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WOMEN ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF WORK-LIFE
BALANCE WITHIN THEIR ORGANIZATIONAL AND
PERSONAL CONTEXTS

A DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

Work-life balance is a challenge for principals to navigate as the ever-increasing responsibilities of the role as principal requires more time. Because time is limited, achieving balance between principals' workloads and home responsibilities can cause a significant amount of stress. Often, women principals face additional challenges because of childcare and household responsibilities. To support principals in their practice and encourage them to enter and persist in the role, better policies and practices should be implemented at the district level. By providing more site level staffing support, fostering a culture where WLB is valued, releasing principals from non-essential meetings and obligations, and training principals to prioritize tasks, districts can help mitigate the stress and conflict principals experience due to the challenges of WLB.

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To my beloved husband, Jim, infinitely supportive and patient,
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

After serving as a classroom teacher for five years and assistant principal for three years, Jane Smith accepted her first principal position at a local K-5 school in another state. During the interview process, she met with school staff members, parents, and district principals. She also had an opportunity to visit the school site and meet students and community members. Jane made a strong impression on everyone, which led the superintendent to conclude that she was the best candidate for the principal position.

During the first few months, Jane faced many challenges. She quickly assessed the situation at hand and soon understood that the many needed changes at the school had not been divulged to her prior to her accepting the position. For example, the overall culture of the school was focused on maintaining the status quo; a focus that had been supported by the previous principal. He had been at the school for 15 years, was well liked, had a good rapport with students, left teachers alone, and kept the school on course, maintaining an academic performance index (API) score in the low 800s, just over the state's required effective school score. There were no new initiatives or changes implemented at the school to improve academic achievement despite the various subgroup populations, such as English learners and special

education students who were scoring significantly lower on the annual state tests.

Jane did not fully comprehend how this and other key aspects of the context of the school would affect her ability to move the school forward with her improvement agenda. She faced several veteran teachers who sabotaged her efforts and voted down initiatives to implement collaboration time at the school. Jane lacked the human resources experience or district support needed to handle ineffective teachers as well as serious personnel issues, such as a classified staff member who was an alcoholic. The context of this school, coupled with the lack of experience and knowledge of a new principal, led to mutual stress, contentious situations, and difficult challenges.

Jane had underestimated the demands of the principalship, including the number of hours she would be required to work during the evenings and weekends. Although she knew that being a principal would require more work, she did not realize how many more hours would be required to keep up with the responsibilities; she found herself regularly working at home, outside of the work day. Because Jane was committed to being visible in classrooms and on campus when school was in session, she took most of her non-instructional work home with her, essentially working 12-14 hours a day. Even then, Jane felt that she never completed what needed to be done day-to-day as items would roll over onto her to-do list for the following day.

At the end of Jane's first year, she got married and had a baby, which impacted the time she had available to balance between home and work life. She

still worked 12-14 hours per day but now also had the added responsibilities of taking care of a child. She found herself lacking the time and flexibility she needed to be excellent both at home and at work; there simply were not enough hours in the day. Ultimately, after two years, Jane resigned from the position and had little desire to take on another principal role.

While Jane Smith is a fictional depiction, this narrative is not uncommon for school principals. By painting this picture, I am laying out the groundwork for a qualitative study about how principals manage WLB, particularly within their organizational and personal contexts and if their experiences vary based on gender.

This study is deeply personal to me as I was a K-12 school administrator for 12 years. I have held positions as assistant principal, principal, and as a director at charter and traditional public schools in two states. When I began my career in administration, I was in my 20s and single. After my third year as an assistant principal, the superintendent promoted me to principal at Seaside School. While there were some contextual challenges at the school, I faced the greatest challenge once I got married and had a child. Ultimately, I found the principalship to be consuming all of my personal life and time. For me, this was an imbalance that I was not willing to accept, and, eventually, I left the field for other positions in education that were flexible enough for me to do meaningful work without feeling like I was sacrificing my role as a mother.

