the main theories that describes how individuals can be actively in charge of balancing their work and family and allow for healthy crossover between both.

Spillover theory. Spillover theory is one of the most popular theories with the most supporting evidence adopted by researchers in the work-family balance field (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014). Many suggest that spillover theory is the transfer of positive and negative attitudes, emotions, skills and behaviors back and forth to work and family (Crouter, 1984; Belsky et al., 1985; Kelly & Voydanoff, 1985). Both positive and negative spillover can occur. An example of negative spillover would be an individual experiencing marital issues, in which these negative emotions could impact both the home life and work life. On the other hand, an employee who receives a promotion and positive experiences at work could pass these emotions onto their family and feel joy at home. Williams and Alliger (1994) completed a study that showed if working parents had negative moods, it tended to spillover to work and family easier than positive ones. The negative spillover was primarily due to high family demands placed on one individual. They also found that women displayed more significant spillovers than men, likely because they have a more significant combined work/family load than

employed fathers (Williams & Alliger, 1994).

However, King et al. (2009) demonstrated in their study that positive spillover occurs as much as negative spillover; however, only negative spillover influenced women's perceived career advancement. This negative spillover was seen as a hindering factor to both men and women being able to advance their careers. Although women often feel pressured to halt their careers so that it does not hurt their families, the study showed that work-life balance is equally important to men.

In the work-life balance research arena, much of the research focuses on using spillover theory; therefore, many other terms have been used to describe it, such as generalization, continuation, extension, familiarity and similarly (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014). All of this research has ultimately focused on the fact that work and family influence one another, which can be both positive and negative; however, both have to be identical. If one is positive, then so is the other (Morris & Madsen, 2007).

Segmentation theory. Unlike spillover theory, where there is a transfer of negative and positive emotions, attitudes, and behaviors back and forth between work and family, segmentation theory believes that work and family are two distinct and separate entities and they do not have any impact on one another (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014).

In 1960, Blood and Wolfe were the first researchers to study this early theory and apply it to a blue-collar workforce (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014). Their theory states that when workers have low job satisfaction or stressful

positions, they can create boundaries and separation between the two roles.

Workers are able to compartmentalize and keep work and family separate. An

example of this would be if someone has a very stressful job, they

compartmentalize and create boundaries, so it does not impact their home life.

Researchers found that this work is done very intentionally so that there is no

cross over between work and family (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014).

  Enrichment theory. The opposing viewpoint of segmentation theory is

enrichment theory. This theory suggests that one domain of life can enhance or

enrich the other, significantly impacting both areas. According to Rincy &

Panchanatham (2014), privilege, status security, psychological energy and

personal growth are benefits that may come from assuming multiple roles and one

can have a positive impact on the other. In this theory, experiences from one role

can improve the quality of life in another role (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

  In 1974, Sieber explored how enrichment theory can help women who

wish to work and maintain life at home. He states, "despite the likelihood of role

conflict for the working mother, women are seeking a wider role repertoire to

increase their resources, privileges and sense of personal worth" (Sieber, 1974, p.

577). The idea of enrichment theory applies here because access to various

resources in one role can help enrich the other, thus being a benefit to women who

are working to balance both domains of life.

History of Women in the Workplace

Finding research on how women balance both work and family is limited. This is primarily due to the fact that historically women have not been seen as equals in the workforce (McKinsey & Company, 2018). What started as traditional housewife duties bled over into the workforce as women entered during the war and were hired as seamstresses and manufacturing jobs (Kranzberg & Hannan, 2017). It was not until the 1970's that the strict segregation of traditional male-dominant occupations would lessen and give women new opportunities to enter those professions (Kranzberg & Hannan, 2017). Although women today are much more likely to participate in the workforce than in the past, they continue to fight for equal pay, rights, and positions (McKinsey & Company, 2018).

The United States Department of Labor (2016) states that "In 2015, women's overall labor force participation rate (56.7 percent) was ten percentage points higher than 40 years ago" (p.1). However, women still tend to be underrepresented in every level position in the workforce, despite earning more college degrees than men (McKinsey & Company, 2018). The National Center for Education Statistics reports that in 1964, only 39 percent of those enrolled in college were women, whereas today 57 percent are women. However, one would assume that women would have equal access to positions, with more women attaining college degrees than men. Unfortunately, gender discrimination in all positions is still evident. A study from the Pew Research Center found that four-in-ten working women in the United States face gender discrimination in the

workforce (Parker & Funk, 2017). This discrimination is present in the wage gap. Women report they were treated as less competent than their male counterparts, receiving less support from their senior leaders and being passed over for promotions because of their gender (Parker & Funk, 2017).

In addition, women dominate in certain professions, such as teachers in education and nurses in health care. More specifically, women account for 77.4 percent of the workforce in these areas (Wooton, 1997). However, women still are overlooked and passed up for higher-level positions as males dominate the administration and supervisory level positions in these fields (Krivkovich, Kutcher, & Yee, 2016).

Not only do women fill management-level positions at a lower rate than men, The State of the Gender Pay Gap Report (2019) shares that women earn 79 cents for every dollar earned by men in 2019. Although this is up from 1979 when women's earnings were 62 percent of men's earnings, in some occupations, women have actually lost ground (US Department of Labor, August, 2018). A study done by the United States General Accounting Office (GAO) found that in ten industries that employed over 70 percent of women in the workforce, in seven of the ten sectors, women managers made less than their male counterparts with an actual increase in the pay gap between 1995 and 2000 (the United States General Accounting Office, 2001). A study by Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce found that a woman with a bachelor's degree earns the same as a man with an associate's degree and the same is true for more advanced degrees, putting women at an economic disadvantage (Carnevale, Smith

& Strohl, 2018).

Despite gains with women entering the workforce in the past decade, there is still work to be done to see equal rights and pay for women at every level.

Women and leadership. Although women outnumber men in their educational levels, this difference is not represented in the number of women in leadership. We know that the United States does not lack in the number of qualified and ambitious women; however, many reasons still exist for why women do not reach higher leadership levels. McKinsey & Company (2018) find that women are dramatically outnumbered in senior leadership. Specifically, 1 in 5 professionals in senior leadership are women, and only 1 in 25 is a woman of color.

Some studies have shown that a significant contributing factor to fewer women in leadership is women opting out or choosing not to accept the responsibilities of senior leadership. A study of more than 130 companies and over 34,000 men and women, conducted by Lean In and McKinsey & Company (2018), finds that the fear of balancing work and family responsibilities was listed by more women (42 percent) than any other reason for not wanting to become a top executive. Slaughter (2012) shares that women should have a family if they want and still hold the career they desire. "If more women could strike this balance, more women would reach leadership positions. And if more women were in leadership positions, they could make it easier for more women to stay in the workforce" (Slaughter, 2012, p. 13). Although women may opt-out of senior-level leadership because of their families, Cheung (2010) finds that women in leadership

positions are learning and realize they do not have to do it alone. "Instead of being superwomen who hold themselves to the highest standards for all the role-related tasks of being wives and mothers, they adopt different internal and external strategies to redefine their roles" (Cheung & Halpern, 2010, p. 185).

Other studies believe that some women feel they are not qualified for the position and therefore opt-out (Harman & Sealy, 2017). Sandberg (2013) finds that women might lean back from the leadership ladder because of their perception that advanced positions are not available for women. They worry that they do not have the skills to obtain higher-level positions.

Women opting out of senior-level leadership is not the only reason that the gender leadership gap exists. A study completed by the American Association of University Women reports that leadership opportunities disappear at various points in their careers (Hill, Miller, Benson, & Handley, 2016). This has been explained in research using the metaphor of a pipeline in which men and women will move through their organizational hierarchy and are expected to reach management in equal numbers (Einarsdottir, Christiansen, & Kristjansdottir, 2018). Blickenstaff (2005) finds that the pipeline is often leaky and pushes women out of the workforce for various reasons before reaching senior-level leadership. Krivkovich, Kutcher, & Yee (2016) explains that the middle-level cliff is due to discriminatory promotion practices and women are getting passed over for these advancements into leadership.

Although many theories exist around why women are not represented in senior leadership, it is evident that through the research that a significant gap

between men and women still exists and needs to be addressed in helping to level the playing field for women.

Secondary Administration: The Principalship

Sergiovanni (2009) shares that the principalship has changed over time where traditional definitions focused on the administrative processes and functions versus today effective principals are responsible for much more. Specifically, planning, organizing, leading and controlling the school falls into their lap. School administrators' primary focus used to be carrying out the day to day operations such as scheduling and building maintenance (Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008). However, leading instructional efforts in the building has become one of the principals' most critical roles (Stronge et al., 2008). Being an instructional leader means being responsible and influencing aspects of the curriculum, instruction and assessment, and carrying the responsibility for the school's success (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005).

With this increased responsibility, the school principalship has become very demanding with a high level of accountability to all stakeholders. Studies show that the principal has a 25 percent impact on student achievement (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). Due to the principal's role in hiring and supporting highly-skilled, quality teachers, the ability to impact student achievement often falls directly onto the principal (National Association of Secondary School Principals & National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2013). Principals work to balance all constituents' competing needs from parents, community members, students, district and state-level leadership. Catano &

Stronge (2007) state, "Bombarded with multiple theories of leadership and management, school principals will likely experience a significant amount of role conflict and role overload as they work to fulfill the perceptions of what they are expected to accomplish, and how" (p. 382).

