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HOSTILE TAKEOVER: THE EFFECTS OF WORK STRESS

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HOSTILE TAKEOVER: THE EFFECTS OF WORK STRESS

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband Nick Barletta and my children Clairissa, Gage, and Olivia. I want to thank my husband for literally picking up the pieces when I couldn't any more and for fighting when I didn't have the will to fight. I love you with all my heart for being the man you are. To my children, I apologize for forgetting the importance of putting family before work and vow to never forget what is more important. I thank my two girls for pushing me to complete this journey and to my son for always making me laugh.

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Abstract

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Guided by family/work border theory, this phenomenological study explored the effects of stress while attempting to balance work and home through the lens of six high school female principals from the Central and Northern parts of California. This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach to examine the effects stress had on the physical and mental health of participants. Phenomenological interviews provided a rich description of the lived experiences of female high school principals. A thorough analysis of data exposed six distinct themes: (a) work became the priority, (b) coping mechanisms, (c) implications of being a woman, (d) lonely at the top, (e) blurred boundaries, and (f) the need for more support. Study participants' experiences provide insight into the primary sources of stress, how stress affected their physical and mental health, the effect their stress had on their home domain, and how participants coped with the stress. Findings from this study address ways stress can be minimized to better balance work and home.

Keywords: work-family conflict, work-family border theory, job satisfaction, spillover, work stress, female principals

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Great principals have an immense impact on student and teacher success (Thusciak-Deliowska & Dernowska, 2015). Yet approximately half of beginning principals will remain in the same job for five years and many will leave the education field altogether when they go (Viadero, 2009). Although policy and research efforts have focused on the effects of principal turnover, student achievement, teacher retention, and financial resources (Lerum, 2016), less focus has been given to investigating the reasons why school principals are leaving their schools at a rapid rate.

School principals may choose to leave their current position for a variety of reasons; advancement to a new position, relocation to a new school, retirement, or better benefits are identified as the predominant reasons (Béteille et al., 2012). This current study explored stress as one possible cause for leaving. Because the effects of principal turnover are dispersed across the school disrupting students, staff, the district and the community; it is reasonable to assume the stress principals' combat will eventually spill over into their personal lives causing conflict in the home and with family.

The conflict between work and home has become a major dilemma for employers across the United States (Boles, 2001) where work-home conflict is higher than in the rest of the developed world (Williams & Boushey, 2010). Work-home conflict, as defined by Greenhaus and Beutell in 1985, is "a type of inter-role conflict in which the role demands stemming from one life domain (work or home) are incompatible with role demand stemming from the other domain" (as cited in Delanoeiji & Verbruggen, 2019, p. 2).

There are many reasons why conflict between work and home has been increasingly more difficult. Delanoeiji and Verbruggen (2019) claimed it is primarily because of female participation in the labor market, dual-earner families, and changing gender norms. Boles (2001) also cited the major reason continues to be the increasing number of women entering the workforce. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021), women made up 57.4% of all participants in the labor force in 2019. More specifically, working women who have children is even greater; in March 2019, labor participation for women with children under age 18 was 72.4% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

Congruently, the number of dual earner families has also increased. "Among married-couple families, 53 percent had earnings from both the wife and the husband in 2018" (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021, p. 3). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) also attributes this increase to a cultural shift involving women in the workforce. Hind (2015) credited "the feminist movement, equal opportunities legislation the expansion of the services sector and the knowledge economy, the ever-increasing cost of living and increased access to education" as movements that have contributed to this change (para. 2).

In 1992, education and health services became the largest industry employing women, exceeding more than 17.4 million employed as of 2016 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). By 2019, women accounted for 74.8% of all workers in the education and health services sector (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). The female population dominates employment in the public education system, making up 52% of principals and 76% of teachers (Superville, 2016).

The combination of family stress added to work stress has the potential to leave any working female feeling defeated and inadequate in either one or both roles as a school principal or as a wife/mother. Work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) provides a conceptual framework

for understanding why conflict between work and family occurs and how this conflict can contribute to the ongoing stress of female high school principals.

Background

According to Goldring and O'Rear (2018) in conjunction with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 24.7% of principals surveyed (21,340 in total) would leave their job as soon as possible if they found a higher paying job. Imagine 21,340 school principals walking out of the job right now. The possibility is there but how can the educational system get ahead of this crisis? Goldring and O'Rear (2018) reported that 75.5% of principals who were at the same school in the current school year as the previous year think about staying home from work because they are too tired to go. What drove these principles to this point? When will they take the leap and leave? What makes their job so difficult that they dread going to work and if given the opportunity would leave?

School boards, state and federal officials, as well as superintendents and current administrators, would benefit from understanding two things: the potential harmful effects that students, staff, and the district may face when the principal leaves the position and what drove the school principal to leave. It would be strategically important to find out principals' attitudes toward their job before they leave (Liu & Bellibas, 2018); this could have several benefits such as: reflection on current practices and policies, the opportunity to train a successor, and the opportunity for the employer to make adjustments to retain the principal. School district leaders must take the time to invest in turnover prevention in order to prevent school principal attrition Sufficient evidence supports and identifies stress as a major factor in educator attrition (Wong et al., 2017) and the potential it has to interrupt the learning process (Lin & Bellibas, 2011).

Minimal school principal turnover is to be expected and often a change in school leadership can be welcomed in situations such as retirement, promotion to district office, or relocation. However, many studies shed light on some daunting statistics. Grissom and Bartanen (2018) identified low performing principals as "more likely to exit the education system and to be demoted to other school-level positions, whereas high performers are more likely to exit and to be promoted to central office positions" (p. 355). Examples include Burkhauser et al.'s (2012) study on first-year principals which found that over one fifth of new principals leave their schools within the first 2 years. On a national average, 35% of principals have been at their school placement for less than 2 years, and only 11% of principals reported being at the same school for more than 10 years (Burkhauser et al., 2012; Goldring & Tale, 2014).

Effects on Staff

It is well known that great principals can have a lasting impact on student and teacher success. The principal has been found to have the greatest impact on school climate, which indirectly affects teaching and learning (Thusciak-Deliowska & Dernowska, 2015). School climate gives meaning to students and teachers resulting in higher job satisfaction (Thusciak-Deliowska & Dernowska, 2015). Principals foster success by setting high expectations and establishing a culture of instructional excellence. "Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to individual student achievement" (National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP], 2017, p. 2), but the job has grown and nearly every education reform adopted by state and federal legislative results in adding new responsibilities and expanding areas of expected expertise for current school leaders (Lerum, 2016).

Grissom et al. (2021), in conjunction with The Wallace Foundation, recently identified major changes in the principal workforce that "have altered the environment in which principals operate" (p. 29). Most significant to this study is the trend of principals having become more racially and ethnically diverse as well as more female "with women representing 54% of all principals in 2016" (p. 35), further calling for a need to explore which "policy changes have brought more women into the principal pipeline and whether there may be lessons that might be useful for efforts to increase demographic representation" (p. 35).

Additional findings from Grissom et al. (2021) include a dramatic shift in socioeconomic and demographic compositions of U.S. public schools; "students are more racially and ethnically diverse" (p. 12) than previously before, claiming the number of students identified as White has decreased to 53% in 2016 (Grissom et al., 2021). Next, the number of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch (a poverty indicator of student's families) is at an all-time high of 51% (Grissom et al., 2021). Principals are also dealing with an increasing number of public-school students who require English language and special education services and supports. The number of students with an individual education plan has nearly doubled to 13% since 1988 (Grissom et al., 2021). Subsequently students identified as English learners make up 10% of the student population and are identified as the fastest-growing population in public schools (Grissom et al., 2021).

The final indicator influencing the principalship is the fact that the "average experience level has fallen, especially in high-need schools and principals reportedly had overall shorter tenures, reporting that the principles average 7 years of experience and half of principals had 5 or fewer years of experience" (Grissom et al., 2021, p. 20). Furthermore, the proportion of novice principals (those with 1-3 years of experience) reached 31% and the number of years spent at the

principal's current school declined to 4 years (Grissom et al., 2021). These consuming job

demands increase demands on time and bring scrutiny to the principal, adding to a growing

turnover.

As a result of the above-mentioned factors, principals are finding the job to be more

difficult. Mascall and Leithwood (2010) found that teacher views on school and classroom

conditions and on curriculum and instruction are less favorable than they have been in the past.

This change in attitude or morale can potentially lead to a loss of vision and trust in the school or

district. Furthermore, it can deter school improvement initiatives and restrict positive growth.

Hargreaves et al. (2003) found that communities and teachers are less likely to support new

school leaders when principal turnover is frequent in the school. "High levels of turnover deny

schools the leadership stability they need to succeed" (Gates et al., 2006, p. 891).

It is easy to understand how this lack of support can transpire when the national average

tenure for principals during the 2016-17 school year was only 4 years (Levin & Bradley, 2019).

"The most recent national study of public-school principals found that, overall, approximately 18

percent of principals were no longer in the same position one year later. In high-poverty schools,

the turnover rate was 21 percent" (Levin & Bradley, 2019, p. 3). Grissom et al. (2021) also

reported that the average time a principal spent at their current placement is on the decline,

reporting "In 1988, the average public school principal had spent 6.2 years at his or her current

school, but by 2016, that number had dropped to 4 years" (p. 34). They further claimed, "In

2016, principals at the highest-poverty public school had just 3.4 years experience at their current

school" (p. 34).

Béteille et al. (2012) identified a correlation between school principal departure and

higher teacher turnover rates. Plecki et al. (2005) supported this claim by identifying higher

rates of teacher turnover up to 5 years subsequently following a principal change. Player et al.

(2017) confirmed, "teachers who reported stronger principal leadership were less likely to switch

from one school to another than teachers who reported weaker principal leadership" (p. 336).

Effects on Students

According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), "School

leadership is the key to closing achievement gaps and increasing student performance in all

subjects across all grade levels" (NASSP, 2017, p. 2). In an analysis of 12 years of

administrative data from North Carolina, Miller (2013) found student achievement takes a

downward turn after principal departure. Identifying student achievement typically continues to

fall for 2 years but will eventually return to pre-turnover achievement levels. This downward

cycle can take up to 6 years to recover from; this may or may not be generalized across school

settings. Grissom et al. (2021) suggested, "It is not the turnover event (principal leaving) itself

but the associated loss of leadership skills, relationships, and the like that disrupt student

learning" thus affecting student achievement. Béteille et al. (2012) claimed that schools with

high concentrations of novice teachers, low socioeconomic families and low performing schools

display stronger correlation with principal turnover and student achievement. As a result,

schools with frequent turnover become less desirable to experienced prospective principals and

these schools "become trapped in a 'vicious cycle' of high managerial turnover and declining

performance" (Béteille et al., 2012, p. 906).

There is conflicting evidence as to the effects principal turnover may have on student

achievement. Berrong (2012) found that principal turnover rates are weakly correlated with

student achievement in math and reading/English language arts amongst 85 middle schools in

Georgia. Grissom and Bartanen (2018) claimed the school principal has little direct influence on

student learning and achievement, further indicating principals influence school climate, which indirectly affects students. Grissom et al. (2021) also reported similar claims, stating the principal's influence is mostly indirect and comes primarily in the form of "impacts on factors that create the conditions for students to learn" (p. 34) including classroom instruction practices, school climate, which teachers are hired and/or retained and building safety. Additional studies such as Bartanen (2020) found effective principals did affect student absenteeism, increasing attendance by 1.4 more school days. Grissom et al. (2021) cited Bacher-Hicks, Billings, and Deming (2019) as a study that indicated principals have measurable effects on school discipline.

Cost of Principal Replacement

According to the NASSP (2017), the demand for school principals will increase 6% by 2022 primarily due to changes in student enrollment, and this growth will put a financial burden on local school districts. It is difficult to estimate an exact cost of replacement, as the cost of replacing a principal can vary from district to district and state to state. Potentially, it could financially cost a district anywhere between $36,850 and $75,000 in typical urban school districts to replace a single principal (NASSP, 2017). This cost can quickly accumulate, as it is not uncommon to see districts, especially larger districts, replace as many as 10-15 principals at a time (Lerum, 2016).

Tran et al. (2018) estimated the overall average cost of principal replacement in a rural school district was $23,974.29, further claiming that this amount can rise substantially if principal preparation programs are included in the cost. When accounting for the cost of recruiting, onboarding, training, and mentoring, principal replacement can cost the district up to $300,000 (NASSP, 2017). This cost to any school district requires immediate attention and strategic planning.

To fully comprehend the financial impact of principal replacement, Tran et al. (2018) studied the principal replacement process utilizing the ingredients method, a form used by cost analysis experts to identify all the resources required to replace a principal and assign a financial cost to each ingredient, allowing for costs to be measured. Tran et al. (2018) identified three phases and the cost associated with each phase: (a) separation; (b) recruitment and selection; and (c) orientation, onboarding, and mentorship. The separation phase involves the exit interview, separation work, and unemployment matters. Phase 2 is the recruitment and selection process; within this phase, the human resource department must advertise current vacancies, process applications, conduct background checks, review candidate information, and conduct interviews. The final stage involves the orientation process, training, mentorship process, and ongoing professional development of the individual hired (Tran et al., 2018). According to Tran et al. (2018), the methodology used in their study "can be replicated across the globe to estimate the cost of replacing school leaders" (p. 109). The same study found, "on average, 37 personnel members were needed to work 207.42 hours to terminate and replace a departing principal" (Tran et al., 2018, p. 112). Tran et al. (2018) also identified the non-personnel resources required for the process and found additional accrued costs for supplies such as business cards; name plates; equipment such as computers and cell phones; and additional funds for stipends, professional fees, and conferences can increase the total by an additional $4,250.00.

The toll of principal replacement is deep rooted, affecting student achievement, teacher turnover, staff moral, and financial drain. School districts must look toward the cost of retention efforts in comparison to the cost of principal replacement. Many underlying factors influence principal retention. Tran et al. (2018) identified the factors that "push and pull" individuals toward or away from the position as: salary, benefits, opportunities, politics, personal conflicts,

poor working relationships, and personal and family issues. Grissom et al. (2021) found turnover was attributed to retirement, low salaries, working conditions, and school accountability.

The role of the school principal has been analyzed, and many key changes in job responsibilities have led to a potential lack of interest in the position of school principal (Tran et al., 2018). These changes include increased accountability and authority, tension between administration and leadership, the call for collaborative relationships with the community, and giving the option of school choice (Tran et al., 2018). From personal experience, most school leaders are not equipped to handle the effects this type of stress brings to their professional and personal lives.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the phenomenon of stress through the lens of a small group of female high school principals in Central and Northern California areas to better understand how stress affected their mental and physical health and the dynamics of their home. School principals must measure up to the demands of students, parents, and school staff while trying to meet the expectations of state and federal regulations, district expectations, and social media attention. Friedman (2002) alleged the job is challenging for principals when forced to meet varied and often conflicting demands. Higher demands and more responsibility can negatively impact principals' wellbeing (Friedman, 2002), and when the leader is not functioning well, the whole school suffers (Beausaert et al., 2016).

Much research has been conducted on the negative impacts of principal turnover; this includes effects on students' academic progress, teacher retention, and financial resources. Researchers, federal and state legislators, and educational systems across the country are

addressing concerns of principal retention by adopting the 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, increasing funding for professional development and training, reforming administration certification, and reforming legislation for loan forgiveness (Levin & Bradley, 2019), but additional investigation is necessary to address the gap which exposes how this stress affects the personal lives of female school principals. Continued investigation from the female perspective is more important as statistics continue to project an increasing majority of female principals in public schools.

It is easy to state that the job of a principal is stressful, the difficulty lies in the ability to describe what this stress looks like and how it manifests itself in the daily lives of school principals. This study exposes the hidden reality of how stress affected the professional lives of female principals and to what extent stress over spilled into the personal lives of six female high school principals. This study includes in-depth reflections on relationships with spouses and families, health issues, and mental stability. This study supports current research by providing a better understanding of why school principals are choosing to leave their school sites and assist with establishing what supports can be put into place to prevent this turnover.

Research Questions

This study sought to inquire what it was like to live with the daily stress of the high school principalship and focused around the evolution of work-family conflict, identifying the problems and stressors female high school principals faced between work and home. The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. What are the significant sources of stress, if any, that female school principals face?

2. As a result of ongoing stress, what physical and mental symptoms did female school principals exhibit during their time as principal?

3. What coping mechanisms (negative or positive), if any, did the principals use to alleviate stress in their professional and personal lives?

4. In what ways, if any, do the borders between professional and personal lives shift as levels of stress change?

Significance of Inquiry

Further inquiry into this phenomenon of principal turnover revealed that stress also affected the family/home life of female principals. This study provides insight into the female high school principal experience as well as identifies what supports could be implemented to prevent principal turnover. Liu and Bellibas (2018) claimed research on principal job satisfaction is vital to preventing turnover and increasing principal effectiveness, stating "despite the importance, there is surprisingly limited research for the topic" (p. 2). Additionally current studies have not identified work-family as a factor in job satisfaction.

Description of the Study

To fully understand and assist with identifying and preventing principal turnover, this phenomenological study focused on six female high school principals from the Central and Northern parts of California who have left a principalship. Data were collected through participant interviews. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a phenomenological approach is well suited for studying emotional and intense human experiences. Stress is an intense reaction that can cause bodily or mental tension, inducing medical conditions such as anxiety or depression (Conrad Stöppler, 2018). Stress can be external or internal and can "initiate the 'fight or flight' response, a complex reaction of neurologic and endocrinologic systems" (Davis, 2021, para. 1). This phenomenological study will help readers grasp the lived experience in the day-to-day life of a female high school principal. The study is described in greater detail in Chapter 3.