One of the biggest obstacles they will face is learning how to juggle all of the responsibilities, which often involve working long hours, participating in evening and weekend events and managing crises regardless of when they arise (Metzger, 2006). The US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) reports that school administrators often work more than forty hours per week as they spend time on evening and weekend duties to meet with parents, community members and attend school functions, all that are outside of the regular school day.

In a recent journal published by the American Association of School Administrators, the subject of workaholism was labeled a severe mental health problem for school administrators, resulting in a negative impact on their families and productivity (McKay, 2004). The National Association of Secondary School Principals (2017) shares a growing concern about the shortage of quality secondary administrators. This shortage is believed to be due to the position's extreme demands, specifically including the time demands and pressures on the principal to be responsible for it all; social issues, isolation, and unsupportive external environments (Mulford, 2008).

The impact of the increased demands on a secondary principal is clear, and it is not surprising that it has become increasingly challenging to find time for oneself, for thoughtful reflection before making decisions, or for maintaining a

healthy balance of all aspects of life (Wang, Pollock, & Hauseman, 2018).

   Women as secondary administrators. Knowing that women tend to be underrepresented in leadership positions in most professions, it is no surprise that more men make up the secondary principalship as well. Coleman (2001) shares that while women make up at least one-half of secondary teachers, they are in the minority in secondary administrative positions. Stuftt & Coyne (2009) agree that although women are trained to be effective leaders and dominate the education profession, they have not been equally allowed to display their adeptness and competency in leadership.

   There may be a variety of reasons that women tend not to be represented in educational leadership. Marshall (2009) adds that the nature of administrative work, including the long and extensive hours, makes it particularly challenging for women to be administrators if they have children. Furthermore, Hoff & Mitchell (2008) found in their study that women are under-represented in secondary administration because of gender discrimination, gender stereotypes and social constraints due to their defined roles. Oplatka & Mimon (2008) studied 15 female principals and found that they had low job satisfaction due to the difficulty of juggling their personal and professional lives. Noddings (2003) shares that work-family conflict is the main reason why there are fewer female administrators than men.

   Marshall (2009) states, "Most studies did not offer positive examples of women administrators with children, including their strategies for negotiation multiple roles, advice for others in the same position" (p. 193).

This study will seek to look closer at how women in secondary administrators find balance between work and school life. This trend is further complicated for women who are single parents.

Single Parenthood

About 30 percent of children live with just one parent today, a number that has risen significantly from the 1970s (Child Trends, 2015). With this increase, many women in the workforce face parenting challenges and are the sole financial provider at home. Robbins & McFadden (2003) find in a study of 59 working single mothers that income is correlated with satisfaction at home and work; this is specifically due to education level and the perception of having enough income to support a family's needs.

Much of the research on single mothers focus' on welfare, poverty, and struggles related to being a single mother. One study explored the health consequences of being a single mother. Pujar et al. (2018) studied 60 female single parents and determined that 40 percent had poor mental health. They determined that this directly correlates with lack of confidence, insecurities around singlehood, role overload, the conflict between work and home and increased stress. Multiple other studies also indicated that single mothers had poor mental health status compared to others (Pujar et al., 2018; Dlugonski & Motl, 2016). In addition, Dlugonski & Motl (2016) have shown in their study that single motherhood is associated with depression and cardiovascular disease. They found these health concerns due to the lack of time single mothers focused on being physically active.

In addition to the studies showing that single mothers often have poor mental and physical health, the perceptions of single mothers' children are often seen as negative. Typical studies have focused on children raised by single mothers living in poverty, having less opportunity, and draining our social system because they are on welfare and have behavioral concerns (Dlugonski & Motl, 2016).

The research is scarce regarding the positive aspect of single parenthood or the successes children of single parents have. Olson & Haynes (1993) completed a study that focused on successful single parents through 26 in-depth interviews of qualified professionals who were single parents. They found that those interviewed had common individual characteristics such as being positive toward parenting, prioritizing parenting, fostering individuality within their family units, and recognizing self-care (Olson & Haynes, 1993). Furthermore, Meier et al. (2016) share that they found single mothers who were employed were happier and less stressed than those who were not employed. They believe this is due to the financial security that employment brings to the family and the social support network that single mothers experience working outside of the home.

The gap in research related to successful single mothers makes the purpose of this research study relevant and necessary. With the American family's change and an increase in single mothers, it is critical to focus on how single parents can be successful and what strategies they use to help them.

Support for single working mothers. Support systems are essential in any family setting, especially for single mothers who are working. Being able to successfully juggle both parenting and working, mothers must find what works for them and what they need to manage it all. A social support network is often seen as one of the most critical areas of support. Research supports the significance of social support networks as a way for single mothers to offset stress and improve physical and mental health (Auerbach et al., 2011; Devereux et al., 2009; Wilks & Spivey, 2010).

In addition to social support networks, having a connection with other women in the workforce who share similar values can help. Lee et al. (2009) share that finding these relationships can help with challenges and have someone to talk to about the stresses and resources. In addition, Lee et al. (2009) suggest that mentors are essential for women in academia to find the support to help them succeed.

Summary

Undoubtedly, working single mothers will continue into the workforce and will always be faced with the challenge of finding a balance between their home and work lives. This study provides insight into the challenges, specifically what internally and externally drives them to face those challenges, the support systems and management strategies that single working mothers utilize to achieve work-life balance. Although this study specifically looked at single-parent female secondary school principals and how they have found balance in their work and life, the study will contribute to the body of research on working-single mothers.

The study will attempt to discover the shared experiences around work-life balance and help other single mothers in the future. Chapter three provides an overview of the research design and methods used in the study.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology

Although female principals have increased in recent years, women are still outnumbered by men in secondary school administration. Although women may be opting out of the principalship for various reasons, this could specifically be due to the demands placed on them by balancing their professional and personal lives. "Today, principals perform a balancing act to respond effectively to the numerous demands of multiple constituencies" (Catano & Stronge, 2007, p. 382). Having a deep understanding of how female secondary principals balance it all was an important topic to focus on to help aspiring administrators or current administrators who are new single parents determine the best way to find balance in both areas of their lives. The purpose of this study was to focus on what internally and externally drives single mothers who are also secondary school principals to face the challenges of balancing work and family. It also examined the support systems and management strategies they used in balancing both.

Research Questions

This research study focused on answering the following questions:

1. What are the internal and external drivers of effective single-parent female secondary school principals that allow them to face the challenges of balancing work and family?

2. What support systems do effective single-parent female secondary school principals utilize to achieve work-life balance?

3. What management strategies do effective single-parent female

secondary school principals utilize to achieve work-life balance?

Research Design

People make sense of the world and shape their narratives by their own stories and experiences. With this philosophy in mind, using a qualitative phenomenological research approach in this study made the most sense. According to Creswell (2013), "we conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study" (p. 48). The phenomenological approach was fitting with this study as it focused on how people make sense of their lived experiences. This study focused on female secondary principals who are also single parents, the internal and external drives that allow them to face the challenges, and the support systems and management strategies they use in balancing work and family. Being able to hear their stories and voices of their lived experiences was critical in understanding how they could balance an intense career with being a single parent.

Qualitative research method. Qualitative research helps the researcher understand the participants' experiences through their lens and in a natural setting. In this study, the goal was to understand female principals' experiences from their viewpoint and how they balance their careers and families. This was accomplished by capturing the principals' narratives through interviews focusing on their experiences as working single mothers. Qualitative researchers assume that the world is made up of multiple realities and that different individuals view

situations through their perspectives (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). By hearing the stories of multiple female principals, a deeper understanding of how they constructed their own lives to create balance was heard.

Creswell (2013) states that "Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 44). By looking at multiple work-life balance theories, the researcher made sense of how the female principals balance both possible and the strategies they employed to do it.

Phenomenological approach. A phenomenological design was the best approach for this study because it allowed for each participant's stories and lived experiences to be told and to understand the unique and complex challenges faced by single working mothers and school leadership. Creswell (2013) states that the phenomenological study "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 76). All individuals in a phenomenological study will have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In this study, participants answered intimate interview questions related to their experiences of being a single mother and balancing that with being a secondary school principal. Each participant constructed an individual lived reality about the challenges, methods and support systems they utilized to achieve balance.

According to Fraenkel, J., Wallen, N., & Hyun, H. (2015), "phenomenologists generally assume that there is some commonality to how

human beings perceive and interpret similar experiences; they seek to identify, understand, and describe these commonalities" (p. 430). In this study, all of the participants were single mothers working in the secondary principalship. There was a similar lived experience and the researcher sought to find the commonality of their lived experiences with finding life-work balance. Phenomenology was selected to address the experiences, commonalities, meaning and perspectives of the participants. In addition, this framework was selected as the researcher has a personal connection and experience with being a single mother and secondary principal. Being able to have a deeper understanding of the lived experiences will help others in the future.

Research Participants

Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun (2015) state that in purposive sampling, the researcher "uses their judgment to select a sample that they believe, based on prior information, will provide the data they need" (p.101). Furthermore, they share that convenience sampling involves selecting individuals based on who is available instead of looking for specific criteria (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). Creswell (2013) shares that purposive sampling "works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon" (p. 155). With that, purposive sampling was utilized to find participants with specific criteria needed for the purpose of this research. It was necessary to find single mothers who were also secondary principals to understand the participants' lived experiences of being a working single mother.