The effects of principal stress and turnover have an astonishing ripple effect on the job and at home. From student achievement to staff morale, teacher retention, and financial burden on the district, all are influenced in some shape or form. But the ripple does not stop there. From my experience, stress on the job impedes on the home, disrupting time with family, feelings of guilt linger constantly, tension among family members builds; subsequently, developing anxiety and depression and lack of sleep all become factors of stress. Chapter 2 discusses principal stress in greater detail by highlighting the effects of stress including the ways it can affect job satisfaction and influence the dynamics at home and with the family. A comprehensive review of literature assists in clarifying the barriers school principals face and the role of work-family conflict.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

School principals must measure up to the demands of students, parents, and school staff while trying to meet the expectations of state and federal regulations and district expectations. In addition, they face increasing public scrutiny due to the growth of social media use among students, parents, and community members. As early as 2002, Friedman described the job as challenging for principals when they are forced to meet varied and often conflicting demands. Higher demands and more responsibility can negatively impact principal job satisfaction and wellbeing (Friedman, 2002). Stress at work will inevitably overspill into the home, creating a hard-to-break cycle of work-family conflict. When the principal is not functioning well, the whole school suffers; when the person, as a family member, is not functioning well, the family can also suffer (Beausaert et al., 2016)**.**

Background

Principals are expected to be influential leaders and build a positive school climate. Dahlkamp et al. (2017) described an excellent principal as one who can assist teachers, communicate school goals, and enforce student conduct. Friedman (2002) identified a good principal as a professional educator, a leader, and a successful manager. If they find the job too challenging, the principal has the potential to experience high levels of stress. The stress could lead to suffering of staff morale, teachers not feeling valued, high absenteeism rates, and further reducing teamwork or the desire to collaborate. A 2018 study conducted by Cancio et al. found that consequences associated with teacher stress include: decreased feelings of accomplishment, difficulty with personal or professional relationships, neglect of other responsibilities, and

emotional exhaustion. One could assume these consequences would be the same for a school principal.

Due to the complex nature of the profession, Ozer (2013) found that school principals are likely to suffer from burnout resulting in turnover. Stress now dominates the role of school principal. Legislative agendas call for instructional and transformational leadership (Wells, 2013); the public wants to see innovation, improvement, and reform, associated with a need to prepare students with skills for the 21st century. In the 2015-2016 U.S. Department of Education Principal Survey, 75.6% of principals surveyed indicated they feel the stress of being a principal is not worth it (Goldring & Spiegelman, 2017).

School principals are not the only professional field with high levels of turnover. LinkedIn, the world's largest professional networking site, identified the top five industries with the highest turnover rates as: (a) technology at 13.2%, (b) retail and consumer products at 13%, (c) media and entertainment at 11.4%, (d) professional services at 11.4%, and (e) government/education/non-profit at 11.2% (Petrone, 2018). The realization of education identified within the top five fields of turnover is alarming. Education is vital to the growth and future of our country. Turnover triggers a slippery slope, creating "instability in schools that can potentially undermine improvement efforts" (Béteille et al., 2012, p. 2) and should be addressed accordingly.

This chapter discusses how the role of the principal has changed due to higher job demands and increasing work intensification. This literature review reflects on what motivates principals to move into administration and inhibitors for turning away. Job satisfaction, health and wellbeing are major factors that all lead to work-family conflict. The battle to balance work

and family becomes increasingly difficult, and work/family border theory provides a framework to why this conflict occurs.

The High School Principal

The responsibilities of the school principal position are intensifying, and the very nature of the school principal position has evolved. Wang and associates (2018) claimed the position has become less desirable with accountability and performance demands continuously increasing, thus affecting the principal and the school (Maxwell & Riley, 2017). The high school principal tends to have more demands than the average elementary school principal. Longer school hours with extracurricular activities such as sports, drama productions, club activities, school dances, and college information nights all demand more time for which a typical elementary may not be responsible. This study speculates that the position of a high school principal is typically more stressful than the position of an elementary school principal and focuses on the lived experiences of high school principals to share their experiences with stress.

Motivators

According to Wang et al. (2018), "Motivators can create job satisfaction and inspire principals to achieve desired organizational goals" (p. 78). Motivators reflect intrinsic factors within the work itself. They generally take the form of work challenges, greater responsibilities and recognition from one's employer (Wang et al., 2018). These challenges, responsibilities, or recognition can come from the work itself or from students, teachers, districts, and the community.

Three major motivating factors for going into school administration exist: the desire to make a difference, personal or professional challenge, or posing the ability to initiate change (DeAngelis & Kawakyu O'Connor, 2012). School teachers continue to be the largest pool for

potential school principals. Many teachers choose administration because they feel they can make a difference in the lives of students. These teachers have hope and the ability to make students believe in themselves (Kafele, 2018).

A longitudinal study conducted by DeAngelis and Kawakyu O'Connor (2012) demonstrated "motivation to make a difference for students and teachers has a positive and significant influence on individuals' decision to apply for administrative work" (p. 497); however, the same study on aspiring principals found that amongst those that were promoted to administrative positions, they were less likely to cite a desire to make a difference vs. those who aspired to go into administration but were not promoted (DeAngelis & Kawakyu O'Connor, 2012). Moore (2009) discovered the highest cited factor for going into school administration was internal or psychic satisfaction that one receives from one's work, including the desire to make a difference or have a positive impact on students, staff, and the community.

Additional motivating factors may include job vacancies; a potential vacancy will have an impact on an individual's decision to apply for an administrative position. Endorsements or sponsorships by employer, college, or mentor all have a positive influence on the decision to seek administration positions (DeAngelis & Kawakyu O'Connor, 2012). Salary can be a determining factor for some. "Economic theory suggests that the expected payoff for entering administration will affect individuals' decisions to pursue such work" (DeAngelis & Kawakyu O'Connor, 2012, p. 479).

Inhibitors

While it appears individuals are entering administration for the humanitarian benefits, the inhibitors currently outweigh the motivating factors. This literature review uncovered the most common inhibitors as increased work time, job demands, non-competitive salary, the overload of

paperwork, lack of support from supervisors and the community, influence of outside groups, and testing accountability (Miller, 2018). Moore (2009) found the number one reason graduate students were choosing not to go in the direction of school administration was increased time commitment. School principals work an average contract of 20-40 days more than a teacher and are scheduled to work past the school day. Teacher contracts, which are typically negotiated by the local teacher's union, only require a teacher to work 15-30 minutes past the school day. A principal is generally scheduled to work an additional 60-90 minutes past the school day. This time is typically spent dealing with student or parent issues, participating in district committees, attending extracurricular activities such as sports, or participating in community activities.

Today's school principal can expect to work 50-60 hours a week, or even more to meet the increasing demands of the job (Moore, 2009). The 2017 Australian Principal Occupational Health and Wellbeing Survey found 56% of principals work up to 56 hours per week with an additional 27% working 66 plus hours a week (Riley, 2018). The workload for a school principal never stops; many feel obligated to work on weekends, holidays, and breaks to catch up on items they have put off due to lack of time. Fifty percent of principals surveyed reported working up to 25 hours during holidays (Riley, 2018). School principals are under constant public scrutiny, and school districts are under enormous pressure to raise test scores and produce high-performing schools. Principals are hired with the pressure to come in and immediately raise test scores (Viadero, 2009). These unreasonable expectations put additional stress on the principal.

The difference between a principal's salary and a teacher's salary continues to be minimal. "Salaries for educational administrator positions may be insufficient to entice educators to leave the classroom for administration" (Miller, 2018, p. 93). When comparing the

length of the work year, education level, and experience, educational research shows as little as a

2% to 17% difference in salary between highly experienced teachers and new administrators and

experienced principals (Forsyth, 2003). School principals may feel trapped in their current

positions with limited opportunities for other employment. They may have a lifestyle that can

only be supported by the salary of a school administrator. According to the National Center for

Educational Statistics (NCES; Taie & Goldring, 2017), 76.5% of principals surveyed would

leave their job as soon as possible if they found a higher paying job.

School principals also work 20-30% longer during the school year when compared to a

teacher. Principals typically work 223-228 days, and superintendents work upwards of 238 days

compared to 180-186 as a teacher (Forsyth, 2003). They work long hours, sacrifice personal

time to get caught up, isolate themselves, and neglect health. Soon they begin to lose themselves

in the job, resulting in feelings of emotional exhaustion and a low sense of self-efficacy.

"Education administrators often provide advice and moral support to others but may not have

someone to turn to themselves when they need support" (Miller, 2018, p. 93).

Job Satisfaction

According to Liu and Bellibas (2018), there is no agreed-upon definition of job

satisfaction. Locke's (1976) description of job satisfaction is the most widely used definition

and defines job satisfaction as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the

appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (p. 1300). Coomber and Barriball (2007) linked job

satisfaction to an individual's appraisal of the degree to which the job fulfills one's job values,

which can lead to a positive emotional state or contrasting negative feelings of dissatisfaction.

Wang et al. (2018) identified job satisfaction as a subjective construct, representing the

individuals' emotional feelings about their job. The dimensions of job satisfaction include:

work, pay, promotions, recognition, benefits, working conditions, supervision, co-workers, company, and management (Locke, 1976).

"Principals' job satisfaction is closely related to their personal and organizational well-being and work conditions" (Wang et al., 2018, p. 75). Factors found to have negatively influenced principal job satisfaction include: lack of time to evaluate teachers, recruiting and hiring teachers, teacher and staff apathy, staff resistance to change, pressure to adopt new programs, union issues (Wang et al., 2018). Wang and associates (2018) found no association between job satisfaction and gender, age, educational background, or years of experience in 78% of principals studied.

The 2013 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher found that principal job satisfaction had declined to its lowest point in over a decade. The same survey found that principals with high job satisfaction differ from those with little job satisfaction (MetLife, 2013). Principals who report higher job satisfaction rates are more likely to work in suburban schools, where most students are performing at or above grade level in math and English language arts. In July 2018, the NCES released results from the 2016-2017 Principal Follow-up Survey on principal attrition and mobility. New results indicate school principals are just as unsatisfied as they were in 2012 but are more likely to stay in their current position (Goldring & Taie, 2018). With high levels of dissatisfaction, it could be argued that principals are "struggling to stay afloat. The challenges and demands on even effective leaders are so overwhelming" (Kafele, 2018, para. 4).

In summary, Lui and Bellibus (2018) identified mutual respect to be the most crucial factor influencing principal job satisfaction. "Respect is crucial when building effective working relationships and is the top driver of job satisfaction" (Wang et al., 2018, p. 84), lack of respect from stakeholders will deter job satisfaction. Additional considerations include social interaction

amongst staff, school safety, and human resources as indicators of job satisfaction (Lui & Bellibus, 2018). However, Maslach (1998) identified a clear link between burnout and job satisfaction. Boles (2001) found that job satisfaction is linked to organizational commitment and the propensity to leave.

Factors Contributing to Job Satisfaction

Locke (1976) identified job satisfaction as a multidimensional concept with employees having complex positive and negative feelings toward their work. Acknowledgement of the factors that affect job satisfaction is imperative in the movement to support school principals and the well-being of their schools (Wang et al., 2018). Understanding the ways that principals' job satisfaction may be influenced by work intensification can help aspiring principals anticipate and address stress, can inform practices related to principal preparation, and can support the development of district-level resources to support principals.

Work intensification. The role of the school principal has become increasingly complex, and it is "inevitable that principals will struggle more compared to the past" (Ozer, 2013, p. 386). In fact, "Seven in 10 (69%) principals say the job responsibilities are not very similar to five years ago" (MetLife, 2013, p. 13). Some of the contributing factors identified as having led to increasing demands on the school principal's workload include: changes to school regulation and policy, budgetary cuts, technological advancement, academic standards, and high-stakes testing (Wang et al., 2018).

Work intensification is defined as "the amount of effort an employee must invest during the working day that oftentimes results from increased economic pressure and other societal changes" (Bunner et al., 2018, para. 6), leading to unsafe work practices and having detrimental effects on employee health and occupational safety. Intensification infers the employee is

pressured to complete more tasks in a work day at a heightened speed or to perform multiple

tasks simultaneously (Bunner et al., 2018).

Fein et al. (2017) identified work intensification as the strongest predictor of work-life

conflict, greater stress, and reduced well-being in their meta-analysis. Increasing demand paired

with diminishing resources continues to threaten the principals' well-being (Maxwell & Riley,

2017). Increasing job demands can be classified by quantity or quality. Quantity encompasses

work overload (having too much work to do) and multitasking while quality refers to challenging

work (difficult conditions and reduced autonomy; Ismail et al., 2014).

Health and well-being. Work intensification has been shown to negatively affect health

and well-being (Fein et al., 2017). "When school principals' well-being declines, their ability to

significantly impact school functioning, student engagement and whole-school wellbeing also

declines" (Maxwell & Riley, 2017, p. 485). Maxwell and Riley (2017) supported the claim that

chronic stress leads to feelings of burnout, thus affecting job performance and job satisfaction

resulting in low motivation to remain in the position of school principal.

The Principal Health and Wellbeing 2017 Survey (Riley, 2018) found principals display

higher physical and mental health issues than the general population: burnout (1.6 times higher),

stress symptoms (1.7 times higher), difficulty sleeping (2.2 times higher), cognitive stress (1.5

times higher), somatic signs (1.3 times higher), and depressive symptoms (1.3 times higher).

The same report also disclosed "2.9% reported feelings of self-harm sometimes, often or all the

time; 21.9% reported significantly lower scores on quality of life; and, 21.8% returned a

composite psychosocial risk score in the high or very high-risk category" (Riley, 2018, p. 726).

Boyland (2011) found 68% of participants in his study "perceived that job stress had

affected their overall health and wellness" (p. 6). Health issues noted by participants included:

high blood pressure, fatigue, trouble sleeping, headache, anxiety, and depression. Participants

also listed concerns with: lack of time for regular exercise, having to skip meals or eating on the

run, limited time with family, or loss of recreational time (Boyland, 2011).

        Stress. Stress is the immediate effect on specific stressors (Cancio et al., 2018), defined

as a disagreeable emotional experience connected to particular environmental causes and

accompanied by feelings of anxiety, anger, frustration, and tension (Haydon et al., 2018). All

stress is classified as distress or eustress. When the body can no longer cope with physiological

or psychological demands, it goes into distress mode (Beausaert et al., 2016). "Eustress refers to

the optimal amount of stress, not too much and not too little" (Beausaert et al., 2016, p. 353).

The intensity of the demands will determine if a person will exhibit distress or eustress

(Beausaert et al., 2016). Examples of stressors for a school principal may be student discipline

or uncooperative staff. Research indicates that employees acknowledge "managing budget and

resources, are longstanding issues" (MetLife, 2013, p. 11); high stakes testing as "counter

productive accountability can create disincentives for principals to remain in low performing

schools and can influence principals' mobility decisions" (Levin & Bradley, 2019, p. 3); "low

salaries that do not adequately compensate principals and are not competitive with other jobs

lead to higher rates of principal departure" (Levin & Bradley, 2019, p. 3); lack of opportunity for

growth and advancement, heavy workload, unrealistic job expectations, and long hours as

significant sources of stress; and, more recently, "mental health of students and staff has become

an increasing source of stress" (Riley, 2018, p. 6).

        Greenberg et al. (2016) identified the four primary sources of teacher stress as (a) school

organization, (b) job demands, (c) work resources, and (d) social and emotional competence.

Haydon et al. (2018) found the top four sources of stress to be: lack of administrative support,

individual student challenges, teacher perceptions, and state mandates. Stress has the potential to impact self-efficacy causing feelings of defeat. It can also affect one's health and well-being. Haydon et al. (2018) reported developing an obsessive-compulsive disorder, weight gain, anxiety, and fatigue resulting in a negative attitude toward work, interfering with the ability to be successful on the job (Wells, 2013). Stress from the job, otherwise known as occupational stress "has been linked to myriad health and psychological complaints, including headaches, high blood pressure, sleeping difficulties, heart palpitations, heart attacks, dizzy spells, breathing problems, nervous stomach, anxiety and depression" (Wells, 2013, p. 338), resulting in time away from work, on-the-job injuries, and job turnovers.

Burnout. Burnout is often considered the long-term outcome of chronic stress (Cancio et al., 2018). Maslach and Leiter (2008) described burnout as a global phenomenon creeping into every corner of the modern workplace with the potential to affect an individual's psychological and physical health, impairing personal and social function, leading some to quit their job while others may stay but only do the bare minimum to get the job done. Beausaert et al. (2016) claimed burnout among principals is a well-known problem with extreme consequences such as reduced performance, reduced initiative, loss of creativity, drop out, and absenteeism. Results from the 2017 Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey revealed principals report higher levels of burnout than the general population (Riley, 2018). "This decline in the quality of work and both physical and psychological health can be costly not just for the individual worker, but for everyone affected by that person" (Maslach, 1998, p. 68). Maslach (1998) described burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.

Emotional exhaustion occurs when an individual has depleted emotional resources and experiences a lack of energy and fatigue. Significant sources of emotional exhaustion stem from

work overload and personal conflicts at work (Maslach, 1998). Ozer (2013) assessed 119 primary school principals with the Friedman School Principal Burnout Scale, finding principals had high scores of exhaustions, experiencing mental, cognitive, and physical fatigue. In the role of principal, emotional exhaustion leaves diminished energy for a job that is very demanding (Wells, 2013).

Depersonalization often develops as a response to emotional exhaustion and work overload. Depersonalization exhibits as a cynical attitude or distancing from others; in the case of a school principal, this may be from students, staff, and stakeholders. This withdrawal typically forms as a buffer to self-protect, representing the interpersonal dimension of burnout (Maslach, 1998). Reduced personal accomplishment results from a diminished sense of efficacy. In this stage of burnout, one may have a sense of incompetence, often leading to depression and an inability to cope with job demands (Maslach, 1998). This is the self-evaluation dimension of burnout (Maslach, 1998).