As data was collected from individuals who experience the same phenomenon, it is recommended to interview 5 to 25 individuals (Polkinghorne, 1989). For the purpose of this study, seven female principals within Minnesota were recruited to participate in the study. The participants that were selected for this study had the following inclusion criteria:

- Participants had at least one child under the age of 18

- Participants are currently serving as a secondary principal in Minnesota

- Participants were never married or divorced

Procedure. Securing enough participants who fit this criterion was challenging due to the historically low representation of women, specifically women who are single parents, serving in the secondary principalship. However, focusing on this specific criterion for participants yielded the greatest understanding of single mothers, and secondary principals' lived experiences. Expanding this population to Assistant Principals or other leadership positions within the public school system could have yielded different results due to the nature of the principalship. The researcher wanted to focus specifically on the demands of the secondary lead principal. In order to secure seven participants who fit the criteria for this study, the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) was utilized to help with recruitment. MASSP emailed a letter to all female secondary principals explaining the study and asking for voluntary participants (See Appendix A). The letter asked them to respond via email or phone if they are interested in participating in the study. In the first email

that went out to principals, six participants who met the criteria responded to the invitation and expressed interest. The first three interviews were secured and conducted at a date, time and location based on the participant's convenience. The informed consent was sent to participants ahead of time and then signed at the interview. The other three participants who expressed interest in the study had difficulty securing a date, time and location to participate. After multiple emails were exchanged, one participant responded and stated, "This is my challenge with time and balancing being a single mother and a secondary principal. Although I would love to, I cannot find the time to meet with you".

After this, MASSP sent a second email to all-female secondary principals explaining the study and trying to recruit additional participants (See Appendix A). One additional participant responded, and a date, time and location for the interview was secured from that email letter.

Due to the low representation of the secondary principals who are single mothers in Minnesota, the researcher determined to move forward with the study utilizing the four participants who responded.

Data Collection

Phenomenology uses a different type of interviewing than any other qualitative method. Traditional interviewing seeks to answer a predetermined set of questions, and phenomenology aims to have an open dialogue. (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). Phenomenology uses a semi-structured interview process that is open-ended with the intent of gaining an accurate understanding of the participants' lived experiences. Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) define the semi-

structured research interview as "an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 6). Within this study, data was collected through a semi-structured qualitative interview. The semi-structured interview was selected to collect data because it focused on the participants' work and family life experiences. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) share that the researcher should enter the participants' world as they listen to them share their life experiences. This method of data collection also validates the individual's constructed experience and reality.

Semi-structured interview questions were designed to guide the dialogue around specific themes (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). The interview questions were examined by the researcher and Dissertation committee during the proposal phase of the research (See Appendix B). From there, the interview protocol was revised to ensure that the questions would provide adequate answers and insight into the research questions (See Appendix C). The questions were open-ended to allow for a dialogue between the researcher and participant to understand how the participants experienced being a single mother and secondary principal. The questions were sequenced and placed in an order that allowed the researcher to best understand what internally and externally drives single mothers who are also secondary school principals to face the challenges of balancing work and family, the support systems and strategies of single-parent female secondary school principals, and how they best manage their work and life.

After a date, time and location was secured with each participant, the

researcher began by conducting face-to-face interviews with three participants. The fourth interview was conducted via the phone at the participants' request. With the participant's permission, the interviews were audio taped using Rev.com and were then transcribed. Notes were taken during the interview and included both verbal and nonverbal answers. Before the interview, questions were answered about the informed consent, all participants signed it, and a copy was given to them for their records (See Appendix D). The consent form included information about the study's purpose, privacy and confidentiality, and details describing that data will be kept until the completion of the dissertation defense and then destroyed. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could discontinue the study at any time.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2013) shares that qualitative research data analysis consists of preparing, organizing, coding into themes, and representing the data. The author describes and supports a data analysis method developed by Moustaka. This method was used in this study to analyze the phenomenological data collected. The process included setting aside the researchers' perceptions of the phenomenon, identifying significant statements, clustering themes, synthesizing themes into textual and structural descriptions, and then developing a description of the meanings and the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2007).

All completed interviews were transcribed and then listened to and read multiple times to hear and understand the participants' lived experiences fully. Next, the researcher identified significant statements and clustered them into major

themes. The researcher wrote textual descriptions to detail the experiences of the participants. Finally, the researcher used the descriptions and themes to report the essence of the phenomenon.

Spillover Theory and Work-family Border Theory were used as frameworks when analyzing the data and looking at how the participants experience work-life balance.

Validating data. Member checking occurred to ensure the validity of the data in this study and that the participants' viewpoints and perspectives were accurately represented. Creswell (2013) shares that member checking "involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (p. 252). In this study, the researcher shared the interview transcripts with the participants. Participants were asked for feedback regarding the interpretations and the accuracy of the interview transcripts. All participants responded and agreed that the transcripts accurately reflected their lived experiences and what they wanted to have represented.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are essential in qualitative research, especially ensuring that no harm is done to the participants and that they are protected (Crewell, 2013). The author also notes the importance of ensuring that they are given the ability to make decisions. In this study, participants were given the option to opt into the research. A letter was sent out to all secondary administrators in Minnesota asking for voluntary participation in the study for

those that met the criteria. All participants signed the informed contest having the option to opt-out of the study at any point without any consequences.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) helps protect individuals who participate in human research. To fully understand this process and the complexities of using human subjects in research, the researcher completed the Hamline University IRB training course, which covered the history of and necessity for ethical research to protect human subjects, clarifying the guidelines for informed consent, assessing risk, and ensuring privacy and confidentiality. As a result of complying with the IRB process and research ethics, every precaution was taken in this study to ensure that all participants' rights were protected.

Bias

As a single mother who is also a secondary school principal, it is inevitable that the researcher's own lived experience may influence how the data was interpreted and analyzed. In this study, the researcher's lived experience may provide additional insight into the study and the data may be different if the researcher had a different lived experience. However, the researcher aside her perceptions and realities about being a single mother and secondary school administrator through bracketing. In this study, the researcher continually journaled about her own experience and wrote down thoughts regarding how she experienced the phenomenon to ensure that those feelings and perceptions were not brought into the study. Creswell (2013) states that "bracketing personal experiences may be difficult for the researcher to implement because interpretations of the data always incorporate the

assumptions that the researcher brings to the topic" (p. 83). The researcher took every step possible to ensure that this did not happen and introduced her understanding of the phenomenon in the study's introduction.

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed description of the methodology used to study single mother, secondary school administrators and how they experience life-work balance. Using a qualitative-phenomenological approach, the researcher analyzed the data and presented those findings in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results, Analysis, and Interpretation

According to Rhode (2016), "The time demands of running complex organizations, coupled with evening and weekend events, pose challenges for anyone with significant caretaking commitments" (p. 100). Within the principalship, this sentiment rings true for many. This phenomenological study presents secondary female principals' lived experiences and how they balance their work with being a single mother. This study aimed to focus on single mothers who are also secondary school principals and their work-life balance. This chapter presents the findings from four in-depth interviews with secondary principals who are single mothers to understand their careers' intersectionality with being a mother. After interviewing the four female principals and analyzing the data, multiple major themes emerged that will be discussed in this chapter that helped to answer the research questions. The research questions this study aimed to answer were:

1. What are the internal and external drivers of effective single-parent female secondary school principals that allow them to face the challenges of balancing work and family?

2. What support systems do effective single-parent female secondary school principals utilize to achieve work-life balance?

3. What management strategies do effective single-parent female secondary school principals utilize to achieve work-life balance?

The Participants

       As a result of the outreach to secure participants, the researcher conducted four interviews with subjects from four different secondary schools in Minnesota, ranging in size from 280 to 900 students. The participants in this study are all white/Caucasian females with their experience as head secondary principals ranging from 2 to 10 years. All of the participants have been divorced and have one or two children. The length of time being a single mother varied from 1.5 years to 12 years. The participants' information is summarized in Table 4A: Overview of Participants.

       Pseudonyms. Participants' names and the school's name they work in were coded to protect their identity and that of the school. Each subject was assigned an alphabetically ordered pseudonym, based on the order in which they were interviewed, to code the participants' contributions to the study and data sets. The pseudonyms used for this study were Mary, Courtney, Susan and Pauline. To avoid school identification by the reader, no specific district or school data was provided in this study other than the size. Participant profiles were provided for the reader to understand the scope of the participants' backgrounds in education leadership and parenting.

Table 4A: Overview of Participants						
Name	Years as Head Principal	Size of School	Number of Children	Age of Children	Divorced/ Never Married	Years as a single parent
Mary	7	320	1	13	Divorced	12 years
Courtney	9	283	2	12 and 14	Divorced	1.5 years
Susan	2	500	1	10	Divorced	10 years
Pauline	10	900	2	16 and 19	Divorced	10 years

Participant profiles. The following descriptions provide a more in-depth overview of each respondent's experience and background.

1. Mary- Mary is in her seventh year as the principal of a 7 - 12 grade building that serves 320 students. She started her career teaching internationally in France and lived there with her husband before having her son. Her only child, who is now 13 years old, was 14 months old when she moved back to the United States due to divorce. She reports always being a single mother as the father of her son still resides in France. Her son spends 100% of his time with her. He is a seventh-grader at the school where she serves as principal. After moving back to the United States, she began her teaching career as a Special Education teacher for five years before obtaining her principal licensure.