Of the three dimensions of burnout, emotional exhaustion is the most widely reported, making it the central quality of burnout (Maslach, 1998). Depersonalization works in conjunction with fatigue, capturing the critical aspect of the relationship people have with their job. According to Maslach (1998, p. 78), "Distancing is such an immediate reaction to exhaustion that a strong relationship from exhaustion to depersonalization or cynicism is found consistently in burnout research." A reduced sense of personal accomplishment works in parallel with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, making it difficult for one to feel accomplished, resulting in lower feelings of self-efficacy (Maslach, 1998). Viadero (2009) attributed burnout to constant public scrutiny, 50-60-hour work weeks, harried nature of the workday, and lack of preparation to deal with problems. Friedman (2002) found the four

primary dominant sources of principal burnout to be parents, teachers, overload, and inadequate support. Parents are generally expected to collaborate with school staff to ensure a successful academic experience for their children. More frequently than not, parents become rude, overly aggressive, and make demands from staff and the principal. The principal is forced to deal with this unruly behavior, taking time away from more critical tasks. Low-performing teachers and teachers with poor classroom management weigh heavily on the principal, creating more discipline issues and concerns. Teachers are also expected to respect the authority of their principal; disregard for their authority creates more stress.

Work overload can become increasingly unbearable as tasks accumulate, forcing the principal's attention to be on other tasks such as committees, community events, board meetings, professional development, teacher and staff evaluations, student supervision, assessments, data review, budget planning, and special education practices. All this overload with inadequate work performance from support staff such as secretaries, janitorial staff, maintenance, and food workers, and the job demands of a principal become overwhelming.

Burnout and stress are related and have distinguishable concepts (Beausaert et al., 2016) both have different antecedents, correlations, and consequences (Wong et al., 2017). Stress is typically a reactive response to specific yet stressful situations. Burnout is the long-term effect of ongoing stress that restricts a positive view of one's job. Burnout may have a stronger influence on adverse psychosocial outcomes, including diminished job satisfaction, intentions of leaving the job, and physical and emotional symptoms (Wong et al., 2017). The antecedents of stress and burnout can be broken up into two categories: individual variables and contextual variables (Beausaert et al., 2016). Different variables consist of general demographics such as age, gender, personality, coping strategies, and self-efficacy. Contextual variables are more

generalized including working conditions, student behavior, and social support (Beausaert et al., 2016).

The contributing factors to burnout and stress vary from study to study, but they all share the universal themes of workload, professional relationships, inadequate resources, limited support, and increasing demands. It is valuable for educational leaders to understand how stress fuels the constructs of burnout (Wells, 2013) and the potential ripple effects burnout can have on job and life satisfaction.

Family and work conflict. The balance between work and family is becoming increasingly more difficult. Conflict in the home can materialize in three major ways: time-based, strain-based, or behavior-based (Ismail et al., 2014). Time-based conflict arises when the individual is forced to choose between two personal demands occurring at the same time (e.g., going to child's award ceremony at school or attending a meeting at work). Strain-based conflict will manifest when tension from one role interferes with duties in another role (e.g., an emergency at work causes an employee to arrive to work late or leave town). Strain-based conflict results in negative emotional spillover between domains (Donald & Linington, 2008). Spillover, defined as an interference with role demands in separate domains (Versey, 2015), can lead to "stress, work strain, absenteeism, physical health problems and burnout" (Versey, 2015, p. 1672). Behavior-based conflict transpires when behavior patterns from one role are not acceptable in another role (e.g., voice tone or attitude with coworkers compared to the way the individual interacts with their spouse or children; Ismail et al., 2014).

A review of literature identified two forms of conflict between work and family: work-family and family-work conflicts. Boles (2001) defined work-family conflict as a type of inter-role conflict wherein some responsibilities from the work and family domains are not compatible

and have a negative influence on an employee's work situation. This can include negative job attitudes and enacting family roles during work, resulting in lower job satisfaction (Smit et al., 2016). Family-work conflict has similar characteristics wherein there is an inter-role conflict and work and family domains are not compatible, promoting a negative work view. Family-work conflict varies by more likely exposing negative attributes in the home domain (Smit et al., 2016). Family-work conflict has a greater influence on life satisfaction, creating internal conflict within the home (Smit et al., 2016). Donald and Linington (2008) claimed, "Work has a greater degree of impact on family life than vice versa" (p. 661).

Work-family conflict and family-work conflict both share the concept of the individual balancing the stress, conflicts, and demands of both domains at the same time. Family-work conflict and work-family conflict are both inversely related to life satisfaction and psychological well-being (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000, as cited in Donald & Linington, 2008). In my experience, there is no clear way to dissociate work stress from home stress or vice versa. The conflicts between work and family can be imagined as an ongoing cycle where the demands and responsibilities of each domain are continuously feeding into one another; therefore, this study uses the terms work-family conflict and family-work conflict interchangeably.

Two primary sources are credited for the influence of family-work conflict. First, is the fact that more women are entering the workforce leading to the second issue of changing compositions of household with more dual-career families and single-family homes (Boles, 2001). Smit et al. (2016) also suggested technological advancements in communication are a contributing factor, enabling "individuals to engage in various life roles at any time of the day" (p. 2142) and promoting "regular crossing of the boundaries that separate work and family" (p. 2142).

Smit et al. (2016) introduced cognitive role transitions as episodes "in which an individual is currently engaged in one role (i.e., work) and experiences off-topic thoughts regarding a different role (i.e., family)" (p. 2145), arguing that these transitions occupy resources from the work role. Thinking about what is for dinner, planning for a birthday party, or thinking about an upcoming family vacation are examples of how family-related thoughts can cause an employee to become distracted from work. Bacharach et al. (1991) reported that work-family conflict led to emotional exhaustion which, in turn, resulted in lower levels of job satisfaction. After investigating job satisfaction of probation and parole officers, Boles (2001) found work-family conflict was significantly related to job satisfaction.

Theoretical Framework

Work/Family Border Theory

Work/family border theory, a relatively new theory developed by Clark in 2000, provides a framework for understanding why work-family conflict occurs. "It is a theory that explains how individuals manage and negotiate the work and family spheres and the borders between them in order to attain balance" (Clark, 2000, p. 750). Through the lens of this theory, work and family are identified as two different domains. These domains each have different rules, different thought patterns, and different behaviors yet they have the ability to influence each other. Smit et al. (2016) identified, "Most individuals transition between work and family roles on a daily basis, and often, multiple times within a given day" (p. 2142); this psychological transitioning of inter-roles is cognitively demanding, increasing conflict and shaping job performance.

Borders. Between role domains lay the physical, temporal, and psychological borders that draw lines or defining points, identifying the start or end point of dominate-relevant

behavior (Clark, 2000). Physical borders identify where dominate-relevant behavior takes place. This can include the walls of a home or the walls of an office. Temporal borders divide work time and family time and identify when each can begin and end. Physical borders dictate thinking patterns, behavior patterns, and emotions by providing rules for each domain (Clark, 2000). The strength of said borders is determined by permeability, flexibility, and blending. Permeable borders allow physical and psychological elements from each domain to penetrate. A simple example of permeable borders is having a bad day at work and going home short tempered.

Flexible borders have the ability to expand or contract to meet the demands of one another (Clark, 2000). Flexplace, working from a location of choice or flextime, adjustable schedules or hours are examples of flexible temporal and physical borders. Thinking about tasks to do when you get home from work or thinking about work when home are examples of psychological borders. When the borders between work and family do not stand firm and too much flexibility or permeability occurs, then blending develops and the two domains are no longer exclusive (Clark, 2000). Blending is more commonly found in family-run businesses or in individuals who work from home. Some scholars argue flextime or flexplace actually produce more permeable borders increasing family conflict (Smit et al., 2016).

Strong borders are inflexible, impermeable, and do not allow blending, thus creating a clear distinction between work and family, whereas weak borders do not create clear distinctions leading to more conflict. Donald and Linington (2008) found family borders were more permeable than work borders. Border-crossers are those individuals who make frequent transitions between the domains of work and family (Clark, 2000). People are essentially border

crossers (Donald & Linington 2008), moving back and forth between the spheres of work and home.

Border-Keepers are also influential. Border-keepers have the ability to influence each domain but lack the power to cross the borders (Clark, 2000). Often these are spouses and supervisors who help the border-crosser manage each domain. Clark (2000) argued that border-keepers often have different definitions of work and family, guarding their domains by limiting flexibility and creating conflict.

Avoiding conflict. As in any relationship, communication is key. Clark (2000) claimed, "Frequent communication is one way to alleviate role conflict since unrealistic or poorly timed demands are less likely to be made by members of one domain if they are able to understand the border-crosser's other-domain responsibilities" (p. 762). When domain members acknowledge both domains and exhibit what Clark (2000) referred to as "other-domain awareness" they have a better understanding of the commitments and challenges in each domain and facilitate better communication. Occasional co-crossing and increased communication help increase other domain awareness (Clark, 2000). Smit et al. (2106) identified advances in communication as contributors to boundary crossing by enabling individuals to easily fluctuate between roles at any time of the day. Clark (2000) found, "Frequent supportive communication between border-crossers and border-keepers about other-domain activities will moderate the ill-effects of situations that would otherwise lead to imbalance" (p. 754).

Commitment is another major factor in avoiding work-family conflict. According to Clark (2000), commitment is manifested when domain members care about the border-crosser as a total person and support their other domain responsibilities. Further, "Border-crossers whose

domain members show high commitment to them will have higher work/family balance" (Clark, 2000, p. 764).

Balance. The domains of work and family and the borders that lay between must work in tandem for balance to occur (Clark, 2000). In the work domain, employers would benefit from reflecting on the culture and values of the organization by offering a family-friendly environment. If this is not possible, strong borders must be kept to maintain balance (Clark, 2000). Balance can also be achieved by engaging in supportive behavior. Supportiveness from supervisors, spouses, and employees can encourage or discourage balance. Clark (2000) suggested supervisor training to learn how to be supportive of employees' family situations. In addition to trained empathy, employees should be given the opportunity to be central participants with responsibilities they can identify with. Clark (2000) argued this will give employees the tools needed to increase work/family balance independently.

On the flip side, the individual can increase work/family balance with open communication and central participation. Clark (2000) suggested sharing work challenges and successes with family members or telling coworkers about family events as a way to facilitate balance. Increasing central participation and becoming experts in work and family responsibilities can lead to increased influence further allowing better work/family balance (Clark, 2000).

Gender roles. Women typically report higher levels of burnout and less leisure time resulting in stronger work-family conflict (Versey, 2015), and women have been the primary focus of work-family conflict (Donald & Linington, 2008). The life satisfaction and relationships of work-family conflict in men were examined by Donald and Linington (2008); their findings revealed "moderate levels of work/family conflict and positive life satisfaction

suggesting that work/family conflict is not a major issue" (p. 668) for men. To maintain a homogeneous participation sample, this study did not focus on gender role orientation. However, I truly feel that male principals experience high job demands accompanied with high levels of stress. During my years of service, I witnessed many male school administrators battle the conflicts between work and home.

Chapter Summary

School principals are often advised to leave work at work and to take time for self-care; however, anyone in this position can claim this is easier said than done. With the average school principal working more than 56 hours a week (Riley, 2018), it can be difficult to control how and when work and family will intrude upon each other, creating a cycle of never-ending stress. Ismail et al. (2014) found high levels of stress and problems on the job increase problems in the employees' family affairs, ultimately leading to a decrease in the ability to control family conflict.

This study explores the phenomenon of stress in female high school principals to understand the context of school principals, the effects of high turnover among principals, and gender-related issues. This chapter reviewed the potential effects of turnover on students, staff, and districts, detailing how stress affects work satisfaction and ultimately disrupts the family. This study examines the lived experiences and daily lives of these women, so researchers alike have a better understanding of how stress affects a female individual in the position of high school principal. The goal is not to compare their experiences with men who are school principals; rather the focus is on women because they comprise the majority of the teaching force and 54% of all principals in 2016 (Grissom et al., 2021). Therefore, they are likely to move into administrative positions. By examining the lived experiences of women who are principals, I

hope to explore issues and events that lead to departure as well identify supports that may

prevent turnover. Chapter 3 outlines the method of this study, including the specific components

of a phenomenological study, participants, data collection, how data were analyzed, and

researcher perspective.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Great principals have an immense impact on student and teacher success (Tłusciak-Deliowska & Dernowska, 2015) and yet, "Research shows that one out of every two principals is not retained beyond their third year of leading a school" (NASSP, 2017, p. 1). Perhaps more astonishingly, when they do leave a position, many principals are choosing to leave the field of education altogether (Viadero, 2009). Although policy and research efforts have focused on the effects that principal turnover has on student achievement, teacher retention, and financial resources (Lerum, 2016), less focus has been on investigating the reasons school principals are leaving their positions at a rapid rate.

My own experience as a school principal was the driving force behind this study. In this chapter, I reflect on my experiences as a school principal and how stress affected my personal and professional life. In addition, I describe how I bracketed my own experiences to allow the voices of the participants to be at the center of this study. At the same time, my experiences informed this study while also allowing me the opportunity to connect with potential participants as both scholar and practitioner. Because I brought my own experiences to this study, I chose to focus on female principals. I acknowledge the stress male principals undergo and I make no claim as to which gender experiences greater levels of work-family conflict.

Statement of the Problem

School principals may choose to leave their current position for a variety of reasons: school performance, relocation to another school, retirement, advancement to a new position, or better benefits (Béteille et al., 2012). However, this study aimed to explore stress as one of the main causes for leaving. The effects of stress on the principal have an astonishing ripple effect

on the school, disrupting students, staff, district, and community. Principal turnover leads to additional costs as administrators attempt to fill a vacancy (Liu & Bellibas, 2018), consuming resources and funds that could be used for additional school resources. Liu and Bellibas identify job satisfaction as a key factor to preventing turnover and increasing principal effectiveness, claiming "despite the importance, there is surprisingly limited research for the topic" (Liu & Bellibas, 2018, p. 2). It is reasonable to assume that stress may affect principals both when on and or off the job. Clark (2000) argued that work and family domains influence each other and there is a need to balance order between the two domains.

The daily stress principals experience has the potential to spill over into their personal lives. Due to additional social and family demands women face (Loder, 2005), the stress they experience can have consequences for both their school sites and their families. The combination of home and family stress added to work stress has the potential to leave any working female feeling defeated and inadequate in either one or both roles as a professional or wife and mother. Work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) provides a conceptual framework for understanding why conflict between work and home life occurs and how this conflict can contribute to the ongoing stress of a female principal's decision to leave the principalship.

This phenomenological study sought to investigate the phenomenon of stress and how stress affected the physical and mental health as well as the family dynamics of female high school principals. Conversational interviews reflected on the various physical, temporal, and psychological borders and examined the lived experiences of participants. Interviews identified how work stress contributed to stress of balancing work and home and revealed what supports can be put into place to prevent high turnover in the position of school principal. This chapter first reflects on the statement of the problem and the purpose of this study. Next, this chapter

discusses why a phenomenological approach was chosen for this study and how this form of methodology and research questions were used to drive this study after which an in-depth review of participant selection and data collection and analysis is offered. The end of this chapter closes with a reflection on the trustworthiness, validity, and limitations of this study.

Approach

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) claimed the broad purpose behind research is to gain a better understanding of a phenomenon. In this study, composed of a small group of female high school principals, stress is the identified phenomenon. The term "stress" has many definitions, but for purposes of this study, stress is defined as "a process in the body, to the body's general plan for adapting to all the influences, changes, demands and strains to which it might be exposed" (Levi, 1984 as cited in Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016, p. 120). Many scales have been designed to measure stress. However, stress tolerance varies from person to person: what one individual views as a stressful situation may not affect another individual to the same degree. This variance makes it nearly impossible to compare individual experiences. One way to identify stress is through self-reflection of one's inner feelings, mental health, and physical conditions.

Self-reflection will not provide data that can be placed into a formula, charted and given a numerical value; but it will, however, provide a deeper understanding of how the individual is coping with the stress. My interest in the phenomenon of stress is on individual experiences of female high school principals and how these experiences are interpreted. The overall purpose of qualitative research is to understand how people make sense of their lives and lived experiences, relying on the views of participants in the study (Creswell, 2012). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) claimed, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have

constructed; that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 15). For this reason, I chose to conduct a qualitative study.

Qualitative research also possesses additional characteristics that were effective for this study including: the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, the inductive process, and rich descriptions. These components are the most significant functions used to understand qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and each of these components appropriately served this study. The focus of this study was on exploring the phenomenon of stress in female high school principals. As the researcher, I conducted interviews and analyzed the data. A rich description of interviews and data content was woven into the findings of the study. Quotes and excerpts from interviews support and contribute to the descriptive nature of this qualitative study.

Methodology

Due to the complex nature of the role of a school principal, stress can often dominate the role and lead to feelings of anxiety, anger, frustration, and tension, impairing personal health, and mental function. Ongoing work stress may potentially spill over into the family and home life of these principals; a bad day at work could result in feelings of anger and frustration leading to a bad mood when they get home. Clark (2000) claimed work and family life influence each other, using the concept of border-crossing to characterize the domains of work and family and the interactions between them.

This study concentrates on the personal stories of female secondary school principals who have experienced substantial stress while in the role. From their personal stories, this study identified how stress affected the health and mental wellbeing of the study's participants, including the ways stress may have spilled over into the home and family boundaries. Because

the focus was on participants' lived experiences as principals, this study employed a phenomenological approach. "Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (van Manen, 2014, p. 9). It is a method used to gain access to the world as we experience it (van Manen, 2014, p. 28). Heidegger (2010) provided a popular explanation of the meaning of phenomenology; "[t]o the things themselves!" (as cited in van Manen, 2014, p. 184). Heidegger's translation of the term phenomenology highlights the concept that something that is hidden or concealed must "let it show itself" (as cited in van Manen, 2014, p. 29). Merriam and Tisdell (2012) alleged phenomenological studies "are of intense human experience" and are "well suited to study effective, emotional, and often intense human experiences" (p. 28).