2. Courtney- Courtney is in her ninth year as the principal of a secondary school in outstate Minnesota with approximately 280 students in grades 7 - 12. She started her career as a band director for 14 years in southern Minnesota and then obtained her principal licensure and moved into

administration in a school in northern Minnesota. She has two children, ages 12 and 14, who currently attend the school that she is the principal. Her children were 3 and 5 when she became the head principal. Courtney is recently divorced and reports being a single mother for two years. Her children spend most of their time with her, seeing their father for dinner a few days a week.

3. Susan- Susan is in her second year as the head principal at a K-12 building, in which she is the principal of the secondary school serving grades 7 - 12 with roughly 500 students. She began her career outside of education working at an advertising agency in New York and moved to Minnesota to start her teaching career. She taught Language Arts for eight years while working on obtaining her K-12 principal licensure. She became the interim principal in her building for half of a school year before securing the head principal position. She has one daughter who is ten years old and divorced before her daughter was born because her husband was having an affair. She reports always having been a single mother and that her daughter is with her 100% of the time. Her daughter currently attends an elementary school in the same school district that she is the principal.

4. Pauline- Pauline is in her tenth year as the head high school principal at a local metro area high school with roughly 900 students. She started her career as a Language Arts teacher, where she spent nine years in the classroom. After getting her K-12 principal licensure, she moved into a

dean of students and then Assistant Principal role for six years and then became a head principal. She has two children, ages 16 and 19 and has been divorced for ten years. Her children spend 90% of their time with her and roughly 10% of their time with their father. One of her children attends school in a different local high school and one of her children recently graduated from the high school where she is the principal.

Themes

During the interviews, the female principals shared information about their personal and professional lives. They discussed the compromises made each day to balance their careers with being a single mother. The principals shared what drives them to face the challenges and the support systems and management strategies they utilize to achieve work-life balance. The data collected from the interviews resulted in themes emerging. Those themes are summarized in Table 4B.

Table 4B: Interview data analysis results: Themes	
Research Question	Themes
RQ1: What are the internal and external drivers of effective single-parent female secondary school principals that allow them to face the challenges of balancing work and family?	Driver Challenge ● Sacrifices ● Guilt ● Expectations from others Positive Driver ● Relationships with staff ● Connections with their children ● Perseverance
RQ2: What support systems do effective single-parent female secondary school principals utilize to achieve work-life balance?	Support Systems ● Physical support ● Friendships
RQ3: What management strategies do effective single-parent female secondary school principals utilize to achieve work-life balance?	Management Strategies ● Prioritize ● Organization

Driver challenges. There is no doubt that when women enter the workforce with children, they face challenges in balancing their responsibilities at work and home (Marshall, 2009). Learning from women who are single mothers who have assumed the role as a head principal is of interest to prospective leaders and other current female principals of how they can achieve the same personal and professional successes. Three themes emerged from reviewing the data that highlighted the challenges the participants faced in balancing their professional and personal lives: 1). Sacrifices 2). Guilt and 3). Expectations from others. After exploring the challenges they faced, themes emerged around what drove the principals to manage these challenges internally and externally.

Driver challenge: sacrifices. When participants explained their role as both a single mother and a secondary principal, the common theme of sacrifice emerged. This consisted of significant difficult choices that they were forced to make daily to manage their multiple roles. These sacrifices occurred in various ways that the participants shared, such as sacrifices in their daily lives/routines, making sacrificial choices between their work as a principal and a mother, and self-sacrifices. Each participant spoke of these sacrifices in a variety of ways.

All of the respondents shared that the time constraints made it difficult to follow through on simple daily activities that may have once existed in their lives before becoming a single mother or a secondary principal. Courtney shares, "one of my biggest challenges is keeping up around the house". Mary stated, "At times, I find myself eating out a lot". Tasks such as household chores and cooking dinner were often things that did not get done in their homes because parenting and work took precedence.

Not only were daily routines sacrificed, but often sacrificial choices between work and parenting also existed. One had to be given up at the cost of the other. Susan conveys the stress of the job and how she often had to make choices.

Part of being a secondary principal is you have a lot of supervision pieces that fall after hours, a lot of events that you wish you could be at and that you have to be at, but it comes at the cost of your child.

Essentially, the women felt that they had to choose. On the flip side, work would sometimes take the back burner and specific learning opportunities would have to be sacrificed in order to ensure that their children were put first. Mary

shares this sentiment, "One thing I have got to sacrifice a little bit is going to conferences and stuff because I've never put him somewhere overnight". She discusses that she would never leave her son overnight with anyone, therefore participating in any training out of town could not happen. Having to decide whether work or parenting takes precedence over the other was often a tough decision.

Not only were the participants often choosing between work and their children, but they also had to decide how much time they would invest in themselves. They shared stories about the self-sacrifices that were made regularly. Many of them spoke about putting themselves last and everything else first. Mary shared, "I can't even get my haircut. I just got my hair cut for the first time in a year. So stuff gets neglected". Susan agrees that finding time for herself is nearly impossible. She says, "The person that gets lost in the shuffle is yourself. There's little self-care if you will, that finds its way into the day". Courtney reiterates this point when she shares that she has gained weight from the job's stress and not working out or eating a healthy lunch. She expressed the concern that "there is no set lunchtime for an administrator and therefore I'm just eating chocolates for the rest of the day or whatever is in the lounge". As secondary principals, three of the participants spoke of weight gain and the job's stress on their bodies. Pauline shared that she would be happy to get herself ready and to make it to work on time trying to get the kids dropped off at daycare. She laughed as she reflected on stories, "I have gotten halfway to school and looked down, and I've got two different boots on. There were days I'm just happy that I put my underwear on

and got to school on time".

Despite the participants knowing the amount they have sacrificed in their lives, they also shared that they would not trade anything for their children. Mary summarized this best with her sentiment about nothing being more important than her son.

I have sacrificed a lot. And I don't feel like saying that because it's not a sacrifice because I love him more than anything on the planet. But I literally, at times, I can't even cry about my mom dying or my dad because I can't upset him; I don't want him to feel it. So I have to take a lot internally.

In conclusion, being a single mother and a secondary principal lead to many sacrifices in all participants' lives. As the participants spoke of these sacrifices, the next major theme emerged: guilt.

Driver challenge: guilt. The respondents went in-depth about all of the different types of sacrifices they made in their lives to be a single mother and a secondary principal. As they explained their feelings, trying to balance their work and family roles and their sacrifices to make this possible, the common theme of guilt emerged. All participants shared how often work and family roles conflicted and how they felt about it. Some described these feelings specifically as guilt, while others described things such as "it makes me feel bad" or "having to figure out how to make up for it," which all relate to their feelings around missing out. As previously shared, they had many experiences of making choices between their work and their children. When these mothers had to make choices,

sometimes it was at the expense of their children and sometimes at the cost of their jobs. Either way, the decision leads to feelings of guilt and figuring out a way to make up for it.

When the participants spoke about choosing work at their children's expense, it was often related to missing out on their events or experiences. Although all of the participants shared the importance of making it to their children's events and activities, they recognized that their responsibilities at school often conflicted with making that happen. School responsibilities often would take precedence over their children to be sure they were successful at work. One specific example shared by Pauline was, "I always felt really guilty because I couldn't go and read to the second-grade class during the day, or go on a field trip". She also noted that as her children got older, she felt she needed to make up for the time that she missed over the years. "I'm trying really hard to make up for all the years of fast food and cook at home".

In addition to the guilt that many expressed regarding their children, they also shared the guilt that they sometimes felt from not supporting teachers or staff the way they would prefer due to being a parent.

Ultimately, these feelings of guilt were present regarding both work and parenting for the majority of the participants. Although the participants shared their feelings of guilt, they recognized that sometimes this guilt was felt because of the expectations that others placed on them. Battling those feelings to ensure they were successful in both worlds was often challenging.

*Driver Challenge: expectations from other***s.** All of the female principals

shared stories of sacrifice and guilt that they commonly felt due to trying to balance their careers with being single mothers. They also expressed that others often placed expectations on them, which posed a continual challenge. Not only was this a challenge that the secondary principals faced, but it also led to some feelings of guilt because they wanted to make sure they were pleasing everyone.

During the interview, Pauline recalls a situation when she first entered the principalship of the expectations placed on her by teachers. She said, "When I first started, I was told by someone that I wasn't available enough after school in case somebody tried to come down to see me". She discussed how she had to work through those expectations and learn to balance what teachers needed and what she could realistically provide in terms of time. She shared that now, into her twelfth year as a head principal, she has learned that people will need to be okay with the hours and time she can commit. She sums it up by saying that "funny perception is that good principal equals a hundred hours a day, and that is just not true". In addition, "I think understanding that no one walks in your shoes"; she reiterates the importance of being able to set boundaries because others do not know what you are going through or experiencing.

Mary shares a similar experience working in a smaller rural school district. She said, "I think people in a small community where I am at, they expect you to be at everything. I mean it is an expectation and people talk about it". In her interview, she discusses that she had to learn to set boundaries and be upfront about what she was able to give. She said, "I am a single mother and I will not be able to be at every single thing, and I will also need to have him with me".

Courtney reiterates this sentiment when she shares, "People don't understand all that they expect us to do". The expectations that are set for this position make balancing work and life very difficult. Courtney adds, "The job itself is stressful and then you put your own family life on the same shoulders that you're trying to balance the job and somethings going to give". Sometimes that give is work and sometimes that give is your children.