Phenomenology can best be described as a method for questioning (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2014) to better understand the meaning of the phenomenon. "Constructed from *phaino*, phenomenon means to bring to light, to place in brightness" (Heidegger, 1977, as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Moustakas (1994) stated any phenomenon is a suitable starting point for investigation. In this particular study, the phenomenon in question was the effects of stress.

I brought my own experiences of being a school principal to this study. Recently, I identified as the stressed and burned out school principal. My health had depleted, anxiety left me sleep-deprived, and the stress had taken a toll on my marriage and relationship with my children. At a doctor's visit, my doctor looked me straight in the eye and said, "Three more months of this and you will have a serious meltdown that will take you years to recover from." In my heart, I knew my doctor was right, and after a long hard conversation with my husband, I quit my job the next day. A year later, I can look back and say it was the right decision. My experiences led me to wonder if I was alone in what I had experienced or if they exemplified

common experiences among women who are high school principals. I further wondered if my experiences were common. Did others choose to walk away from their principalships. How did the decision to leave the position affect them? How did stress from the job affect their personal lives? Am I the only person who unnoticeably took their stress home and tore apart their marriage? How many other principals were under doctor's care for anxiety? Although I often feel alone, I believe that I am not the only one who lived through this kind of experience. Phenomenology provides a means to explore this sense of wonder by examining the experiences of female secondary principals to understand what it is like to be a principal, to understand their lived experiences.

This sense of wonder is what van Manen (2014) referred to as a phenomenologically reflective attitude. "A good phenomenological study almost always starts with wonder or passes through a phase of wonder" (van Manen, 2014, p. 37). This sense of wondering attentiveness is the spark that set this phenomenological study in motion. A phenomenological study shares the lived experiences and daily lives of these women so researchers have a better understanding of how stress affects a female individual in the position of a high school principal and can identify supports to prevent turnover in the educational field.

Moustakas (1994), Spiegelberg (1965), and van Manen (2014) are identified as leaders in the field of phenomenological studies. While Moustakas (1994) and Spieglberg (1965) established a process and guidelines for this field of research, I more closely resonated with van Manen's phenomenologically reflective attitude and the format he discussed in his book *Phenomenology of Practice.* Hence, I based data analysis of this study around his blueprint for thematic analysis. His format includes the process of "recovering structures of meanings that are embodied and dramatized in human experience represented in a text" (p. 319). However, I used

Moustakas's (1994) definition of the Epoché and his argument that "The Epoché offers a resource, a process for potential renewal" (p. 90). It was thought that given the opportunity to reflect and recall living with the daily stress of the principalship, participants would be able to gain their own sense of renewal.

Participants

Participant selection for this phenomenological study was purposeful to gather a homogeneous sample of individuals who share a similar experience. Purposeful sampling, the most common form of nonprobability sampling is commonly used in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and is "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 96). Moustakas (1994) claimed, "there are no in-advance criteria for locating and selecting the research participants" (p. 107), further asserting essential criteria for participation should include: the research participant must have experienced the phenomenon, wishes to understand the nature of the phenomenon, is willing to partake in a lengthy interview, consents to audio tape of said interview and agrees to allow data retrieved to be published in a dissertation and future publications. To understand and focus primarily on the phenomenon of stress endured as a female high school principal, no other personal demographic information such as age or race was collected.

For this study, participants must have met three criteria: being female, had served as a high-school level principal, and left at least one principalship at the high school level. These particular attributes helped support this study for three primary reasons. First females now comprise a majority of principalships in the United States with 54% of the total principal population as of 2016 (Grissom et al., 2021), yet males continue to represent nearly two-thirds of

all high school principals and three-quarters of school district superintendents (Wong, 2019). Secondly, job satisfaction of high school administrators is significantly lower than administrators in primary schools (Sener & Özan, 2017), leading to higher levels of stress. Third, female principals have been shown to experience greater work-family conflict than their male colleagues (Eckman, 2004). These specifics provide a foundation to support work/family border theory, ultimately providing descriptive real-lived experiences of how stress at work leads to stress at home.

Qualifications of this specific criteria reflect the purpose of this study and will yield information-rich cases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This unique sample of female high school principals were likely to share similar characteristics of being highly educated, possessing good work ethic, and exhibiting strong leadership and communication skills. It is also anticipated that they would have a common shared experience. This intentional selection of participants helped identify and clarify the phenomenon of stress on female principals and provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

To begin this study, I intentionally sought out participants who met the criteria and was able to find two participants within the University. First, I provided the individuals with a summary guide of my study outlining the purpose of the study and criteria for participation. I distributed this information via email. Having worked in the field of education for more than 15 years, I was also able to reach out to one of the Coordinators at Teachers College of San Joaquin, who put me in contact with two additional potential participants. Once participants were identified, and upon completion of the interview, participants were asked to recommend a colleague who could be a potential participant for this study. Often referred to as snowball

sampling, this form of purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The total number of participants needed for this study was driven by data collected during the interview process. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) advised the sample size should maximize information and reach saturation of said information. This implied no additional or relevant information would be gained from continued interviews. The number of participants in a phenomenological study will vary depending on the nature of the inquiry. "[T]he general aim should be to gather enough experientially rich accounts that make possible the figuration of powerful experiential examples . . . to make contact with life as it is lived" (van Manen, 2016, p. 353). For this reason, I recruited six participants for this particular study.

All participants were required to sign a consent form establishing a clear agreement for participation. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. All participants were given a pseudonym to protect participant privacy. Any information that the researcher deemed as private or possibly damaging was removed or disguised to protect the identity of the participant (Mostakas,1994). Participants were also given an opportunity to review findings and themes, at which point they may confirm or add to the data.

Data Collection

Due to my direct experience with the phenomenon as a school principal, it was vital that I reflect on my own experiences, acknowledging my biases and prejudgments prior to the start of data collection. These biases are described in further detail under the researcher perspective section of this chapter. This process, known as the Epoché, is unique to phenomenological research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2014). Once these biases and assumptions were set aside or bracketed, it was easy to "be completely open, receptive, and naive

in listening and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) contend, "The extent to which any person can bracket his or her biases and assumptions is open to debate" (p. 27). Moustakas (1994) reinforced this by declaring the "Epoché is rarely perfectly achieved" (p. 90). However, he offset this by calling for the need of regular practice to "increase one's competency in achieving" this process (p. 90).

Data for this study were collected through the use of phenomenological interviews "used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential material" (van Manen, 2014, p. 314); phenomenological interviews are the primary method used for data collection in a phenomenological study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This type of interview "serves the very specific purpose of exploring and gathering experimental narrative material" (van Manen, 2016, p. 314) which can later be used for phenomenological reflection.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) advised that the number of participants should maximize information and reach saturation or to the point where no relevant information will be gained; six participants were necessary for this particular study. Each participant partook in an initial interview, which lasted 60-90 minutes. Second or follow-up interviews were anticipated but not needed. Participants were contacted and sent a copy of the findings to review and confirm information gathered. van Manen (2016) advised that interviews should not be rushed so participants were given ample time to reflect and share, and I engaged in the interview as long as necessary to gather a collection of rich data. Ideally, it was anticipated interviews would be conducted face-to-face. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face interviews were not deemed safe for all participants and were therefore held virtually through a secured Zoom®

meeting. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants and held in the spring 2020.

Van Manen (2016) advised, "People are more inclined to remember and tell life stories when surroundings are conducive to thinking about these experiences" (p. 315). I want the participant to feel comfortable in their environment so it will be easier to reflect on their experiences and tell their stories. The goal is to help the participant feel comfortable and to win their trust. All interviews were audio-recorded using a digital device. I refrained from taking notes during conversations to not distract the participant, thus allowing me to focus my attention on the conversations. I took notes following interviews to identify key points and references.

Interview questions (see Appendix A) were intended to support the intentions of the interview and focus on the lived experience of the phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask questions of each participant while providing flexibility to follow up on responses and allow the narrative to unfold based on participants' responses. The goal of each interview was to hear the participant's story. I wanted to explore how she became a school principal and how the position changed her as a person. Themes I wished to explore included: professional and personal relationships and how these relationships changed with the stress load, how she handled the stress with coping mechanisms, support systems, health concerns, self-image, tipping points, and reflections on her principalship. Probing or follow-up questions were then asked based on the participant responses. At the conclusion of each interview, I reflected on field notes and themes that emerged; these notes were then used as additional data to support findings. In addition, I considered my own reactions to the interview as a way to continuously bracket my experiences so they did not influence the ways I understood each individual participant's narrative.

Data Analysis

The phenomenological analysis was guided by the phenomenological question, "What is it like to live with the daily stress of the principalship?" Through participant interviews, I hoped to gather stories and personal reflections that painted a vivid story of participant lived experiences.

The audio recordings of each interview were transcribed verbatim by a transcription service. Transcribing and analyzing interviews began immediately following the interview and continued, as interviews were ongoing. This is a "much-preferred way to analyze data in a qualitative study" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 197) because simultaneous data collection and analysis assisted in predicting coding categories early on and helped prepare for the next participant interview. Data collection and analysis are part of the same process and, according to van Manen (2014), should not be separated. Once interviews were completed and it was determined that enough information was collected to the point of saturation or recurring responses, then the horizontalization process commenced, which involved "laying out all the data for examination and treating the data as having equal weight" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 27). Data were then organized into themes. I then integrated van Manen's (2014) blueprint for thematic analysis, which is the process of "recovering structures of meanings that are embodied and dramatized in human experience represented in a text" (p. 319). My epoché and the phenomenological reduction drove this process. Phenomenological reduction is "the process of continually returning to the essence of the experience to derive the inner structure or meaning in and on itself" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 27). Phenomenological reduction diverted my analysis back to the participant experience and "the qualities of the experience become the

focus" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90). I looked at the experiences from various angles, reevaluating data multiple times to reveal the nature of the phenomenon.

The following steps were initiated: First, I "attend to the text as a whole" (van Manen, 2014, p. 320) and formulate a phrase that captures the text as a whole. A single word or sentence will be what captures the essence of the phenomenon. Next, I read the transcripts several times, singling out phrases or statements that revealed the phenomenon and identified phenomenological meanings that could be translated into thematic expressions. The most extensive piece of thematic analysis lay in the final task that van Manen (2014) identified as the detailed reading approach. This involved an examination of every sentence or cluster of sentences to identify what it revealed about the phenomenon. For every sentence, I reflected and asked, "What does this sentence say about the experience of stress for a female principal?" I then began to identify key ideas, words, or categories and placed each sentence or cluster into piles with common topics. These later became the themes and subthemes of the study

Researcher Perspective

As I reflected on any personal experiences, prejudices, assumptions, and viewpoints with regard to females in the role of school principal and the stress they may have experienced, I acknowledged I had some anger and remorse lingering that could have influenced this study. My experience in the principalship was not positive. Lack of support, long hours, staff turnover, and extended commute led to burnout, emotional exhaustion, and mental instability, affecting my professional and personal life. I was angry that I was not given the proper support to perform my job successfully, and I was remorseful about leaving my position so abruptly and unprofessionally. I feared this may influence potential employment.

My experience lead me to automatically assume all principals experience extreme stress, work long hours, and have limited support and issues with staff. I also assumed females undergo more stress than their male counterparts due to family and home responsibilities. I suspected that this work-related stress will have impinged upon the physical and mental health of school principals. I also had the preconception that female principals do not have the time or energy to take care of themselves or engage in successful coping mechanisms because I did not have the time or energy to go to the gym, do yoga, or eat a healthy lunch daily.

When reflecting on the position of the school principal, I presumed those in the position were highly qualified with teaching experience and leadership skills. I assumed they were well educated and possessed a valid teaching credential, administrative credential, and graduate-level education. I expected they were experienced and will have spent some time in the classroom, were familiar with the school curriculum, were aware of classroom management strategies, and were knowledgeable in education law. They should have been in tune with the school setting and aware of the community culture. This ideal profile of a school principal should be able to manage the average high school effectively. A deficiency in any of these areas will lead to additional stress.

The reflective process known as Epoché assisted in limiting the potential of imposing my personal biases, beliefs, or values onto participants of this study. "The Epoché describes the ways that we need to open ourselves to the world as we experience it and free ourselves from presuppositions" (van Manen, 2014, p. 220). I can now acknowledge my anger and remorse and pardon my emotions, assumptions, and experiences. According to van Manen (2014), the various assumptions I conjured can stand in the way of opening up to the living meaning of the phenomenon (p. 215).

I feared that setting aside my emotions and refraining from my personal biases would be a difficult task. Moustakas (1994) identified, "There are life experiences that are so severe, intense, and telling, some things that are so ignited, and some people so attached to or against each other and themselves that clear openness or pure consciousness is virtually an impossibility" (p. 90). I did not want to let my personal experiences affect the outcomes of this study. I resonated with van Moustakas's (1994) argument, "The Epoché offers a resource, a process for potential renewal" (p. 90). With ongoing practice and determination, this process helped me let go of some of the trapped prejudices and emotions I concealed (Moustakas, 1994).

Before conducting interviews, I revisited my reflections and followed the Epoché process of bracketing or temporarily setting aside my assumptions and preconceptions to focus on the participants' lived experiences. Because my personal emotions ran deep, I practiced this process before each interview with the hopes of releasing my preconceptions and biases, allowing the participants' voices to be discovered in their lived experiences.

The process of Epoché was powerful and just as Moustakas shared; it was in fact a process of renewal for myself. After the second participant interview, I realized that my experiences did not just resonate with myself and my flaws but were in fact more common than I ever could have ever imagined. I came to realize that I was never alone; there were women out there facing very similar issues.

Trustworthiness

"Ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research involves conducting the investigation in an ethical manner" (Merriam &Tisdell, 2016, p. 237). To establish trustworthiness in this study, I had to "become aware of personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 27). To ensure my personal biases were not imposed

on the data analysis, participants were encouraged to participate in respondent validation. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) claimed, "This is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say" (p. 246). As my preliminary analysis begins and topics develop, findings were presented to participants to confirm I accurately captured their experiences. The identified themes became objects of reflection in follow-up conversations where the participant and myself focused on the lived experiences.

Upon completion of this study, I intended to have a study that demonstrates a phenomenological attitude and possesses the presentation of phenomenological insights. In true phenomenological study, "One should be able to recognize the presence of a phenomenological attitude and the presentation of phenomenological insights in the study" (van Manen, 2014, p. 319).

Limitations

As with any research study, there were potential limitations to this study. The limitations identified thus far included: probable bias due to personal experiences, the assumption that all participants are going to respond truthfully, and the possibility that the participant experiences are not similar to others in the same role. To overcome any potential personal biases, I continued to focus on bracketing my experiences and preconceived ideas about the phenomenon of stress among high school principals. A process of continuous personal reflection helped ensure that I remained aware of the potential for my own ideas to influence the study. It was reasonable to expect that participants would be hesitant to share their lived experiences. To encourage participants to tell their stories truthfully, I asked questions to solicit their stories. I listened without questioning the veracity of their narratives and when needed, prompted them for additional details. I anticipated that those who agreed to participate in this study would be

interested in sharing their experiences and providing information that could be helpful to aspiring female principals.

Qualitative research findings are not intended to be generalized to a population of like individuals. Nevertheless, the data collection methods used in this study illuminated the experiences of female high school principals. Although not intended to be representative of all high school principals who are women, the experiences of the principals in this study can help scholars and practitioners identify ways to support principals and reduce turnover.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of stress through the lens of a small group of female high school principals in the Central to Northern California area to better understand how stress affected their mental and physical health and the dynamics of their home. In this chapter, I identified a qualitative phenomenological study as my choice of methodology for this research project. I outlined my strategy for collecting and analyzing data following the common traits associated with phenomenological research. I provide an in-depth description of my personal biases and a plan to bracket said biases to reveal the participants true experience untarnished by my preconceptions and validated by participant review. Finally, I closed this chapter by addressing potential limitations to this study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter outlines an analysis of the data collected from phenomenological interviews, which aimed to identify and discuss the stressors and barriers female high school principals face when balancing work, family, and home. The goal of this study was to hear the participants' stories guided by the phenomenological question, "What is it like to live with the daily stress of the principalship?" Therefore, the research questions guiding this study were focused on the evolution for work-family conflict bringing light to the problems and stress female high school principals face.

Research Questions

The questions guiding this research were:

1. What are the significant sources of stress, if any, that female school principals face?

2. As a result of ongoing stress, what physical and mental symptoms did female school principals exhibit during their time as principal?

3. What coping mechanisms (negative or positive), if any, did the principals use to alleviate stress in their professional and personal lives?

4. In what ways, if any, do the borders between professional and personal lives shift as levels of stress change?

Qualitative data were collected through one-on-one interviews that were held during spring 2020, each lasting approximately 60-90 minutes in length. Six females consented to participate in this study. While this sample size may appear to be small, it was significant enough to reach saturation of data. All participants served as a high school principal at some point in their career. All participants signed a consent form indicating confidentiality of each participant would be maintained throughout the entire study. The six principals are identified as P1-P6. Consent forms, interview recordings and transcripts are kept in a locking filing cabinet.

While conducting interviews, a semi-structured approach was followed, which consisted of 12 interview questions. The goal of each interview was to hear the participant's story and this structured approach ensured all participants reflected on the same questions. Each interview was audio recorded and sent to a third party for transcription immediately following the interview. Transcripts were reviewed and analyzed simultaneously as interviews occurred.

By the time all interviews were completed, I was ready to start the horizontalization process. This involved laying out all the data, giving each piece of data equal weight, examining the data and then organizing the data into themes, and each transcript was printed on a different colored paper. I then read each transcript a minimum of three times. By the third reading, I was able to start identifying common themes in the transcripts. Following van Manen's (2014) blueprint for thematic analysis, I took each transcript and cut out sentences or clusters of data. I read each sentence or cluster and asked myself "What does this say about the experience for this female principal?" I would then identify a category pile into which to place it. Initially, data were placed into 32 various categories. I reviewed the 32 categories and combined areas that were similar, resulting in 24 categories. I then studied the categories and identified the main topics and labeled sub-categories. By the end, I was able to identify six distinct themes in the data with 18 sub-categories. Because the transcripts were printed on colored paper, I was able to identify which participant made each specific response.

Demographics of Participants

Participant selection in this study was purposeful to gather a homogeneous sample of individuals who share similar experiences of being female, served a principalship in the high school setting, and left a principalship. Participant criteria were specifically chosen for three reasons. First, in the U.S. females make up 54% of all school principals (NCES, 2020).

Secondly, job satisfaction is reported to be significantly lower among high school principals, and, finally, females have been shown to experience greater work-family conflict when compared to their male counterparts.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), purposeful sampling is also commonly used in qualitative studies similar to this one with the assumption that the researcher wants to gain insight and understanding from a specific demographic of participants. Moustakas (1994) argued the determining factor for participation in a study such as this one is defined by the participant having experienced the phenomenon, wishes to understand the phenomenon, and being willing to partake in the study.

To understand and focus on the phenomenon of stress experienced as a female high school principal, no personal demographics such as age, race, or years of service were collected. All participants identified as female, and all participants served a principalship in the central or northern part of California. Participants were questioned about marital status and family make up. This information was important to establish a foundation of factors that may influence stress in the principalship and in the home.

Marital and Family Status

Five of the six participants interviewed self-identified as married. Two of the female participants had been divorced at some point during their careers and remarried. One participant was not married or in a current relationship. Five of the six participants identified themselves as mothers. Four of the participants indicated they had adult children living outside of their primary residence, and two participants indicated they still had school-aged children living at home. One participant indicated she is part of a blended family with her second husband's children also being raised by her.

Current job status. All participants reported they were currently employed in education. Two of the participants currently work as school principals while the remaining four participants reported working at the district level in various positions, including: Supervisor of Academic Instruction, Director of Educational Services, and Personnel Regional Officer. All participants expressed a passion for education and were proud of their personal accomplishments.

Current home responsibilities. All participants had children and primarily identified themselves first as a mother. Five of the six participants were currently married and self-identified as a wife second. One participant identified herself as single. Participant 6 further identified herself as a daughter and a sister, and throughout her interview, she referred to her mother and sisters quite frequently. The other five participants did not further identify themselves as a daughter or sister and referred to their extended family very little.

When asked what their responsibilities at home were, three participants reported clearly defined roles at home, and P3 stated:

> We are very much one of those very traditional couples in that there is a female role and there is a male role. So, when the kids were younger everything was "my job." My husband does the lawn and the painting and all of those typical traditional male roles.

Participant 6 referred to her home as her "second shift" where she cooked, cleaned, and walked the dog. Three of the participants claimed to not cook very well so their husband handled the cooking. Overall, every participant described further responsibilities in the household such as cooking, cleaning, taking care of the bills, etc.

Career path. Research cites three major reasons individuals go into school administration: the desire to make a difference (with students, staff, and community), personal or professional challenge, or having the ability to initiate change (within the district). Participant

responses were consistent with these findings. Three of the participants did not enter the field of education with aspirations of becoming a principal. P1 stated, "I never wanted to be a principal," while P2 claimed, "I kinda went kicking and screaming" into the principalship. These women were sought out and compelled by a supervisor to step up to a challenge, and they accepted.

P1 was a physical education teacher until she was convinced to go into administration by her site principal. P2 was a middle school teacher for 12 years before becoming a school counselor and pushed to get an admin credential. P3 was in her district for 16 years before taking an administrative position. P4 started off as a substitute teacher working her way up to vice principal and eventually principal. P5 would be an exception having only worked in the classroom for 3 years before being sought by her site principal to pursue her administrative credential. P6 taught for 10 years before finally being convinced to go into administration.

P2 and P3 both stated they knew the stressful demands of being a principal and held off going into administration until their children were out of school. P3 stated:

> I was very aware that I had a duty to my kids, my personal kids at home. I didn't actually go into administration until my youngest graduated from high school. He literally graduated from high school and then I immediately got an administrative job.

P2 echoed this:

> I did not go into administration at all until after he graduated because I knew the impact and me being away at night and the commitment, and not that teachers don't have a commitment, but teachers can come home and kind of still be in it. But as an administrator especially at a high school, you have lots of nighttime duties and lots of expectations beyond. So, I did not intentionally go into administration until he graduated from high school.

The next section of Chapter 4 addresses the findings that emerged from data analysis. Figure 1 represents the emergent themes from participant interviews and reflects how family-work conflict blend into each other through the major ways of time-based, strain-based, or behavior-based conflicts. These female participants revealed how they were often forced to

choose between events occurring at the same time. They shared the strain of how their role as

principal interfered with being a wife or mother, and they reflected on the behavior patterns they

exhibited as a result of the stress and demands of the job as a high school principal. Through the

analysis of data described above, six themes emerged: (a) work became the priority, (b) coping

mechanisms, (c) implications of being a woman, (d) lonely at the top, (e) blurred boundaries, and

(f) the need for more support. An additional 18 sub-findings within the six themes were also

found and are analyzed in this chapter.

Figure 1. Six emergent themes.

Findings

The first major theme that emerged from analysis of participant data was the gradual takeover of the principalship where work became the priority. This takeover could also be characterized as a "hostile takeover." The word "hostile" can be defined as "not friendly," "not hospitable," and while the school environment, students, and staff may be warm and hospitable the job itself proved to be demanding and inhospitable (Merriam-Webster, n.d., para. 2, 7). Participants described the job of high school principal as exhausting, taking all their time and energy, and leaving behind very little of themselves for home, family, and to attend to personal needs. As work became the priority, other aspects of the female principals' lives had to yield, including marriage and an inconsistent daily schedule. These sub-themes are also discussed in this emerging theme.

Work Became the Priority

Over time, the job as high school principal can become all consuming, with long hours coupled with never ending extracurricular activities that must be supervised. The 2017 Australian Principal Occupational Health and Wellbeing Survey found 56% of principals work up to 56 hours per week with an additional 27% working 66 plus hours a week (Riley, 2018). Data gathered from this study were consistent with the data from the 2017 survey. P4 reported to have worked "about 65 hours a week on average." P3 claimed, "There are so many things that just come up that take priority over home and although it shouldn't, but you feel like you are doing that, that greater good." P6 recalled not having enough time in the day to think about everyday functions like going to the bathroom. "I had a timer on my phone for bathroom breaks."

P6 did feel as if she placed work over her husband and family:

I think that my principalship, probably if I had to rank things, work was always on the top of the list and then it was my son and then it was my husband and then it was my dog. That was the order of operations.

When asked how she attempted to balance work and home, P4's response was, "There is no balance of work and home. It is all work." She (P4) explained, "My kids are used to being here with me all the time and they are really good. They don't complain. They are very helpful. They are just kind of used to it."

Two participants divulged they had no time to spend with adult children. P2 recalled her last year in the principalship as being all about work. "There was no balancing. I didn't see my family . . . Well, let me say this, I didn't see my son except for major events like Christmas or Thanksgiving." P3 recalled only visiting her son away at college twice because she was so busy.

Participants reported the feeling of always being on, "You're always on. Your phone is always on. Your emails are always on" (P6). Smit et al. (2106) identified advances in communication (email and cell phones) as contributors to stress, enabling individuals to easily fluctuate between roles at any time of the day.

P4 prided herself on being so available to her community:

These kids, these families, they have my cell phone number. They know how to contact me. They text me all the time. They email me on evenings and weekends, and they expect to get an answer and not in a demanding way, but they just know I'm very connected with them like that.

Daily work hours also appeared to vary by participant. P1 recalled the expectation was for her to work 12-to-14-hour days and she was unable to sustain the demand after 14 years of service, "Really, an eight-hour day was realistically more about 12 hours a day." Participants did reveal that long work hours did take a toll on their marriages. A majority of participants (4) confessed

that their husbands had a difficult time understanding the demands of their principalship. Few

spouses were very supportive while others were not.

Marriage. On the job, the principal must play a neutral role supporting staff, students,

and the community all at the same time. P1 described:

> Oh, I would say that I would come home . . . I can't be snappy at work. I can't snap at anybody at work. I have to be this perfect individual that always has the right thing to say even though there were things that I would love to say that I could never say. So, I think I would come home and then take that out on him (husband) and my kids, like just be more on edge and snappy.

P4 professed in her first marriage her husband was not supportive toward her (P4) career

claiming her ex-husband felt as if she "was too dedicated to work, to pay attention to what he

wanted me to pay attention to." P4 went further to deny that work was the reason her first

marriage fell apart; it was rather an excuse her ex-husband made.

P3 recalled a point in her marriage when she felt this wedge between herself and her

husband:

> There was a point in our relationship where I felt very disconnected and it wasn't because he had done anything different or anything had changed in our home other than I was so busy doing other things that I wasn't paying attention to the family I had in my home. I understand why so many people ended up either with different partners or whatever their situation is. I just got lucky that even though I felt disconnected, I certainly didn't go anywhere else. And although he recognized it, because we talked about it later, he figured that eventually I would find my balance, so he was waiting it out, which is a tough thing to hear when you hear your partner say, "Well, I was waiting for you to come back."

P5's reflection of her first marriage was deeper, "I would like to reflect on that home/life

balance piece, because I do think that is what destroyed my first marriage." She recalled putting

so much of herself into her first principalship "that my home life really suffered. My husband at

the time thought for sure I was having an affair with someone because I spent so many hours at

work" also "because he was no longer the focus of my energy" (P5). After remarrying, P5

continued to have the same struggle, "My husband now and my previous husband had a very hard time understanding the commitment that I had to my career." However, she (P5) claimed to have to "work very diligently particularly with her new husband, creating a successful balance" of work and home.

P6 also struggled with her husband and shared, "I started not telling him a lot of things because I didn't want to worry him or to have him have an adverse response." This lack of communication, or not sharing work experiences or demands could potentially drive a wedge between spouses. Participants divulged that there was never really a typical day at work but rather every day had different challenges leaving them exhausted by the end of the day, sometimes making it difficult to go home and retell or relive experiences with their spouses.

Never a typical day. By nature, the job of high school principal is very stressful. All participants were asked to describe a typical workday. P1 stated, "Holy cow. I wouldn't say any day was ever typical, other than that I woke up and went to bed every day. Anything at any moment could happen." Like P1, the other participants reported similar responses. P2 stated, "You know what, that's the thing, there really aren't typical days." P3 said, "I will say this; there is no typical day. You can plan your day out and think you know exactly what you are going to do and how you are going to do it . . . and none of that happens." P4 mentioned, "I get here about 6:45 and I am here running around like a chicken with my head cut off until about 5:45, 6:00 every night."

Four of the six participants reported getting to work early. P5 described using her daily commute to work as a time to "make a mental list of all the things that I needed to do." P6 stated "I would get there early because then you have some time kind of to yourself a little bit." Debriefing with secretaries, walking the campus, and greeting students was also described as part

of the typical morning routine. "By 7:45 at the latest, I would be at that front gate, and I would always welcome the kids in, every single day without fail, because I wanted time to know they start the day with a good morning, how are you?" P5 worked out a schedule with her assistant principals on site and scheduled who would come to campus early that day, allowing for the rest of the team to arrive to work about 30 minutes later. Strategies such as arriving at work early assisted with alleviating the stressful morning rush.

As work became the priority, participants felt their inner circle of family, friends, and colleagues began to get smaller. Working long hours isolated them from family and friends and being the head of the school isolated them from coworkers. In general, employees do not like to socialize with the boss when they are trying to escape work. Participants explained how they felt isolated and became lonely in their principalships.

Lonely at the Top

Three of the participants stated the principalship was a lonely position. P2 recalled feeling extremely lonely and isolated, "This dynamic that really isolates you as a leader." P2 shared that teachers and staff who may have been close to her eventually stopped seeking advice or confiding in her because she was "the boss." At the same time, it was challenging for her to find co-workers in whom she could confide because "she was the boss" and could not just vent to anyone who would listen. P3 stated, "I met a hundred new people because that was all my staff, but none that I could form a relationship with or none that I could talk openly with. I always had to stay in the role of principal."

P6 described, "It is very lonely because you have to be able to stand on your own and you have to be able to stand alone." This is similar to P2's remarks. As the site principal, all decisions come from their leadership; there may be some guidance from a vice principal or

others but the decisions are ultimately up to them and once those decisions are made, they must be able to stand by their decision and stand up to teachers, students, staff, the community, and their superintendent who may not be as supportive. P2 supported this with her claim that it is hard for others to realize how big the principal's job is, "everything is on your shoulders, everything the entire school and you have to own it. You don't get to say, we, so and so made that decision. They are your staff. They are your teachers. You have to own it."

P3 revealed her circle of friends became smaller because she did not have the time to talk to the people she used to talk to all the time. After working a 50-65-hour week, there was no energy left by the evening or weekend to do much. Mentally, these women may have wanted to go out to dinner on a Thursday night with some friends or go to an event on the weekend, but physically, they were so tired they did not have the energy to do so. P3 recalled wanting to participate in family activities but did not because she was too tired. "It's more just, I'm so tired and I'm sorry, so exhausted that I just can't do that, whatever that is, even if that is watching TV or eating dinner, I can't. I need to decompress." P2 also shared a similar comment, "My body just . . . I just would rather sleep or I would rather just rest and not go do."

P2 started to see a counselor to "just talk about the feeling of being lonely and isolated." P6 also discussed feelings of loneliness in the inability to have a romantic relationship due to work demands, "I felt like I was alone, yet I didn't really have time to step out and do anything about it. She claimed it was a double-edged sword:

> You feel lonely and isolated but you don't have a lot of time for yourself when you are a high school principal because you are constantly going to football games, baseball games, basketball games or events and it's just nuts.

Imagine working 50-60 hours a week and then finding time to date. According to a study done by Baboo.com, "Women spend approximately 79 minutes a day using dating apps" (Tsintziras,

2018, para. 3). Some participants reported not having time in the day to eat a proper meal and use the restroom; one could assume adding dating to this situation would be challenging.

The competitiveness of the job is also attributed to making this position lonely. Participant 5 described the job of high school principal as extremely competitive amongst colleagues, especially with male colleagues. P5 remembered going into meetings and boasting about how well her students were performing or how they just won the big game. P5 also recalled prepping 3 months ahead for state testing to give her students and staff an advantage.

P3 really opened up about her experiences, recalling when she was appointed to her first principalship her former boss was angry that she was offered a principal position so quickly. At one point, he made the comment to her "Well, there are other people that could've done it better." She responded, "Really because I'm female, or because I used to be your AP and now I'm going to be above you?" P3 shared that that relationship with her former boss never mended; he continued to be dismissing and not supportive of her role as principal, "He didn't think I should be his equal."

Coping

Participants were asked how they coped with the stress, and this theme reveals some of the health effects, mental effects, and positive coping strategies demonstrated by participants. In addition, participants revealed how this affected their home/family. Stress can be defined as a disagreeable emotional experience to a particular environment accompanied by feelings of anxiety, anger, frustration, and tension (Haydon et al., 2018). Each participant was asked to share a stressful event that occurred on the job and participants' responses were very intense. Although responses seem to depict an extreme example of a stressful event, the findings illuminate the stories of these women depicting the stress they endured daily. Not knowing what

may happen today or working in constant fear that at any time a student could get hurt or injured

pushed these women to live in a constant "fight or flight mode" threatening their well-being.

P1 described a horrific scene of finding a student attempting to commit suicide in the

lady's restroom and two families coming to school with guns to attack each other. P2 had a

student go into cardiac arrest, "We had to keep her alive for, I think it was 22 minutes before

anybody came." P3 recalled a few occasions when she had to escort a child to the hospital and

the students' parents did not show up for hours later. P4 struggled with neighborhood problems

carrying over to school, "I'm not kidding you when I say we had five fights breakout in about a

three-minute window. It was just crazy."

P5 recalled being placed at a new school site only 5 days before the first day of school to

get there and find out "the school had no facilities, no restrooms, meaning no rest rooms, no

internet connection for teachers to use any kind of instructional things, videos and stuff that they

want to pull in. Kids couldn't use technology." She went on to say:

> The school opened to parents screaming at me, kids screaming at me, teachers screaming
> at me, because all of them had been promised all these different things. Like facility wise
> and academic wise and all this stuff. The district didn't come through with anything.

Having been blindsided by the district's promises to parents and the community created an

enormous amount of stress for P5. P5 did not allude to having known about promises made by

the district to the community before taking the position.

P6 was open about the trauma she experienced with the deaths of some of her students:

> It was life changing, but that stress, like I said, we still talk about it. So, I don't think that
> has ever gone away. It may not be manifested in the way of stress, but maybe manifested
> in a way of some type of trauma that I can't even really explain to you.

It takes a strong person to take on the weight of the school. One participant described it this

way, "You have to be calm for all your teachers and all the students and all the parents and then

when you get home, you completely have a total meltdown." One can only take so much of this stress till it weighs them down.

All participants reflected on how the stress manifested in their daily lives and the coping mechanisms they used to help them get through the stress. Some of these methods were positive; however, others were not and could potentially become dangerous.