Susan adds that often people do not realize what it means to be a single mother and a principal. She talks about the stress of trying to get others to understand that. She shares, "Sometimes people forget that I don't go home to a support system. I think what's missing is just more of an understanding that when I walk out of here at the end of the day, my day is just beginning". Not having a spouse help support their home life means that these women are working to figure out how to meet the expectations placed on them by others. Susan discusses how she works to set boundaries and help others understand her situation, especially when she cannot do everything that everyone else demands of her. She says, "I can't do it all. I can't be at everything and people are just going to have to be okay with that".

While sacrifices, guilt, and expectations from others emerged as the top challenges the participants faced in balancing their work and children, learning from these women about what drives them to meet these challenges and keep going was at the heart of the research.

Positive Drivers. Getting to a deeper understanding from them about how they are able to be single mothers and hold a secondary principal position is of the

utmost importance to the heart of this research. These driving forces can be explained in three major themes. Those themes are 1). Relationships with staff 2). Connections with their children, and 3). Perseverance.

Positive driver: relationships with staff. Through all of the challenges that the four principals shared, each of them spoke about their relationships with their staff and how this played a significant role in their lives. Being able to rely on others at their school to help and support them greatly impacted their success. They also shared that it makes showing up to work and putting in long hours worth it.

Courtney shares her story about going through a divorce and managing her role as a principal and leader. She spoke about what she said to her staff and how it helped her get through her days.

> You were the reason I got up every morning because I knew I could come and have a stable world for eight hours. I knew what to expect during the day, even though our days are unpredictable. I knew where you would be and things here would be solid. It made me realize all that you do for kids every single day.

Courtney's value on her relationships with her staff was reiterated throughout her interview and she expressed how important they were to her in multiple sentiments.

Although the others' stories were a little different, they all shared the same sentiment as Courtney around the love and relationships with their staff. Susan shares, "I absolutely love my school. I have the world's best staff and students. So

coming to work is enjoyable". When it is challenging to balance school and home life, knowing that you are making a difference in both staff and students' lives help make that challenge more manageable.

Mary conveys the importance of being a strong leader for her staff and having personal connections to them. She shares, "I have to build relationships and know what's going on for your people". Knowing what is going on in their classrooms, how they work for students and what is happening in their personal lives makes a huge difference in how others show up every day. Staff want to know you are there for them. Many of the respondents spoke about this concept.

Pauline discusses the importance of being a "trusting for real" principal and following through on things. She expresses the importance of building relationships with her staff so they know they can count on her, and she can count on them. She says I strive to be "a good listener, a collaborator, spend time really reaching out and building relationships". When she does this, it makes coming to school each day easier because she has developed relationships and trust.

Showing up for people was a common thread throughout the interviews. In the field of education, principals work for their staff, students and community. The importance of building relationships with staff comes through in all of the interviews. They each expressed the connections they have with their child/children and how that drives them to manage the challenges they face.

Positive driver: connections with their children. Nothing is more important to all four of the female secondary principals than their children. Everything they do is for them, and despite the challenges, they recognized that

being a mother is their first and most important job. This sentiment is a common thread throughout the entire interview process.

Pauline describes the importance of her decisions and how she believes it has influenced her children and demonstrates the love and desires she has for them.

> I think my kids have learned a lot watching me, and I want to keep modeling that for my kids. I think that motivates me. I know that they're proud of their mom. I think they've picked up a lot of different things from me.

Knowing that she has had to sacrifice a lot in life to get to where she is in her career, she recognizes that her children are not only a motivating factor for her, but she also believes that they have learned a lot of skills from watching her.

As Mary discusses the choices she has had to make in life and how she finds balance between work and life, she adamantly states that it is about the choices she makes for her son.

> *Sacrifice* is not the right word. What would a better word be? *I have chosen to* because I have him. He is the most important thing, even over this job. If he doesn't turn out okay, then I didn't do what I needed to do.

Reiterating that her son is the highlight of her world and nothing else is more important was something she wanted to ensure came out in her interview.

Courtney talks about her particular situation and going through a divorce while serving in the principalship. Making choices and protecting her children was always at the forefront. She expresses, "I want so badly to just protect them

from it completely. And now I don't really have a lot of downtime from parenting, which I treasure because they've already grown up so fast". Knowing that parenting demands can be a lot, all participants expressed how much they still cherished this time and figured out how to make it work.

Pauline shares, "I do a lot of parenting on my phone in the car. It's all worked out, but it hasn't been without challenges. But it's been super fun and each year it gets more and more fun". Ultimately knowing that as difficult as it can be, the respondents have found humor and joy in the balancing act.

Although the delicate balancing act sometimes comes at the children's expense and work takes precedence over everything else, all four participants reiterated that they would not change it for anything. Their children are their worlds, the highlight of their lives and the absolute most crucial thing over anything else. Finding the perfect balance does not always happen; however, these single mother, secondary principals seem to persevere and figure out a way to make it all work.

Positive driver: perseverance. Figuring out how to balance work and single parent life has certainly not been an easy task for the four female secondary principals; however, their tenacity to push through was common throughout the interviews. Having the mindset that despite the difficulties, they are able to make this lifestyle work of being a single mother and a secondary principal.

Mary shares this sentiment in her persistence to show others that she can do whatever she sets her mind to. She says, "I'm like, I will show them, I will show you all! It's like, I will do this. And I just am determined that I can do it".

Having the mindset that she can accomplish anything she sets her mind to is essential in balancing two very important and stressful jobs in life. She said, "I cope. I am really pretty good about shutting off stuff unless it's a big incident when I go home". Not only did mindset come through in regards to perseverance, but the participants also shared how those skills were learned.

Growing up learning the skills of pushing through helps grow the mindset that you can do anything. Pauline shares her story of growing up and having a lot of responsibilities at a very young age.

> I was given a lot of responsibility really young. I learned to cook when I was 11-12 because my mom worked too many hours. I learned how to iron. We were in charge of cleaning the house and doing all the outside work and doing the groceries and all that kind of stuff super young. And I worked 80 hours a week total, one full-time job and evenings and weekends. I had a Tuesday night off.

Pauline believes that learning these skills at a young age has helped her gain the skills needed to balance a stressful work environment and parent her children alone. She says she always finds a way to make it work, no matter what the situation is.

Courtney believes that her mindset also has set her up to be successful. She sees each situation she faces as a new challenge and finding a way to push through it.

> I love a good challenge. I'm bored without one, so it's been fun to problem solve and find answers, whether it be anything from how can we approach

our goals differently at school to what am I going to do now, like with the lawn or whatever it is. I just really enjoy a good challenge and learning. Seeing the situation as a challenge that she needs to figure out how to work through and solve helps her manage both worlds' daily stresses.

Susan shares that learning problem solving and perseverance as a teacher and the challenges of working in education help you know what you are getting into when you step into the administration world. She says, "I was a language arts teacher, this has always just been my life, even prior to having my daughter. There were always papers to be graded and lessons to be planned. The busy life is nothing new to me". Pauline was also a language arts teacher before becoming an administrator and shares the same sentiment. She chuckles as she shares, "I never sat and counted essays like others. Well you wasted at least three essays' worth counting them and complaining to me about it. I guess for me, I just do it because it has to get done".

The persistence that all of the four participants shared during their interviews was a strong common theme expressed whether they talked about their lives at home and being single parents or their lives at school leading a secondary building. The mindset that they could accomplish anything despite the difficulties stood out as a driving force for them to take on both worlds.

Summary of driver challenges and positive drivers. It was evident that the challenges are remarkable in finding life-work balance in being a single parent and a secondary principal. However, as the four single-parent female secondary school principals spoke about their situations, relationships with their staff and

their children as well as having perseverance were the driving factors that helped them face the challenges of balancing work and family. Internally, these women have the drive to make anything possible and meet whatever challenges come their way. Externally, it is all about working for others, relationships with staff and their children to keep driving them forward. They made it about others and not about themselves. In addition, in each of the interviews, the participants acknowledged the importance of others and support systems in their lives, who helped make this balancing act possible.

Support Systems. After hearing about the importance of relationships to all of the participants, it was no surprise that they emphasized their support systems to make balancing work and parenting possible. In the interviews, the participants spoke about support systems in a variety of ways. The support systems ranged from other individuals who provided care, love, feedback, time and support for themselves and their children. These support systems included family, parents or siblings, friends, colleagues, and superintendents. Overall, the participants spoke about someone who had significantly impacted their ability to manage both lifestyles. From reviewing the data, two themes emerged that highlighted the support systems that participants utilized in balancing their professional and personal lives: 1). Physical Support 2). Friendships.

Support system: physical support. Although a spouse might be significant support for maintaining a higher-level management position in other situations, such as a principal, there is no spouse in these situations. In this study, being a single parent means that you have dependent children under 18 and are single,

divorced or widowed. All of the participants in this study are divorced and shared that they have sole responsibility for their children. Therefore, relying on another parent was not possible when they spoke about their support systems. However, they all talked about the help they received from others in their life who helped with the day-to-day activities, such as babysitting, picking up or dropping off at school, and daily household tasks.

Susan shares the importance of her parents and how helpful they have been to her. She says, "They are good about taking my daughter when I've got a lot of projects to do or when the workload gets to be too much. They have been just incredible support throughout pretty much all of my daughter's life.". The support has been so helpful to Susan; she smiles as she shares, "they have even rearranged their work schedules to accommodate mine".

Courtney shares a similar sentiment about her mother's regular support to help her balance work and her boys. She shares how helpful it is to have her mother close by to help out with day-to-day tasks. She said, "On Wednesdays, my mom has a meal ready for us. I pick the boys up from practice, and I go right to my mom's kitchen".

Although Susan and Courtney share the same support system within their families, Pauline and Mary have a different perspective regarding support. They did not have their parents around or close by to help out. Instead, they speak of relying on a different circle. Pauline says, "I hired a neighbor girl, who was a high school kid up the street for two years. So she would actually come over in the morning and get my kids ready for school". Mary shares a similar story about her

parents living in another state at one point in her career and not having them around to help out, and she relied heavily on her daycare lady to assist her. She said, "She is my support, my biggest support at that point in my life. She was my person".

Support system: friendships. In addition to all of the participants speaking about a variety of others who help out with their children and the day to day activities, they also all talked about a support person for themselves and the importance of their friendships.

Throughout the interview, Mary continued to speak about her friend and colleague and the importance of having someone to talk to about work and home life. Pauline also shares, "I do not have a lot of noise in my life. I have my friendships that I work hard at keeping. But they are soulful, good people that don't bring drama or noise, as I call it". These friendships are significant to Pauline and were a thread that continued to come up throughout the interview. Courtney reiterated the same sentiment. She has a group of women that she referred to as "homegirls". These five women or "homegirls" in Courtney's life "tell each other everything and support each other in everything".

The friendships that the participants spoke about were as crucial to their lives as those who provided physical support. These friendships helped with their mental stability of having someone to talk to and turn to when needed. In the end, support systems play a massive role in balancing work and life for the four participants.

Summary of support systems. A support system is an individual or a

group of people who provide physical support, love, care, feedback, friendship, and love. In the interviews, the importance of a strong support system to manage being a single parent and a secondary principal was evident. The participants relied heavily on others to help them with the day-to-day activities, friendship, and mental health support. All of them spoke about how much it helped having others around them to love and care for them during difficult times. Although this concept might not be specific to secondary principals and single mothers, it certainly is imperative in this situation to make the balancing act a little more manageable.

A strong support system was vital in the participants' lives, but they also shared many other management strategies they used to help create balance between work and family life.

Management strategies. Although having an individual or group of people supporting the participants in their day to day tasks was critical to their success; all of the participants also had a variety of ways in which they were able to manage the duties of being a secondary principal and a single parent. The themes that emerged relating to the management strategies that were utilized included: 1.) Prioritizing their work and home life, and 2.) Organization.

Management strategy: prioritize. Prioritizing what is most important is a critical skill that all of the participants discussed in finding any balance between work and home life. The idea of being purposeful with your time and understanding what is crucial to get accomplished in a day are skills that all of the participants found to be a necessity.

Susan shares, "I think you have to be very purposeful in setting aside time for family. I have to remind myself that she's only young for so long. This is my time, and this is how I'm going to spend it". The idea that Susan felt strongly about was making sure that she prioritized the time with her daughter and having a shutoff point each night.

Others agreed with this sentiment about prioritizing family life. Courtney said, "I am working really hard at leaving as much at school as I can and just being present at home. I make it a priority to have a meal together every night". Not only are meals together crucial to the participants but also deciding when and how much to work. Mary adds,

I used to work every weekend, and then I stopped. And maybe it's my stance because I am a single mother, but I decided that nope, on the weekend Saturday we do something together, and then on Sunday we go to church and I do not work on weekends".

Pauline reiterates this exact sentiment during her interview when she shares how to use her time. She expresses the idea of prioritizing what is most important to you. She says, "I think that as you become a more experienced principal, you also become a more experienced parent and you learn shortcuts and can do things more efficiently".

Throughout the interviews, the participants all shared the importance of prioritizing time with their children. Still, they also discussed the importance of prioritizing what is urgent and what is not when working and what needed to be done in a day. Courtney says, "Prioritize the big things and let the little things

go". This might be something that is learned over time in the position. Susan shares

> Part of the learning for me, too, is just being efficient when I am in the building. So finding a balance while I'm here, setting aside time, whether it's coming in early or staying late, to work on emails and phone calls and those sorts of things so that I can be with students, with teachers throughout the day. Finding that balance and then trying to be as efficient as possible so that I can focus on being at home when I am at home. I'm working on it.

While Susan talks about learning how to find this balance as a newer principal, others shared how they figured this out in their careers. Mary says, "I also learned that not every fire needs to be squelched immediately. I know the prioritizing of events". One strategy that she has utilized in determining how to prioritize was to draw a grid with urgent and non-urgent events. She discusses that although she spends most of her time in the critical management piece, learning how to move away from that was very important to her in her leadership.

The participants recognized the importance of prioritizing work and family and what they must get done. They also realized that this is a skill that is often learned over time. Another tool that emerged as an essential skill in balancing work and home life was being organized.

Management strategy: organization. Due to the intense nature of being a single parent and in a higher-level leadership position at school, staying organized was a strategy that emerged throughout each participant's interviews. The skill to

stay organized at home and school through lists, calendars, and piles was discussed by all respondents.

The use of a calendar was the top way that the respondents shared that they stay organized and on top of all of the tasks they are faced with. Pauline shares,

> I am a freakish list maker and a freak about my calendar. I have a personal and professional calendar, and I put them on the same calendar for work. I just put the little private thing, but I put every single thing on my work electronic calendar.

Susan reiterates this point when she laughs and says, "I do not know what people did before Google. I pride myself on being organized. I live by my Google calendar and everything goes in it".

Mary shares that she works to organize herself into separate piles: vital, to do, read and file. By organizing herself in this manner, she can cross things off her lists as she completes them and keeps the buckets all separated.

Courtney also shares this is a strategy that she uses to help find balance. She says, "I can separate my buckets. When they are all in the same buckets or the buckets are sloshing around, there is no chance at balance".

Making lists and using a calendar were the top organizational strategies used by all participants, and they all spoke about finding a disciplined routine. Courtney shares that having a regimented routine with her sons in the morning and after school was critical to find balance and know what to expect. Pauline shares that she has a routine of cleaning her house twice a month and keeping it

picked up daily. Doing laundry daily and making lists for groceries was shared by all of the participants.

There are many different ways that one can organize time at work and home. Finding a variety of ways to keep themselves organized in the hustle of both work and family was extremely important to all of these participants. They found that lists, calendars, piles and routines were the top organizational tools that they utilized.

Summary of management strategies. It was evident in the interviews that all of the participants had various ways in which they were able to manage the duties of being a secondary principal and a single parent through prioritizing their work and home life and staying organized. Although they all agreed that they do not know if they have successfully managed to find complete balance between work and home life, using these different strategies certainly helped.

Connections to the Literature

Theoretical frameworks. Theoretical frameworks help explain what life-work balance truly is, how one achieves it, and its challenges. In this study, the two theoretical frameworks chosen to help understand the phenomenon were work-family border theory and spillover theory. By examining these theoretical frameworks, the researcher was able to better understand how female secondary principals also balance being single mothers and what strategies they employed to find success at home and school. All of the participants in this study shared some degree of struggle in finding balance between their work and home lives, suggesting that they were not sure if they had successfully achieved balance.

However, they felt strongly about being in charge and setting boundaries for each domain. As the research predicted, work and family are entities that are continuously overlapping and influencing one another.

Work-family border theory. Clark (2000) explains that the central idea around work-family border theory is that family and work still influence each other and individuals are continually crossing the borders between them, even though they are in different spheres. The participants described multiple examples in which they crossed boundaries between work and home.

Multiple participants cited that their children were very comfortable finding their way around their school buildings, specifically spending time at school while their mothers worked and spending many evening hours at events with them. Many of those events, becoming family outings and opportunities to spend time together. Crossing the family border into work, these participants found a way to bring their children into their work lives.

Not only did they cross family boundaries into work, but they also cited multiple situations in which they would cross-work into the home. For example, all participants shared that they would often check emails late at night once their children went to sleep or would choose one day on the weekend to focus on work. One participant shared how much easier it was to pack up things at work early to avoid the long commute and then finish things up in the evening once her children were sleeping.

Crossing the borders between work and home and blending them together allowed the participants to control their time and where they spent their energy.

They shared that it was necessary to be in charge of their time and where they spent it, stating that they needed to create boundaries through time requirements that they would or would not work at home. In addition, all of the participants felt strongly about being in control of their own time and not letting others' expectations make them give up time in one of the spheres.

Work-family border theory best describes how individuals can be actively in charge of balancing their work and family and allow for healthy crossover between both. This theory was seen and heard in multiple instances during the interviews.

Spillover theory. Spillover theory is the transfer of positive and negative attitudes, emotions, skills and behaviors back and forth to work and family. It is one of the most popular theories adopted by researchers in the work-family balance field (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014). Researchers agree that both positive and negative spillover can occur. For example, if something positive happens at work, those emotions would pass onto their family and they could experience joy at home as a result. All participants in this study shared how their experiences at work and home were carried over into the other entity. The majority of the spillover shared by the participants in this study was around negative spillover.

One participant shared how she needed to create boundaries to prevent negative spillover from a crazy day at school. Establishing limitations and an agreement with her son that they do not talk about work or school for ten minutes after getting home helped ensure this separation was made. That time allowed her to decompress from the day so she could focus entirely on him and not take any

emotions out on him from the things that occurred during the day. Another participant echoed this sentiment that although she has set boundaries to try to shut off work, sometimes things need her attention. Turning off what occurred at work can be very challenging and leaks into home life. As single mothers, they all felt strongly about trying to prevent negative spillover from work to family to protect their children and the time they were able to spend with them.