P1 provided a deeper reflection, revealing that she drank alcohol in excess. When asked if her drinking became more frequent or considerably more over time, she responded:

> Yep. Until one day you notice that every day you are coming home and instead of one wine cooler, it's now you've drank three of them every day when you come home from work, just to kind of numb your mind. So, when you can go to bed, you can actually go to sleep, because you have to do it all again the next day. So, once it gets to that point and you realize this isn't okay and then you've got to find something else to cope with.

P3 recalled having frequent Friday evening drinks with a group of principals to decompress but did not provide the impression that her Friday night drinks became an issue.

P3 began to experience anxiety attacks "every night before I would fall asleep, suddenly everything would hit me. And that was when I thought I was relaxed, and it would come forward." P5 also shared she suffered from anxiety during her principalship and stated, "That anxiety was still there. It never goes away."

P1 reported to have found comfort in food "that's just comfort food because you are just stressed and so ice cream makes you feel better or whatever, something. Eating just makes you feel better." P3 also struggled with eating patterns. "My stress was shown through eating. My go to, things that make me feel safe and comfortable and warm and all of the crap that we shouldn't eat that I still love."

Participants demonstrated that they coped with the stress by withdrawing. Because they were unable to withdraw from work, they began to withdraw from family and friends primarily

because they were too exhausted to engage in activities after work and on the weekends.

Exhaustion is a symptom of stress discussed by some of the participants. Long hours and heavy

mental stress can lead to feelings of exhaustion. P3 recalled wanting to participate in family

activities but did not because she was too tired. "It's more just, I'm so tired and I'm sorry, so

exhausted that I just can't do that, whatever that is, even if that is watching TV or eating dinner, I

can't. I need to decompress." P2 shared a similar comment, "My body just . . . I just would

rather sleep or I would rather just rest and not go do."

> P3 shed light on this when she reported:
>
> I didn't put an effort into relationships that I've had forever. I have a, I'll say a former best friend from college that I just didn't make an effort to maintain . . . I just was done. I was like, I don't have time. I have too many other things that I need to do. Maintaining this relationship is not a priority. That relationship that I had for 32 years, but I determined at a certain point that I just didn't have time for it.

P5 revealed she withdrew by simply not being attentive or distracted when she was home.

> I'll be at home and I'll be really quiet. It's not because I'm mad or anything like that. I'm thinking about how to solve the problem. I'm thinking about how I handled something and how I could have handled that better.

> The 2017 Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey found principals reported a huge effect

size of physical and mental health issues when compared to the general population (Riley, 2018).

Participant responses seemed to support these findings.

Health effects. Stress from the job, otherwise known as occupational stress "has been

linked to myriad health and psychological complaints, including headaches, high blood pressure,

sleeping difficulties, heart palpitations, heart attacks, dizzy spells, breathing problems, nervous

stomach, anxiety and depression" (Wells, 2013, p. 338). Long-term stress can affect the body in

many ways little and big.

P6 reported frequent bladder infections from lack of time to go to the bathroom.

You don't have time to go to the bathroom. I know it just sounds weird because it's like everyday functions, but you really don't think about these things. I had a timer on my phone for bathroom breaks. It got to the point where I had a timer on my phone so that when the time went off, I would just go into the bathroom, because I didn't want to get another kidney infection.

Several participants reported having muscle pain and tension in the shoulder and lower back. P6 stated she knew when she was super stressed, "I carry it in my shoulders. I carry it in my lower back. I would know because I would get really stiff and it feels like a rock in my shoulder area." P2 reported serious backaches that were attributed to stress while P3 had to frequently visit the chiropractor every 2 weeks for her neck. P5 shared that the stress affected her vision and memory.

P5 and P1 had issues with weight gain. P1 shared:

My weight would fluctuate quite a bit depending on how the year went. There were some years where I would lose 30 or 40 pounds because it was a great year, and then others that I would gain 30 or 40 pounds.

P4 and P6 had the reverse happen to them, stress suppressed their appetites and caused them to lose weight. P6 recalled not physically having enough time to eat.

During her last year of her principalship, P1:

Made the decision in my head that I was not going to do this anymore. I'm not going to kill myself. I had two emergency room visits because I couldn't breathe and had chest pains from the stress and I said, "I'm not doing this anymore."

The health symptoms shared by participants is consistent with current research on stress. Conrad Stöppler (2018) described stress as an intense reaction that can cause body and mental tension, influencing anxiety and depression. All participants alluded to having one or both body and mental tension.

Mental effects. Emotional exhaustion occurs when an individual has depleted emotional resources and experiences a lack of energy along with fatigue. Significant sources of emotional

exhaustion stem from work overload and personal conflicts at work (Maslach, 1998). The

mental effect of stress can show in different ways. P2 stated, "I felt mentally that I was a lot

more not balanced. I don't know how to explain it. It was just more kind of not balanced, just

unsettled with myself." P2 struggled with bouts of depression and lack of motivation but did not

go into detail during the interview. P3 recognized a disconnection with people in general, "It

was just like I'm not interested in hearing anything. I'm not interested in talking about anything.

I need to decompress."

Maslach (1998) found depersonalization often developed as a response to emotional

exhaustion and work overload, further arguing that depersonalization exhibits itself as a cynical

attitude to distancing from others. P3 provided a perfect example to support Machlach's

argument. P3 discussed becoming a lot more abrupt with people as she became more stressed

and professed to cutting off a relationship with her sister because she was difficult to deal with,

"There were a whole lot of people that I would still like to be close to that I just kind of let go

because I didn't have time, the energy, the focus, the desire because of the tiredness and the

stress."

Looking back, P1 realized the stress was affecting her mentally, "I just never thought that

it did affect me mentally until I was out of it, until I took a new job, and I was actually sleeping 8

hours a day, not waking up all the time." P6 said it was difficult for her to relax, "It felt

unnatural to breathe, like to just not do anything and then you almost feel guilty. Like there is

something I should be doing." P6 said:

> I guess you are under stress all the time and there is different types of stress, but maybe
> we become really good at pushing it down to where you don't understand or don't know
> that you are stressed until you haven't eaten for a couple of days or until you get sick, and
> then you still push through . . . I guess I have always lived at a high level of stress and
> just probably think that it's normal.

P3 was diagnosed with cancer during the second year of her principalship. She recalled the stress of this news combined with the stress from her new principalship introduced her to anxiety and panic attacks. She remembered telling her doctor she was a new principal and did not want to lose her position. Sitting in a hospital room, she received a call from work right out of surgery, still drugged and unable to fully comprehend the conversation. She responded, "Let me call you when I get out of the hospital." It took a life-changing event for P3 to stop and tell herself she really had to determine what is important. "Family is important, work is important. Us working with kids is critical, and we do make a huge impact on the kids that we work with, but we can't do that if we are not taking care of ourselves."

For the average person, they would not have given this situation a second thought if they were in the same position. It would be easy to say, "I have cancer, I need to have surgery, so I'm taking time off, leave me alone till I return back to work." However, for this participant (and other principals alike), it was very difficult to draw that line because so many teachers, staff, students, and community members rely on them. As high-achieving women, some participants often found it difficult to relinquish authority or rely on another to make the right decision for fear that the job will not be done to their standard or someone else's decision will only make more work for them in the long run. P5 acknowledged that she put much of the pressure on herself. She claimed she was always trying to be an overachiever.

Positive coping mechanisms. All participants claimed that physical exercise was found to be beneficial to help cope with the stress; however, finding the time and energy to do so was the issue. This is right in line with Boyland's (2011) study wherein 68% of his participants perceived on-the-job stress had an overall effect on their health and wellness, further finding lack of time for regular exercise as one of the root causes. P3 recollected, "I always found that there

was a difference on a day that I wouldn't exercise versus when I would. I could feel the way that I dealt with the day was very different if I didn't work out versus when I did."

P1 also said exercise was beneficial but did not last long. "I did that for about 6 months and then I wouldn't do it for a while and then I would go back." P3 recalled getting up at 4:00 am every morning to go to the gym, eventually this took a toll on her too. "That makes for a long day, when at 4:00 in the afternoon, you've been awake for 12 hours." P1 claimed that if she did not get up at 5:00 am and make it to a 6:00 am exercise class, there was no way she would get her exercise that day:

> It would look like you get home at 6:00 from work if you are lucky, because if there is no school event that night, there is no play or presentation, then you get to be home by 6:00, which is an early night. And then you make dinner and you do homework with your kids and then you would go back to the gym for a 7:30 class at night, which I never did because hell no, I was too tired.

P5 also shared a similar experience, "I would try to get there (gym) 3 days a week, but if I got there 2 days a week, I was lucky, because when you're a principal, even though your workday is supposedly done at 4:00, sometimes you'll be there until 6:00 or 6:30.

P6 shared that she started to do yoga as a way to relax but claimed it was hard at first, "It was hard for me to relax. It felt unnatural to breathe." She further stated, "I'll start thinking about what I'm going to make for dinner or what's happening over there and then it's like, nope, let me refocus." P6 needed to train her brain to relax, letting her breathe and stretch.

P5 recalled training her brain to disconnect when she got home from work. "I struggle with this even today but trained myself not to look at my emails and just focus on my husband or focus on my child." P6 said she had to train herself not to look at emails first thing when she woke up; she claimed this helped. "It just kind of made my mornings more like mornings for myself."

Having flexibility or control over one's daily routine provides one with a sense of comfort and may help alleviate some of the daily stress caused by schedule conflicts. As the site principal, P1 had control of the school calendar "so I scheduled the school calendar around my children's activities, so I never had to miss any of them, which was great." While this ability was specific to P1, the idea behind having flexibility and having the ability to preplan works as a coping mechanism. Planning events and activities ahead of time allocates designated time for specific events and activities with the dexterity to not double book events and or scheduling around set events. Planning also gives principals the opportunity to look at their schedules ahead of time and assign another staff such as a vice principal or counselor to attend an event or activity in their place if needed.

Women have also been the primary focus of work-family conflict (Donald & Linington, 2008) primarily because women reported higher levels of burnout (Versey, 2015). In the next theme, participants confessed they had to navigate certain expectations to being a woman and they (participants) brought to light how they perceived their gender influenced their principalship and the guilt associated with being a female.

Implications of Being a Woman

Caliper Research and Development Department (2014) found women leaders to be more flexible, empathetic, and possess stronger interpersonal skills when compared to their male counterparts. In the field of education, Rowland (2008) found female administrators to be more supportive, approachable, sensitive, understanding, nurturing, organized, creative, and receptive than male principals. According to Riley and See (2020), female school leaders reported higher quantitative, cognitive, and emotional work demands than their male counterparts. By nature,

women tend to be motherly and nurturing, and it is assumed said qualities do not fade when entrusted with the position of high school principal.

P4 expressed having more heart when it came to working with kids. As a female, she felt "maybe there is a little more heart involved, a little more concern, a little more care" further saying "when my kids hurt, I hurt, it hurts my heart." P1 recalled having an emotional attachment to her students and wanting to take care of everybody:

> I think females have the motherly instinct, the empathy and the care about. Not to say that male principals don't care about the kids. I just think female principals take on a motherly role with the kids and will bend over backwards for anything that they need, whereas male principals may not have that piece so they can kind of shut that emotional attachment off. I don't think male principals get emotionally attached to the students like female principals do.

Participants revealed that as females they had this constant internalization that compared themselves to others or had this feeling of "I'm not as good as." P6 did compare herself to others, saying, its:

> especially hard when you look different than everybody else and you have to continually tell yourself that you are worthy, that you belong here, that you have a seat at the table, that you are smart that you are capable.

P6 recollected most of her colleagues that she had were all male at her position. At times, this caused her to be uncomfortable; she recalled going to her local sports league meeting and being the only female there and felt as if the male-dominated league representatives were testing her about her knowledge of sports. P6 recognized the stress that was caused by going into situations or places similar to league meetings and would opt to sometimes send an assistant principal in her place.

P5 recalled the feeling of being the minority in her role as a female high school principal with the pressure of making sure she "had to do things just a little better." P5 recalled always

having the feeling, "I had to prove myself, particularly in a male-dominated field." P3 recalled

the frustration she felt:

> That frustrates me because I am, as a female, as capable, as intelligent as my male peers, but automatically by the nature of being a female, there is the 'she shouldn't be in high school. She should probably go to elementary.

Superville (2016) alleged, "Women often face scrutiny men don't . . . They are told to smile

more, their appearances are critiqued, and they can face harsh treatment when they assert their

authority" (para. 20).

Guilt. Part of the struggle of being a working wife and mother is the guilt these women

carried for not doing enough, whether it was at work or at home. There was always a feeling of

"I'm not doing enough" or "in my mind I'm supposed to be doing it and handling it" (P3). P6

recalled missing various activities of her children, "I didn't go to their parent conferences

meetings when they were in elementary school . . . I didn't do a lot of stuff, but I was just

starting." She further stated, "Yeah, that caused me some grief . . . I apologize to them and I tell

them that sometimes I'm really . . . I'm sorry, I didn't do the things I should probably have

done." P3 remembered feeling guilty about not visiting her kids while they were in college away

from home. P6 recalled her daughter coming home from school and having to go visit her at

work. "She would come down and the only way that she would see me was to come visit me at

my site."

As P5 reflected, she said, "As an administrator and as an educational and instructional

leader, that's who I am first and foremost. That's a really sad statement, now that I just said

that." P5 felt guilty for not identifying herself as a mother or as a wife first, realizing that she

had placed her husband and son second to her job. "I still feel guilty about giving too much time

to my workplace and not enough time to my home, or not having time for my husband."

P6 recalled having feelings of guilt after realizing she was taking her work problems home with her. "I tried not to really have bad days or to bring it home. We think we're doing a good job of not bringing it (problems) home, but that's a lie too." P3 shared the difficult decision of not accompanying her husband back home when his mother was passing:

> I can see he needs the support. I can see that he wants me to go and my response was, I'll call our daughter and I'll have her go with you. I said, 'I'm a brand-new principal. I'm at this school and school is starting. I can't do that. I can't take a week and go. I didn't.

Gender bias in the work field. According to Donald and Limington (2008), women have been the primary focus of work-family conflict and women typically report higher levels of burnout and less leisure time than their male counterparts (Versey, 2015). Participants also reflected on the bias they witnessed in the workplace. Three participants felt the physical presence of a man versus a woman is very different in the high school setting. P3 reflected on the stigma that women are not often seen as fit to handle a school with a high suspension rate for violent offences.

> In their opinions, males can handle stress differently than females can. As a male:

> They could cuss, they could let it all out and it's okay, but if the tables were turned. It would be me who can't handle it. She is out of control. She doesn't know how to lead. But yet if the man does it, it's just like oh, whatever. That's just how he is. It's just how he talks. He's just upset right now. I can't do that. (P6)

P2 shared similar feelings:

> I think that males can have this presence, can have this strong voice, can have this opinion and it's the classic, they are male. They are moving forward. They are in the position, whereas I've encountered that I'm intense. I'm bitchy. I'm not approachable. I am not collaborative and none of those things really exists once you get past the position that I'm holding. I don't think men have to work to get past that. So, I think that adds a huge stress because I'm always trying to find this balance and trying to kind of act not like myself so I don't come across as bitchy, when I know I'm not being bitchy.

> One participant felt gender bias influenced her by making her work harder. P6 also expressed the feeling that men are given more grace when it comes to making a mistake.

"Females cannot make a mistake, because if we make a mistake, it's a whole plethora of reasons why instead of just like, oh, you made a mistake." P3 oversaw a predominantly male staff where she had the burden of proving herself even in her daily appearance. "I never wore heels in that environment. I was professional, but it was more, a professional of I've got slacks on and I've got loafers on. I've got a collared shirt on." Her reflection demonstrated her need to adapt and lose her feminine traits to play the role of high school principal in a school environment that was predominantly male staff and students. She described her look as "I can handle business." All participants reported that gender bias did not influence their decision to leave their principalship.

Blurred Boundaries

Smit et al. (2016) identified, in today's society, "Most individuals transition between work and family roles on a daily basis, and often, multiple times within a given day" (p. 2142), further claiming this psychological transitioning of inter-roles is cognitively demanding, increasing conflict. Clark (2000), in his relatively new work/family border theory, argued that individuals must enforce borders between the spheres of work and family in order to attain balance. Clark (2000) defined these borders as physical, temporal, and psychological. The strength of these borders is determined by permeability, flexibility, and blending of said borders. Aligned with Clark's theory, participants were provided an example of physical, psychological, and temporal borders and asked to reflect on how these borders did or did not play a role in their attempts to balance work and home.

Participants were asked how they attempted to balance work and home, and most revealed it was difficult. P2 attempted to describe this balance, but stated, "I can't even envision it. And so, I think that's a problem. I say to people, I am 100 percent all into my work. I love my work, love it, and that is a fatal flaw. I can't find this balance." When asked if she felt there

were no boundaries between work and home, she replied, "Oh, a hundred percent." P3 revealed

that she was able to balance more consistently once she was able to internalize there was only so

much she could handle in a day. P5 stated, "I've got my home stuff in one section of my brain

and I have my work stuff in another section of my brain. Sometimes they blend, and that makes

it very, very hard."

Having permeable borders between work and home allows physical and psychological

elements from each domain to penetrate the other domain. When the borders between work and

family do not stand firm and too much flexibility or permeability occurs, then blending develops,

and the two domains are no longer exclusive (Clark, 2000).

Psychological borders. Psychological borders (also referred to as behavior-strained in

some literature) dictate thinking patterns, behavior patterns, and emotions by providing rules for

each domain (Clark, 2000). Guilt was identified as being the main psychological obstacle. The

guilt of not being a good enough mother and wife weighed heavily on the participants.