Another participant shared a negative spillover experience when going through a divorce while serving as a principal. During this experience, she worked hard to keep the two entities separate and addressed her staff via email. When it came up organically at the next staff meeting, she shared the experience of crying in front of her staff and expressing how much she appreciated their stability and for providing predictability in a time during her life that was so unpredictable. Although this situation could be seen as a negative spillover of a home experience into work, it also created and strengthened many relationships with her staff. In this situation, staff appreciated her vulnerability and humanity around a topic that many of them had personally experienced.

Although negative spillover seemed common among the participants, some positive spillover was also shared by the participants. All of the participants had experienced their child attending the school or district where they were the principal. This created a lot of positive spillover and crossing of boundaries between work and home. The participants experienced many positive emotions and attitudes towards the staff and students they were leading and felt proud to have their child/children experience the school system in which they were a

leader.

Spillover theory ultimately focuses on the fact that work and family influence one another, which can be both positive and negative. The participants in this study would agree that this occurs daily and can show up in many different forms from emotions, attitudes, and behaviors at both work and home.

Women and leadership. A study from Lean In and McKinsey & Company (2018) shared that 42 percent of women cite the fear of balancing work and family responsibilities as the top reason they opt out of becoming a top executive. Although the women in this study did not opt-out from senior-level leadership, they have a deep understanding of the difficulties in balancing their family responsibilities and their careers, thus can make the connection of why others may not choose this career path.

The participants in this study have chosen a senior-level leadership position for their career. Therefore, they have found and utilized various strategies and support systems to help manage both entities. Cheung (2010) found that women in leadership roles have begun to realize they do not have to be superwoman and have "adopted different internal and external strategies to redefine their roles" (p. 185). Although the participants would not say they have mastered balance, they have found a way to make it work for their own families and career. They were able to identify many of these strategies, such as calendars, lists, piles, hiring someone to clean, leaning on friends and family members in helping them manage their roles.

Secondary administration: the principalship. Metzger (2006) finds that one of the biggest obstacles faced by secondary principals is learning how to juggle all of the responsibilities, which often involves working long hours, participating in evening and weekend events and managing crises regardless of when they arise. The participants in this study spoke of the difficulties of balancing their work and being a single parent due to the long hours at work, including supervision of evening events, having to take work home with them and dealing with crises. Many of them cite a variety of strategies they have employed to help create boundaries within their own lives, such as shutting down technology at a particular time each day, setting aside the weekends to spend time with their child and allowing their children to spend time with them at school events and functions to create a family activity and help with the difficulties of juggling both.

Although a study by Oplatka & Mimon (2008) found that some female principals have low job satisfaction due to the difficulty of juggling their personal and professional lives, the women in this study did not report low job satisfaction. They all spoke highly of loving their staff and students that they work with and feeling proud of having their children go through the school system in which they are a leader. The participants spoke about the challenges they faced with being a single mother and secondary principals but did not report being unsatisfied with their work.

Single parenthood. All of the study participants are single mothers, and their children spend most of their time in their care. The single mothers in this

study also hold secondary principal positions and have had to figure out how to best balance their work and home life. Although much of the research focuses on single mothers living in poverty, having fewer opportunities, and draining the social system, this study demonstrates the opposite of this sentiment (Dlugonski & Molt, 2016). These single mothers hold higher-level leadership roles in their careers and work hard to prioritize their families. Olson & Haynes (1993) found that successful qualified professionals who are single mothers share some common individual characteristics; prioritizing parenting and recognition for self-care. All of the participants in this study fit the criteria for holding those common characteristics. For example, they all expressed the importance of their children, even over their work. Also, they shared how they leaned on their friends as a means of self-care. It is evident that there is a gap in the research around single mothers who are successful in their careers. This study helps contribute to the body of research that there are strategies and support systems that those in this position utilized to make it possible for them to hold higher-level positions in their careers.

Support for single working mothers. The research on support for single mothers primarily focuses on the significance of social support networks to offset stress and improve physical and mental health (Auerbach et al., 2011; Devereux et al., 2009; Wilks & Spivey, 2010). The participants in this study all shared the importance of their friends and family in helping with their children and creating a support network. Many of them found that having a group of friends to talk to and bounce ideas off of was just as important as the physical support they

received from friends and family around picking up their children, helping with meals, and the day to day tasks of parenting.

Lee et al. (2009) shared that having a connection with other women in the workforce who shared similar values can also help tremendously with stress and challenges. Two of the participants in this study shared the importance of their female principal colleagues who helped support them daily and were extremely important in assisting them in talking through the challenges at work and home. The connections with colleagues who may face similar challenges are significant to finding the balance between work and home life.

Summary

This chapter presented the study's findings and connections to the literature from four in-depth interviews of single mother, secondary principals to understand their lived experiences and how they achieve life-work balance. The next chapter shares the conclusions, implications and limitations of the study and considerations for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions and Recommendations

The concept of work-life balance has been around for decades as men fueled the workforce; however, as family structures change and more women enter the workforce, the need to understand how families work through the balancing act has become more of an interest. Although there is a wide range of research on work-family balance that includes many types of workers and professions, past studies of work-life balance often overlook senior-level leadership with considerable family responsibilities (Cheung, 2010). The purpose of this study was to help add to the body of research on women in senior-level leadership, specifically who are single mothers and how they balance their home life and careers. This study focused on what internally and externally drives single mothers, secondary school principals to face the challenges of balancing work and family and understanding the support systems and management strategies they use in balancing their families and careers. This phenomenological study was conducted using semi-structured qualitative interviews to answer the following research questions in which multiple themes emerged.

1. What are the internal and external drivers of effective single-parent female secondary school principals that allow them to face the challenges of balancing work and family?

2. What support systems do effective single-parent female secondary school principals utilize to achieve work-life balance?

3. What management strategies do effective single-parent female secondary school principals utilize to achieve work-life balance?

This chapter shares conclusions, implications and limitations of the study and considerations for further research.

Study Conclusions

Throughout the interviews with the four single mother, secondary school principals, finding balance between work and home life was extremely challenging. Many of the participants shared that they were not sure if they had successfully found balance, but they have tried to manage the best they can and reflected on what it looks like in their own lives. Many factors helped the participants realize the strategies they employed to make this possible.

Specifically, they reflected on the many internal and external drivers that allowed them, single-parent female secondary school principals, to face the challenges of balancing work and family effectively. First, developing deep relationships with their staff was a critical factor in facing the challenges. As a principal, knowing that they were working for others was a leadership skill that should be cherished and built. Specifically, building trust, listening, and knowing what was going on in the personal and professional lives of those on their staff was critical. Second, being a mother was prioritized as the most important job, even over work. Prioritizing family time and setting boundaries with work can help ensure that adequate time was made for their children despite the challenges. Lastly, having a mindset of perseverance helped them face the challenges. Know matter how challenging work or home life is, looking at facing the challenges

through a problem-solving lens to try and figure out how to manage and get

through is a skill that the participants found as a necessity. Not only did these

driving factors play a huge role in balancing work and family, being able to rely

on a variety of support systems was equally important.

The participants found that a strong support system was critical in finding

the balance between work and life when single parenting and serving as a

secondary school principal. Those support systems helped assist with day-to-day

activities such as helping with the children or making dinner. Some participants

found hiring someone to help with the daily chores of house cleaning and driving

their child to and from activities was a huge stress reliever in taking something off

their plate. As important as the physical support system was to them, having a

positive circle of friends to count on for mental health support, talking to and

bouncing ideas was equally important to creating a healthy balance. Many shared

that self-care, such as getting their nails done or haircut, was often challenging to

fit in, so friendships helped create a healthy dynamic of someone else to talk to

about non-work related items. When determining how to fit everything into their

daily routine and schedules, all of the participants shared a variety of management

strategies that they utilized that helped with this process.

Determining the management strategies that work best to achieve work-

life balance was extremely important and different for each participant. Most

importantly, all of the participants felt that prioritizing work and home life was a

necessary skill. Determining what is urgent and non-urgent in a day will help

understand what needs to be completed. It is imperative to set boundaries for

work and home to achieve adequate time for each area. Secondly, being able to stay organized through calendars, piles, planners, and lists is a skill that is important when finding balance. Staying organized will help ensure that all of the day to day activities and events are completed.

In conclusion, the results of the interviews with the four single mother, secondary school principals showed the difficulty and challenges in finding balance between work and home life. Although the participants were unsure if they have successfully found balance, learning how to manage and tailor what it looks like in their own lives to make it feasible was extremely important. Campbell Clark (2000) explains this best by describing people as border-crossers. Clark says people "make daily transitions between these two settings, often tailoring their focus, their goals, and their interpersonal style to fit the unique demands of each" (p. 751). These principals have learned what is most important to them based on each domain's demands and what works best for them and their children.

Implications for Current Practice

This study's results have implications for current practice for secondary principals who are single mothers, mothers considering going into administration and ideas for the school districts that employ them. The following are ideas for what the findings from this study mean for other individuals in the field.

Find a support system. It would be extremely beneficial to secondary principals and single parents to find support systems to help manage daily challenges. Determining if there are daily tasks that someone else can help take

care of, such as clearing or cooking, could help find work-life balance and leave time for the jobs that one feels are a top priority. These support systems can be family and friends who are willing to help out. It would also be beneficial for school districts to help create these support systems among their employees through networking opportunities and social support groups.