> Guilt is a big one. Even now, I feel guilty about doing things and I'm not doing anything
> other than working. But I still feel guilty about giving too much time to my workplace
> and not enough time to my home. (P5)

Guilt is an awful feeling. P5 recalled the guilty feeling of being a bad wife, "There were times

when I didn't see my husband for long periods of time due to conflicting schedules" and after

school responsibilities. P3 recalled the guilt of having stood up her husband multiple times for

dinner dates and the time she lost with him.

P1 recalled having the feeling of "I wanted to be everywhere all the time." She (P1)

realized that this was not good for her stress level and:

> It was probably okay to miss some school things. I didn't maybe need to be there or have
> another teacher there, but they (school and community) always just wanted to see the
> principal. It's just not the same. I think I would sometimes think, Jesus I'm tired. I

really just want to go home. I don't want to be here anymore, but I felt it was really important. So, I probably put school above my own needs a lot of the time.

Psychologically, a second obstacle was taking on the problems of others or worrying about others. P1 reflected on taking on all the issues and problems of her students:

You know in education, they are all your kids and so you take on all of their issues and problems and you want to fix everything and you worry about whether Johnny got home from school today because he was afraid of his mom's new boyfriend or whatever. So you think about them constantly.

When participants are constantly thinking of their students' problems; it occupies space in their mind that takes away from their ability to focus on home.

P5 revealed that psychologically, she was not attentive or was distracted when she was home.

I'll be at home and I'll be really quiet. It's not because I'm mad or anything like that. I'm thinking about how to solve the problem. I'm thinking about how I handled something and how I could have handled that better.

Physical borders. Participants revealed that part of being a working mother or wife is the difficulty balancing trying to be in two places at once. P4 described attempting to blend some of her needs such as doctor appointments and shopping into part of her work day during lunch time or right after work. Work can easily creep into the home without even knowing. This was especially apparent with two participants who claimed they live close to the school they operate. P5 discussed having to go back to her work site when a problem arises. "I'm at home and something happens and I have to run back to school and that becomes an issue."

Other ways work creeped into the home is when the participants physically brought their work home with them. "I did a lot of work when my kids were asleep." Answering emails or taking phone calls after work hours while at home was a common practice of all participants.

These examples demonstrate participants did not have clear firm borders between work and home/family. Because work became a priority for the participants, work appeared to conflict with family/home rather than family/home conflicting with work.

Temporal borders. Temporal borders (often referred to as time-strain in some literature) divide work time and family time and identify when each can begin and end. Work hours and commitments seemed to be the biggest issue when reflecting on temporal borders. When work becomes the priority, it becomes easier to place home and family responsibilities aside. "If I commit to something at work, it's a no brainer. I'm doing it. I've committed to it, I'm doing it. But for some reason, we give ourselves more grace when it comes to our family." P3 also confessed it was easier to cancel home commitments than it was to cancel work commitments.

Often, these women faced many temporal conflicts at the same time. This was a general trend when multiple school functions were going on at the same time.

> I would always show my face at every event, whether it was for 5 seconds or 5 hours. If there were three events there were multiple events whether it was a Saturday or a Sunday or a night event, I would always go show my face, say hi to everybody, and welcome everybody.

Time commitments were reported to cause rifts with spouses. P5 recalled her husband getting upset when she would come home many hours after school was out. P3 claimed to have lost connections and relationships to always having to say no, and she did not have time for that. P3 recalled the guilt of having stood up her husband multiple times for dinner dates and the time she lost with him.

All participants reported it was hard to set or establish boundaries due to all the unforeseen events that occur on a daily basis. Specifically, P4 stated, "You could be walking out

the door at 4:45 and a parent walks up or something happens in the afterschool program and you are the only one to deal with it so you have to deal with it."

Border-Keepers. Boarder-keepers are individuals who have the ability to influence each domain but lack the power to cross borders (Clark, 2000). Border-keepers are influential in keeping the spheres of work and family/home separate. Riley and See (2020) indicated that 78% of school leaders identified their partner as the top source of support. Participant spouses were reported as the main border-keeper in the home. P1 recalled her husband yelling at her to get off her email. P3 recalled her husband being really good about monitoring her and keeping her grounded. "He would tell me, you just need to chill, you need to relax. No, you don't need to go do this or that." P3's husband also helped by picking up the slack at home when she could not.

In the workplace, the principal's secretary could assume the role of border-keeper; however, none of the participants discussed that connection. P5 recalled working on herself essentially being her own border-keeper by learning not to harp on her work day, be negative, or bring work troubles home that she claimed, "might infiltrate your time with your spouse." P4 recalled having to learn how to focus on her second husband and not bring work home.

P4 displayed the biggest conflict with broken borders; however, P4 did not view this as an issue with her family. Over time, her family learned to adapt and embrace. Her first husband could not embrace this lifestyle and eventually the marriage suffered. P4 ensured this would not be an issue with her second marriage by finding a new husband who was more supportive and was not bothered by this lifestyle but conformed to it. P4 professed, "My family life now is much more conducive to blending with my work life and we make it more of a family environment than it was previously."

Clark (2000) claimed that blending of work and family spheres is typically found in family-run businesses and individuals who work from home. P4 had essentially turned her principalship into a small family business. P4 shared that her husband came to campus to help with various activities and her children had to stay on the school campus late when she had after-hours duties like supervising sports and drama. She recalled her son going into her office and playing video games to keep himself busy. In retrospect, she said, "My family life is much more conducive to blending with my work life and we make it more of a family environment than it was previously (with her first husband)."

This claim indicated to the researcher that her first husband was attempting to establish firm boundaries between work and home, but P4 was resistant. Similar to what Clark (2000) described, the first husband had different expectations of work and home. Her first husband did not approve of her working so much, thus creating conflict in the marriage. P4 did not experience this conflict in her second marriage because her second husband allowed P4 to blend work and home domains, making them nonexclusive.

Supportiveness from supervisors, spouses, and employees can encourage or discourage balance. P4 actually revealed this in her interview. Clark (2000) claimed employees should be given the opportunity to be central participants with responsibilities they can identify with. Clark (2000) argued this will give employees the tools needed to increase work/family balance independently. P1 demonstrated this when she spoke about having the opportunity of drafting the school calendar and scheduling events around her personal schedule.

While balance can be achieved by engaging in more supportive behaviors, Clark (2000) suggested supervisor training to learn how to show empathy and be supportive of employees' family situations. The final emergent theme found is "The need for more support." In this area,

participants shared their frustration with needing more support at work and in the home. Within this theme, data also reflect family support and their reactions to the stress the participants underwent and what support systems each participant had or did not have in place.

The Need for More Support

By far the biggest need stated by all participants was the need for more support. P2 alleged there was no on-the-job support, "I don't know whether people just think that you just know all this stuff. In school you may have learned it, but then putting it into practice is something different." The majority of participants identified the need for a mentor or coach to support their leadership development on the job. Some participants reflected on having a group of colleagues they could turn to, but most did not have a work support system in place.

P2 suggested the integration of a principal PLC to support principals in the district. P2 simply stated, "There wasn't anybody to help me." A peer mentor or support group was greatly needed by all participants especially with other women in the profession. "That would have been nice if there would have been, say, a support group for lady comprehensive principals" (P6). Having a support person in place to contact with a question or seek advice on a specific situation was not in place for these participants. P5 recalled the need to have a colleague to share ideas with and get feedback from. She felt the school district should incorporate a mentorship program. "If districts could make those connections and make an administrative support group or something so that you have somebody you can share in a confidential space, but yet get things off your chest so that you don't have that level of stress."

The second area of support addressed by participants was the need for more support from the district. Staffing was an issue that emerged, and often these participants felt they were doing the job of multiple people because there was a shortage of staff. P1 recalled having to substitute

and enter attendance. She claimed, "I was the best cross-trained principal in the district. There weren't enough personnel resources in the office to help with the amount of work that needed to be done."

Additional district support was revealed as participants discussed the need for clear policies and procedures. Half the participants indicated changes to district policies and procedures need to be implemented. P4 reiterated this by stating, "The district needs to figure things out and not constantly change policies, just be consistent." P3 asserted, "To alleviate some of the stress, some of the procedures and expectations at the district level need to be changed." P3 called to mind the start of the school year, "Every department would wait til the day before school starts to send you an email; well I've been on campus for a month! You didn't have to wait until the day before school to send me a thousand emails." Situations such as this are easily avoidable to help relieve the stress a principal deal with on a daily basis.

P1 stated the main reason for her leaving her principalship was due to lack of support from the district, "The lack of support from the district was what finally just made me say 'I'm not going to do this anymore.'" She felt the district was not considerate of what was in the best interest of the students but interested in the needs of adults, and she simply did not agree with district-level decisions.

Family support and reactions. Balance can also be achieved by engaging in supportive behavior. P3 reflected on having a stress-free homelife with a very supportive husband. "I have a good relationship and there is always that support. I don't know it to be any different, but I know that those things played a huge role in how effective I was at the school site."

Supportiveness from supervisors, spouses, and employees can encourage or discourage balance. Clark (2000) suggested sharing work challenges and successes with family members or

telling coworkers about family events as a way to facilitate balance. P4 came from a family of educators with her mother having been a teacher. She felt very supported by her "because she understood from a teacher's point of view what I would be stressed about."

However, this was not the case with other participants. P1 recalled her husband and family being very support, yet at the same time she claimed to have kept a lot of information from her family and friends.

> I would keep a lot of that from my parents because my parents, my mother would have taken on all of my stress if I were to tell her any of that. So, I just always said everything was fine.

P2 also alleged not sharing her stress with her family, "I'm very private and I very, put up this, I think appearance that I'm okay. I don't know how much they knew."

P3 reported hiding the stress from her children, "My kids weren't really seeing it other than they knew they were not seeing me as much." P6 reflected on the stress affecting her children saying, "We think we're doing a good job of not bringing it home, but that's a lie too." "I think that my kids knew." According to P6, her children would cook and clean for her. "They would do more acts of service to show love and that they understood that things might not be exactly how we want them to go."

P5 said her children grew up knowing her job expectations, "My kids have kind of grown up with me having these rules of not being quite as available maybe as they probably would like me to have been." P6 reflected on the reaction of her son's resentment toward her being his high school principal, "I think it was more around the fact that he always had to share his mom with everybody."

P5 claimed, "I don't think my son felt gypped from me working" and felt her son may have had the opposite experience. P5 utilized her commute time to communicate with her son.

Together, they had a 45-minute morning and 45-minute afternoon ride to decompress and talk

about his day. "It was all just focused on him. I think it helped me become a better mom." P5

actually felt her job as principal become "much more tolerant of teenage behavior at home.

> **Support systems.** P3 claimed the best support she received was from a peer group:

> That peer group that was created not by the district, but by the nature of us recognizing
> that we needed people similar to us. This group was mixed male and female, but it was
> just to be able to talk about what we experienced and being able to I think trust.

This peer group was important to P3. The feeling of being supported by colleagues who shared

her experiences was irreplaceable by any other coping mechanism. On the other end, P3 stated

that she also lost friendships with long-term friends, "I didn't put an effort into relationships that

I've had forever . . . I just didn't make an effort to maintain it. I have too many other things that

I needed to do."

P5 reflected on having had excellent colleagues who were not only friends at work but

also friends outside of work. She was able to "talk shop and talk about things that are happening

and I can get their perspectives and ideas on how to handle a certain situation or get their

perspective on, have you considered doing X, Y and Z?" P5 also had a group for friends who

were not educators:

> I think that's another thing that's important, is having an outlet that is not tied to your
> career. To me it is helpful. To this day, even though we don't live in the same area, we
> all get together and I can vent to them about stuff that's going on and we all just kind of
> figure it out.

P6, who initially described herself as a mother, wife, sister, daughter, discussed a strong

support system in her extended family and friends. "My mom and parents were extremely

supportive of anything that I did, they were always just like whatever you need." This also

included her sisters who she said helped keep her grounded and are very supportive. P6 also has

a group of girl friends who she described as all professional women who get together and do not

focus on work because it is their time to get out and simply have fun with each other. P5 also

had a similar group of friends from outside of work who she could vent to about home and kids.

In a sense, P5's sisters and P6's friends acted as border-keepers by helping maintain balance.

Summary

This chapter reported the findings of the six study participants. Analysis of the data and

findings uncovered six themes: work became the priority, coping mechanisms, implications of

being a woman, lonely at the top, blurred boundaries, and the need for more support.

Participants' lived experiences exposed that female principals continue to face barriers as they

attempt to balance work and family. As indicated in the emerging themes, participants excelled

in their careers, work gradually became their priority, leading them to put aside marriages,

children, and self-care. Eventually, participants became isolated and lonely as they struggled

with the expectations of being a career woman, wife, and mother. With the need for more

support, participants looked toward other means to cope with the stress.

Participant responses were consistent with the work on burnout theory conducted by

Maslach (1998) further supporting claims of higher burnout amongst women. Additionally,

findings support Clark's (2000) work/family border theory in that flexible borders lead to an

imbalance in the spheres of work and home. Border-keepers, including spouses, family, and

secretaries, help build stronger borders by acting as gatekeepers for their respective spheres of

work and home. Chapter 5 answers the research questions guiding this study, reviews the

study's conclusions, and offers recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants revealed that stress from work did spill over into their personal lives affecting their physical and mental health. This caused participants to internalize some of their stress into feeling not being an adequate wife and mother. While participants did not directly identify stress as a reason for leaving their principalship, they did cite lack of support, the implications of being a woman, long hours, inconsistent daily schedules, and blurred boundaries as factors that contributed to their stress levels. This chapter answers the four research questions that drove this study, provides recommendations on actions to better support female high school principals, offers recommendations for future research, and closes with the author's reflection on this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the phenomenon of stress through the lens of a small group of female high school principals in the central to northern California areas to better understand how stress affected their health and the dynamics of their home. Participants exposed the hidden reality of how stringent the position of high school principal is and how the mental and physical demands overspill into their personal lives. This included in-depth reflections on relationships of marriage and families, health issues, and mental stability. This study will support current research by providing a better understanding of why some female school principals are choosing to leave their principalship and assist with establishing supports that can be put into place to prevent this.

Methodology

A phenomenological method was utilized to investigate the phenomenon of stress and how it affected the physical and psychological health of participants' and their family dynamics. Participant selection for this phenomenological study was purposeful to gather a homogeneous sample of six female high school principals in the central and northern parts of California who shared similar experiences. Interviews lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and were then interpreted and analyzed using horizontalization processing. From their lived experiences six distinctive themes emerged: (a) work became the priority, (b) coping, (c) implications of being a woman, (d) lonely at the top, (e) blurred boundaries, and (f) the need for more support.

Research Questions

This study explored what it was like for participants to live with the stressful demands of a principalship. Focusing on the evolution of work-family conflict, this study answers the following research questions.

Research Question One. What Are the Significant Sources of Stress, if Any, That Female High School Principals Face?

An analysis of data revealed that participants in this study identified long work hours, inconsistent daily schedule, and the need for more support as the most significant sources of stress during their principalships. Participants reported working as many as 65 hours a week, losing time at home.

They also divulged feelings of a never-ending workload; many felt obligated to work on weekends, holidays, and breaks to catch up on items they put off due to lack of time, putting off family needs, even missing family vacations because the needs at work outweighed the needs at home.

One of the biggest issues' participants identified was the lack of a consistent daily schedule. Their workday was never predictable, causing interruptions in eating schedules, exercise routines, and time with family. Participants reported never really knowing what was going to happen at any moment, living in a constant state of stress which could potentially lead to burnout.

The need for more support at work and at home was also identified as a significant source of stress. Participants reported not having a mentor to turn to for guidance and support. Participants also reported desperately needing more support staff and disclosed they were doing the job of multiple people because of staff shortages.

Findings of this study are similar to Miller's findings in 2018 illustrating the most common inhibitors for entering educational administration were identified as increased work time, increased job demands, non-competitive salary, overload of paperwork, lack of support from supervisors, and the community and testing accountability. The factor of long work hours has been a historical problem, remaining unaddressed by school districts and state educational systems. In 2009, Moore found the number one reason graduate students were choosing not to go in the direction of school administration was increased time commitment. Participants in this study revealed long work hours as one of the primary triggers of stress.

The 2019 Australian Principal Occupational Health and Wellbeing Survey found school leaders work "an average of 54.5 hours a week, over 14 hours longer than the standard 40-hour workweek. During the school term, 22.1% of school leaders worked more than 60 hours a week, over 20 hours longer than the standard 40-hour workweek" (Riley & See, 2020, p. 21). Riley and See (2020) also found that female school leaders reported working longer hours than their male counterparts. Burnout is often considered the long-term outcome of chronic stress (Cancio

et al., 2018). Maslach and Leiter (2008) described burnout as a global phenomenon creeping into every corner of the modern workplace with the potential to affect an individuals' psychological and physical health.

Research Question Two. As a Result of Ongoing Stress, What Physical and Mental Symptoms Did Female School Principals Exhibit During Their Time as Principal?

Participants in this study did experience physical and mental health decline with increased stress. Participants struggled with weight gain (eating for comfort) or weight loss (not eating due to lack of time). Many participants reported lack of sleep either from working long hours, getting to work earlier, or their brain not shutting down during sleep, keeping them awake.

Anxiety, depression, and muscle pains in the shoulders and back were also reported by participants. This is similar to Boyland's (2011) study wherein participants also reported high blood pressure, fatigue, trouble sleeping, headaches, anxiety, and depression as symptoms of job stress. Mentally, participants struggled with the guilt of not being a good mother or wife. Participants shared feelings of "not doing enough" at home or with the family. Oftentimes participants put work before family and home increasing feelings of guilt.

Data also showed evidence that gender bias contributed to mental health strain. Participants had to deal with the stigma that women are often not seen as fit to handle a high school, disclosing feelings of the need to work harder to prove themselves and that they were just as capable as their male counterparts. One participant went as far as adapting to her environment by losing some of her feminine traits to play the role of high school principal in a school environment that was predominantly male staff and students.

Participants acknowledged feelings of isolation and loneliness, primarily due to lack of a peer mentor and less down time to spend with family and friends. Participants shared that their

circle of friends became smaller because they did not have the time or energy to maintain friendships. Finally, the competitiveness of the job itself also made it a lonely position. Participants confessed that the position of high school principal was extremely competitive amongst colleagues, especially male colleagues.

Data from this study further support statistics released in the 2019 Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey (Riley & See, 2020) where it was found that principals display higher physical and mental health issues than the general population: burnout (19.9 times higher), stress symptoms (21 times higher), difficulty sleeping (17.1 times higher), cognitive demands (20.1 times higher), somatic signs (3.6 times higher), depressive symptoms (2.5 times higher). The same report also disclosed immediate alerts to participants who report concerning levels of stress. Referred to as red flag alerts, the survey measures thoughts of self harm, quality of life risk, and occupational health. In 2019, 31% of secondary school leaders surveyed received a red flag alert; the data justify the need for more support.

Research Question Three. What Coping Mechanisms (Negative or Positive), if Any, Did the Principals Use to Alleviate Stress in Their Professional and Personal Lives?

Participants in this study disclosed that the main coping mechanism for stress was exercise. Other coping mechanisms that manifested as a result of stress included drinking, withdrawing from family and friends, and treating the principalship like a business. Exercise was the main coping strategy stated by participants; however, lack of time was also an issue for participants. While most would have liked to consistently participate in daily exercise, the truth of the matter was participants did not have the time to do so. Participants recalled waking up at 4:00 or 5:00 am to make it to the gym; however, that made for a longer day, making it difficult to sustain.

Emotional and physical exhaustion were other manifestations of stress shared by all participants. Participants claimed to have been fatigued and had a lack of energy. Long hours and heavy mental stress can lead to feelings of exhaustion and the need to withdraw. Participants discussed withdrawing from family and friends primarily because they were too exhausted to engage in activities after work and on weekends. Participants needed to save their energy and essentially rest and recharge for the coming work week.

Half of participants reported not sharing their stress with spouses or family so as not to worry them. Depersonalization often develops as a response to emotional exhaustion and work overload. Depersonalization exhibits itself as a cynical attitude or distancing from others; in the case of a school principal, this may be from students, staff, and stakeholders. This withdrawal typically forms as a buffer to self-protect, representing the interpersonal dimension of burnout (Maslach, 1998).

Participants also alluded to drinking alcohol as a way to cope with the stress. One participant was more open than others, discussing excessive drinking to relax after a day of work. She shared that her drinking started off slowly with one wine cooler a day and gradually increased as her stress increased, eventually causing her to realize she was excessively drinking daily. While other participants did not address excessive drinking, 3 of 6 did allude to drinking with colleges as a way to decompress from the workweek. The American Addiction Centers (2021) found teachers were among the highest professions prone to alcohol abuse. "Among teachers, school administrators, professors, tutors, substitutes, teachers, and others in the education field, 4.7% reported heavily abusing alcohol" (para. 16).

Treating the principalship like a family business, where all members of the family are expected to help out and do their share was another way to cope with the stress. Participants

who had school-aged children shared their children were more involved with school than they may have liked them to be. This meant that their children were often forced to stay at school for longer periods of time while they attended a meeting or participated in afterschool activities because mom had to supervise.

Research Question 4. In What Ways, if Any, Do the Borders Between Professional and Personal Lives Shift as Levels of Stress Change?

Participants were asked to reflect on the physical, temporal, and psychological borders between work and home. Data from participants suggest that as work became more stressful and took over as the priority for these women, the borders between work and home became weaker. Two participants shared that they had absolutely no borders established and let work invade their home lives. One participant claimed her family adjusted to this lifestyle while the second participant struggled with the hostile takeover of work with feelings of isolation and loneliness.

When addressing psychological borders, all participants exhibited some form of guilt. Participants expressed guilt of not being a good enough mother or wife. Temporal wise participants felt they dedicated too much time to their work and stressed about having to be in multiple places at the same time, further playing into their guilt. Participants also professed to taking on the problems of others, which affected them psychologically. The problems of work and concerns of student safety occupied space in their minds that took them away from being present at home.

Work hours and commitments were the biggest issues when reflecting on temporal borders. Participants were very committed to their jobs and they frequently put work commitments before home commitments. All participants reported it was hard to set or establish boundaries due to all the unforeseen events that occur on a daily basis.

Establishing physical borders was easier for participants to manage when work was kept separate from home. Participant data revealed that spouses were the primary border-keepers and the determining factor in maintaining boundaries. Participants did acknowledge they blurred boundaries by taking calls at home, answering emails at all hours, working after children were sleeping, and going into work on the weekends and holidays.

To establish firm boundaries, participants and border-keepers must enforce strong limits as to what they would allow to enter each sphere of work and home. This included not answering emails or phone calls when home, keeping home commitments, and not working late hours. Participants exposed this was more sustainable when having a supportive partner and or family members.

Recommendations

This study interviewed six female high school principals from the central and northern California areas. Information gathered from participant responses was consistent with Maslach's (1998) work on burnout theory and Clark's (2000) work/family border theory. The data revealed participants' need for more support in both spheres of work and home, further promoting the need for stronger borders between work and home and encouraging border-keepers (spouses and staff) to be more proactive in maintaining borders.

Consideration needs to be given to the concept of de-stressing the position of principal. The simplest methodology to support this is ensuring principals have the appropriate support in place to share the burden of the position. First this includes securing a vice principal (in larger schools possibly more than one vice principal). The vice principal will create an environment of shared leadership where they share the duties of the school and support the principal by doing their share in providing support to the school, staff, students, and district. This may include

support in behavior management, instructional support, staff development, supervision of extracurricular activities, and support with statewide assessments further distributing the duties and responsibilities that may solely fall on the school principal.

In situations where it is not possible to secure or open the position of vice principal consideration should be given other options of support such as a lead teacher who is interested in pursuing an administration position. This has the potential to serve as an internship opportunity as well as support the principal while providing responsibility to adequately prepare for a future principalship.

Second is the support of a trusted administrative assistant. The position of administrative assistant is just as valuable as the position of vice principal in the ability to reduce stress. A strong administrative assistant will prioritize the principal's daily schedule and enforce boundaries by communicating with the principal and reminding said principal of priorities both at work and home. In order for this relationship to flourish, the principal must establish trust in their assistant's abilities to prioritize and balance the needs of the principal. This relationship will take time to build but the potential in it will ultimately reduce stress and support work family balance.

This study further adds to claims of higher burnout rates amongst women. Burn out amongst women is not a phenomenon solely exhibited in the field of education, however because the field of education is dominated by females who tend to have higher claims of burnout, more consideration should be given in administrator preparation programs on the importance of mental wellbeing and finding the balance between work and home. Incorporating mental wellbeing courses into said programs should be carefully considered. Additionally, professional development opportunities should be encouraged throughout the school year. This can be

accomplished by attending conferences, workshops and seminars or possibly obtaining a speaker

on the topic of mental wellbeing. Findings suggest additional areas for action and unmasks

additional areas to be explored. The following are recommendations derived from the data,

findings, and conclusions of this study.

Recommendations for Action

1. At the district level, school districts need to ensure adequate personnel is in place to support the principal by ensuring there is a vice principal or lead teacher and/or staff in place to share leadership responsibilities. Additionally, districts should establish support or peer mentors to high school principals. Whenever possible, pair a female principal with another female principal so they can better identify with a peer mentor. This would include implementing an established schedule to meet with a peer mentor to provide professional and personal support/advocacy when needed. Finally districts should establish ongoing professional development to support wellness and balance for leaders and those in administrative positions.

2. Administrator Preparation Programs can support future administrators by incorporating courses on managing dual roles (personal and professional) that focus on wellness and work home balance. This would include the concepts of border theory, how to balance work and home and how to avoid burnout. Courses should also stress the importance of shared leadership in order to obtain longevity in the principalship.

3. Principals would benefit from utilizing self-developing strategies to advocate for themselves. This includes collaborating with significant others to establish and maintain firm borders. In addition they (principals) should also collaborate with administrative assistants, district leadership, and administrative support teams to establish and maintain borders, setting clear roles that support their principalship and maintain their primary role as instructional leader.

4. Border-keepers identified as spouses, secretaries/administrative assistants and/or additional support staff leaders are essential to maintaining firm borders between work and home and can assist by establishing said boundaries. However school principals must take responsibility for their own work-family balance and learn to identify what is reasonably acceptable to secure adequate health and well-being.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. Direct future research on a larger sample of female and male high school principals to gain more representative data on the lived experiences of high school principals.

2. Conduct a deeper examination of elementary school principals to identify and compare lived experiences to that of high school principals.

3. Research the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and how it may or may not have affected female high school principals mentally and physically. A post-COVID-19 interview of current participants may yield further results.

4. Research the impact the COVID-19 pandemic may have had on the physical, temporal, and psychological boundaries of female high school principals. A post-COVID-19 interview of current participants may yield further results.

Researcher's Reflection

As I reflect on this study, I saw bits and pieces of myself in every participant. I could have been a participant in this study. In fact, it was my personal experiences that sparked this study. I lived very similar experiences, working my way up the ranks to school principal and eventually to my dream job of Director of Schools. However, my dream job was destroying my life and I did not realize it until I had spiraled out of control with sleep deprivation, anxiety, and alcohol consumption.

Like the participants of this study, I was under tremendous stress, working long hours with no support. Eventually, the stress took a toll on me mentally and physically. It started with light drinking after work or occasional Friday drinks after work with coworkers, not my typical behavior. Eventually my drinking became excessive but I hid it from my family and friends. Drinking was an escape to numb my mind and help sleep. Lack of sleep really took a toll on me mentally. My mind would not shut down at night, thoughts would just race through my head, and my hands and legs would get a tingling numb feeling that I could not shake out. I started having panic attacks and was always on edge. Eventually, I sought help, but the psychologist just wanted to prescribe medication, which I did not react to very well.

My behavior was starting to affect my marriage and family. My husband could see the writing on the wall, we fought constantly. He threw my job in my face, saying how much I had changed since I took my promotion, and I resented him for it. A wedge was driving us apart.

My children had to tiptoe around me out of fear that I was going to yell at them. They resented my job because it took time away from class activities. My son wanted me to be the class mom and go on field trips, but my schedule would not allow it.

Eventually, I found a new doctor, one who listened to my symptoms and heard my cries for help. That doctor looked me straight in the eyes and said 3 more months of this and you are going to have a mental breakdown that will take years to recover from. Almost 5 years later, I can still feel those words jab my heart. On the verge of divorce, I went home and cried to my husband; the next day I quit my dream job. It was hard to walk away, but it was the decision that saved my marriage and my family, but, most importantly, myself.

Participants revealed similar experiences to my story. Some had struggles with alcohol, as I did, not all to the same extent. Others shared they suffered from panic attacks and trouble sleeping even battling anxiety and depression. I continue to take medication daily to keep my anxiety under control. I can distinctly recall a participant discussing how she carried her stress in her shoulders with this hot burning sensation, an indicator of stress that I still exhibit today.

However, I personally did not experience the gender bias participants shared. As I reflect on my personal experiences and the experiences of my participants, I now feel as if I was sheltered from gender bias and, in a sense, naive to their experiences. My immediate supervisor, who I worked under for nearly 15 years, was male and treated me with the utmost respect. The time spent learning from him was indispensable to my development as a leader in the field of education. He empowered those around him to take initiative and gain experience; from him, I learned to do what is right when it matters the most, always give credit where credit is due, acknowledging my mistakes and putting the safety of my students and staff before myself.

Additionally, the non-profit organization I worked for had a female chief executive officer. As the director of schools, I sat at the director's table surrounded by many other female (and male) directors. Over time, the organization did become a toxic environment to work in, but I can honestly say that gender bias was never an issue (at least for myself). I did not anticipate there would be as much focus on gender bias in the workplace as what was revealed by participants. They were very vocal about the pressure they felt and how some of it was attributed to them being female. The constant scrutiny and frustration they felt was very evident in their interviews.

While participants were honest about their experiences with gender bias in the workplace, I do suspect most were reserved, putting up walls to guard their professional reputations when reflecting on how they coped with the stress of the principalship for fear that the community may be able to identify them as a participant in this study. As a principal, you are a community figure, and it is important to have a respected reputation. This is a pressure to which a few participants alluded. This can be even more challenging for participants who live in the same community they work in. This can also put added pressure on spouses and children, to keep up appearances.

Summary

This phenomenological study took a deep look into the phenomenon of stress through the lens of a female high school principal. Six female participants consented to one-on-one interviews resulting in a qualitative analysis of the obstacles they battled while attempting to balance work and home. With research questions guided by Clark's (2000) work/family border theory, six themes emerged: (a) work became the priority, (b) coping, (c) implications of being a

woman, (d) lonely at the top, (e) blurred boundaries, and (f) the need for more support, confirming the need for more support in both areas for work and home.

Data from female participants indicated stress did affect their physical health with various medical issues including weight gain and or loss, muscle pains, increased alcohol consumption, problems sleeping, and lack of energy. Mentally, participants revealed issues with anxiety, feelings of inadequacy, depersonalization. Findings indicated the need for additional support at work and in the home. Participants revealed they felt isolated during their principalships and most did not have a peer mentor to advise or confined in. Recommendations for action include developing a mentorship program tailored to female principals and encouraging participants to openly communicate their support needs in the home and work. Border-keepers such as spouses and secretaries can assist setting firm boundaries between work and home. Finally, female principals must take responsibility for their own mental health and wellbeing, being careful not to let the job consume them. Further research is needed to investigate the gender disparity in the role of high school principal. Post-COVID-19 interviews with participants may also add depth to this study and the effects of stress.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC
CONSENT FOR RESEARCH SUBJECT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESERCH
TOO STRESSED TO FUNCTION: THE EFFECTS OF WORK STRESS
OVERSPILLING AT HOME
Name of Lead Researcher: Monica Barletta

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of this study is to understand the effects stress plays on the health and family dynamics of female school principals. It is easy to state that the job of a principal is stressful, the difficulty lies in the ability to describe what this stress looks like and how it manifested itself in the daily lives of school principals. This study will expose the hidden reality of how stress affects the professional lives of female principals and to what extent stress overspills into the personal lives of school principals. This will include in depth reflections on relationships of marriage and families, health issues, and mental stability.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT
Participation in this study consists of partaking in an interview conducted by a doctoral candidate researcher from the University of the Pacific. An initial interview is estimated to last 45-60 minutes. A follow up interview maybe requested and findings of study will be shared with all participants. All interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
Minimal risks associated with participation in this study include some psychological discomfort during interview sessions and the loss of confidentiality. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you have the right to decline to answer any questions and/or end the interview. Reasonable steps will be taken to keep confidential any information obtained in connection with your identification. Measures to protect your confidentiality include the use of pseudonyms for all participants and the schools and/or districts they serve to conceal identity.

Upon conclusion to this study, data obtain will be maintained in a safe, locked or otherwise secured location and will be destroyed after a period of three years after the research is completed

BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS
You may not receive direct benefit from this study. However, the information you provide may help others to understand the effects stress has on the professional and personal lives of female school principals and may help identify support factors to reduce principal attrition.

COSTS
There is no monetary cost associated with participation in this study how ever participants will give their time to participate in the study

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Participants will not receive payment for participation in this study.

VOLUNATARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
As a participant in this study, you have the right to withdraw participation at any time. Furthermore, It is under your discretion to choose not to answer particular questions that you are asked in the study. There will be no penalties or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitle to if you choose to withdraw from this study.

CONTACT INFORMATION:
If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research study, it's procedures, risks and/or benefits, please contact the Lead Researcher or Faculty Advisor.

Lead Researcher: Monica Barletta, 209-202-4477 email: m_barletta@u.pacific.edu
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Delores McNair email: dmcnair@pacific.edu

Independent Contact: If you have any concerns or if you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted or general questions about the research, please contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at the University of the Pacific to speak to someone independent of the research team at 209-946-3903 or IRB@pacific.edu

DISMISSAL FROM STUDY:
It is possible that we may decide that your participation in this study is not appropriate. If this occurs, you will be dismissed from the study. In any event, we appreciate your wiliness to participate in this study.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you have been afforded the opportunity to ask question or voice concerns and have answered any questions that you may have. You completely volunteer to participate in this study and understand you are entitled to withdraw your assent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You will receive a copy of this form and understand you are in no way waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

_____
Name (Please /print)

_____
Signature

_____
Date

Due to California's stay in place order, please sign and email to m_barletta@u.pacific.edu. If

unable to email, a self-addressed envelope can be sent directly to you upon request.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please discuss your career path to becoming a principal.

2. Can you reflect back to a very stressful event?

3. How did you cope with the stress?

4. How did that make you feel physically and mentally?

5. Describe any changes your body may have exhibited.

6. How did you attempt to balance work and home/family?

7. What were some of the physical borders between work and home that created conflict? What were some of the psychological borders between work and home that created conflict? What were some of the temporal borders between work and home that created conflict?

8. How did your family react to the stress you were going through?

9. How did this stress manifest in your marriage?

10. How did this stress manifest in your relationships with children, parents, extended family or friends?

11. How did the stress change over time?

12. Now that time has passed and you reflect on the position, how do you feel?

13. Were there structures that could have helped you?

14. As a female principal how do you feel gender influenced your stress level?

15. What is your perception on how male colleagues experience stress differently?

16. As a female do you feel gender influenced your decision to leave?