Networking. Much of the research on single-parent families shows the value of strong social support networks and the ability to help reduce stress and create a sense of belonging and understanding. School districts that employ single parent administrators could intentionally focus on developing these social or workplace networks that focus on female principals networking and connecting. Creating these affinity groups in school districts with multiple school principals in the same situation would allow for networking and support amongst the principals. It could reduce stress levels as well as support for one another.

Wellness activities. Self-care was often one of the significant areas that single mothers sacrificed in leadership positions. School districts could have an intentional focus on wellness activities that help facilitate self-care. Single mother, secondary principals reported that self-sacrifice often occurred and they put themselves last. Suppose school districts focused on wellness activities offered at work and made it a priority, including family-friendly ones. This could be extremely beneficial in finding time for oneself, thus relieving some stress and the daily challenges of finding time for self-care.

Work-life balance policies. Making work-life balance a priority is often something that is not talked about within organizations. School districts could

have an explicit focus on creating work-life balance policies and a culture supporting parenting and leadership. School districts could allow some flexibility within secondary principals' work schedules, specifically on non-student contact days or winter, spring and summer break to allow work from home or bring your child to workdays. Setting boundaries around the number of evening hours or creating additional compensation and acknowledgment for their time could help create a healthier work-life balance for administrators. Making work-life balance a high priority within an organization can help employees develop healthy boundaries and reduce stress in both work and family life.

      Understanding of challenges. Those considering moving into secondary administration who are single mothers may understand the challenges they will face by reading this study. This study may help others decide to move into secondary administration or determine what strategies or support systems they may want to have set up before moving into the role.

Recommendations for Future Research

      It is evident that there is a gap in the research on single mothers who are secondary school principals. Therefore, many additional research areas would be beneficial to contribute to the body of research on working single mothers.

      First, this study's purpose was to focus on what internally and externally drives single mothers, who are also secondary school principals, to face the challenges of balancing work and family and understanding the support systems and management strategies they use in balancing both.

Although this study provided valuable insight regarding these women's lived experiences, additional research in this exact area would be helpful. Exploring this same idea with an expanded participant group, possibly to include single mothers who are elementary principals or who hold district-level leadership positions, would be valuable. An additional longitudinal study throughout single mothers and secondary school principals' time raising children may provide insight into how work-life balance changes over time.

Second, although many single mothers are working, there is a gap in the research about the number of single mothers in leadership positions, specifically school leadership and the challenges or stressors they face. An additional research area could provide an explicit focus on understanding the stressors that single mothers in any leadership position face and how their employers can best support them.

Third, understanding the challenges that married principals with children face vs. single mothers and creating a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences between the two groups could offer a broader perspective on how to best support any mother in the principalship. This study could give school districts a more in-depth idea of how to best support their female leaders.

Finally, specific research around school districts as employers and their work-life balance policies or culture could help other school districts or employers gain insight into how to best support their employees. The focus could be specifically on resources provided, the organization's culture and

climate, and policies that support a healthy balance of home and work.

Limitations and Bias

There were two significant limitations to this study. First, it was specific to the number of interviewed participants for this study, creating a limited sample size. Second, the primary scope of the study was secondary principals in Minnesota.

The first limitation of this study was the limited sample size of the study. This study was limited to single mothers who are in the role of a secondary school principal. Using this narrow focus of participants was purposive sampling and due to the unique needs of this group. The hope was to gain a deeper understanding of single mothers' lived experiences in the secondary principalship; therefore, it was necessary to include participants who fit this criterion. Although married mothers who are in the principalship likely experience their own set of challenges and needs, it is expected that single mothers have unique needs and therefore made sense to focus on this group solely. With that narrow focus, there are not many secondary principals that fit those criteria, and consequently, it was challenging to find a large sample size. Even after multiple attempts to find participants, the researcher was only able to secure four participants in this study. Had a larger sample size been used, additional results could have been obtained.

The second limitation of the study was around the geography of the study. The researcher only looked for participants in the state of Minnesota. This limited the number of participants that were able to be secured for the research. This may have impacted the study's results because the background of the secondary

principalship in other states may be different. The principals in this study all held

Minnesota State Principal licensures and trained or prepared to serve in the

principalship in Minnesota. It is possible that if the study would have been opened

up to secondary principals in other areas of the United States or globally, the

results could have been impacted by their experiences serving in that specific role

in their area.

In addition to the limitations of the study, there was also researcher bias.

The researcher is a single mother and also serves as a secondary principal in

Minnesota. Although there were similarities between the researcher and the

study's participants, single motherhood and the principalship, the researcher also

has many other factors in her background that differentiate her situation. For

example, the researcher was a teenage mother of biracial children in an abusive

marriage. These factors have contributed to the researchers' outlook on work-life

balance. The researcher has had to balance home and work life daily and has been

completely immersed in the work. Although this topic had a personal meaning to

the researcher, she set aside any personal biases about work-life balance. She had

a vested interest in learning how others work to balance their home and careers.

Although there were limitations to this current research, future research

studies' suggestions attempt to close these gaps by expanding the sample size.

Final Thoughts

My final thoughts on the results of this study are very intriguing and

interesting to me. I find it fascinating to reflect on the field of work-life balance

research and how it has changed with time. Although it may have been important

to find a perfect scale between both work and home life at one point in the research, it seems to become more evident that it might not be possible to truly ever obtain a perfect balance between the two. I am drawn to Campbell Clark's work, who agrees that it is not necessarily about finding balance but about finding what works for each domain of life, even if those domains cross. Clark (2000) says work-life balance is defined as "satisfaction with fulfilling the personal goals in both the work and life domain, by being able to use appropriate means" (p. 751). The sooner we accept that it is about finding what balance looks like in our own lives and what brings satisfaction for each person, it is far more important than finding a perfectly scaled balance between the two domains. This study was able to uncover the reality in how single mothers who serve as secondary principals were able to find what drives them to face the challenges of balancing work and family and the support systems and management strategies that help them feel successful in both areas.

Summary

This chapter presented the conclusions, implications, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research from the findings of four in-depth interviews from secondary principals who are also single mothers to understand their lived experiences and how they achieve life-work balance. This study shows that competing demands between home and work life and finding the perfect balance can be extremely difficult. The women in this study are dedicated to both roles' success and have shown high perseverance in managing both domains of life. They have determined that although they might not have perfect balance,

they have found a variety of support systems and management strategies to neutralize the stressful demands of both roles.

I hope this study provided insights and suggestions for other single mothers or those who support single, working mothers around the strategies and systems that can help successfully manage being a working professional and a mother. Although the goal does not have to be a perfectly balanced scale, with time divided equally among the two domains, determining what balance looks like and how it fits best within each individual's life is the most important.

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Appendix A: Invitation to participate in research study

Dear Minnesota Secondary School Principal;

I am a doctoral student at Hamline University and a principal at Fridley Middle School. I am conducting a research study that seeks to understand how single mothers who are also secondary school principals manage and achieve life-work balance. If you are a single mother and also serving as a middle or high school principal in Minnesota, I would love to speak with you regarding your experiences. Your input into how you manage both roles will be beneficial to other mothers who are seeking to do both.

If you decide to participate, you will participate in an hour long interview that will take place at your convenience. Your participation will be confidential. Please contact me if you are willing to participate or have any questions at 651-592-9414 or acochran02@hamline.edu

Thank you for considering participating in this important study.

Sincerely,

Amy Cochran

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Research Questions:
- What are the internal and external drivers of effective single-parent female secondary school principals that allow them to face the challenges of balancing work and family?
- What support systems do effective single-parent female secondary school principals utilize to achieve work-life balance?
- What management strategies do effective single-parent female secondary school principals utilize to achieve work-life balance?

Prospective Interview Questions:
1. Give a brief overview of your professional career and journey into the principalship.
2. Tell me about your family and children.
   a. Single parenting
3. How do you define an effective principal?
4. How do you define life-work balance?
5. What challenges do you face as you do your leadership work as a single parent?
6. What barriers do you need to overcome to do your leadership work as a single parent?
7. What personally drives you to face the challenges and barriers you identified? What are the external drivers?
8. What specific support systems (at work or home) help you achieve life-work balance?
   a. Superintendent or other learning organization leaders
   b. Friends or leaders outside your learning organization
   c. Family members
   d. Relationship with children's father
9. What specific management strategies do you utilize at home or work to help you achieve life-work balance?

Appendix C: Research Question Validity Table

	Principalship	Parenting	Work-Life Balance
Background Info	Give a brief overview of your professional career and journey into the principalship. How do you define an effective principal?	Tell me about your family and children.	How do you define work-life balance?
RQ1: What are the internal and external drivers of effective single-parent female secondary school principals that allow them to face the challenges of balancing work and family?	What challenges do you face as you do your leadership work as a single parent? What barriers do you need to overcome to do your leadership work as a single parent?		What personally drives you to face the challenges and barriers you identified? What are the external drivers?
RQ2: What support systems do effective single-parent female secondary school principals utilize to achieve work-life balance?	Support Systems: Superintendent or other learning leaders	Support Systems: Friends or leaders outside your learning organization, Family members, Relationship with children's father	What specific support systems (at work or home) help you achieve life-work balance? ⌐⌐ SEP
RQ3: What management strategies do effective single-parent female secondary school principals utilize to achieve work-life balance?	What specific management strategies do you utilize at work to help you achieve life-work balance?	What specific management strategies do you utilize at home to help you achieve life-work balance?	