This chapter discusses the background of the problem, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and the significance of the study. Chapter 1 also defines the research question and identifies the research plan for this study.

Background of the Problem

The role and responsibilities of the school principal have grown immensely in the past 30 years (Copland, 2001; Fullan, 2014). Principals are required to be instructional leaders, parent and community liaisons, skilled orators, knowledgeable human resource directors, lunchtime supervisors, facilities managers, and disciplinarians, among an ever-growing list of duties, all of which add to the stress level and, therefore, desirability of the position (Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Administrators are no longer simply operational managers; they are also expected to be actively engaged as educational reformers (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007), answer to the district office, and most importantly, deliver results (Fullan, 2014). According to Fullan (2014), "We have put the principal on a pedestal, and now we expect miracles; a few can pull it off, but mere mortals have little chance" (p. 7). The escalation of administrative responsibilities can take an inordinate amount of time, which makes it difficult to balance obligations at work and home.

Several factors contribute to the WLB of principals: work overload, organizational contexts, leadership styles of principals in relation to organizational contexts, and personal contexts. First, the added roles and responsibilities have increased the demands on an administrator's time and the number of work hours per week, which has led to work overload. According to

Martin & Willow (1981), high school principals worked an average of 53.2 hours per week in the 1980's, whereas in the late 1990's into the early 2000's, they reported working 60-80 hours per week (Read, 2000; Usdan, McCloud & Podmostko, 2000). More recently, Bitterman, Goldring, and Gray (2013) surveyed 14,000 K-12 school principals and found that school principals on average spent 58.1 hours per week on school-related activities, with an increasing average of hours based on school enrollment. High school principals reported working more hours on average than elementary and middle school principals, which could be because high schools are often larger than elementary and middle schools.

Administrative turnover is a corollary issue plaguing the principalship. The turnover is often related to work overload. According to the School Leaders Network (2014) report, *CHURN: The High Cost of Principal Turnover*, "Fifty percent of new principals quit during their third year in the role. Those that remain frequently do not stay at high poverty schools, trading difficult-to-lead schools for less demanding leadership roles that serve more affluent populations" (p. 1). Less demanding leadership roles require less time from the principal, which can make a significant difference when balancing responsibilities between work and home life. For some leaders, the demand for time at work pushes them out of the position. Loeb, Kalogrides, and Horng's (2011) study of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, found that "principals in schools with the most low-achieving students have been at their school for an average of 2.2 years, whereas principals in schools with the fewest low-achieving students have been at their

school for an average of 3.6 years” (p. 215). This gap in principal tenure between low-achieving and high-achieving schools is worth noting because principal leadership is one of the main factors that impact student learning (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008, p. 27).

These issues demonstrate how the context of the school impacts the experience of principals. Thus, second, it is imperative to consider organizational factors that may contribute to the experience of a principal. The context of each school adds to the complexity of the principalship. According to Hausman, Crow, and Sperry (2000),

An idealized view of the principal's role ignores the importance that context plays in defining and influencing who principals are and what they do. Context influences the demands on the principal's time, range of possibilities for reform, and a host of other constraints and opportunities that at least partially define the principal's role. (p. 5)

In other words, the relationship between the context of a school and the principal is complex and mutually influential. Context may influence a principal's experience in leadership just as much as, if not more than, a principal is able to influence the context. As such, a principal's experience cannot be viewed without understanding the context in which a principal works.

A school's context includes demographics, history, fiscal solvency, and school culture, among other internal factors. External factors also come into play as schools are open systems that are intricately connected with the district, the community at large, the county, and the national educational scene. Hausman et

al. (2000) stated, "Principals today also work in a context of multiple reform agendas" (p. 6). According to Jennings (2012), during the past 50 years, there have been three types of education reform movements. First, there have been equity-based reforms, including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Second, there have been school choice reforms, including the introduction and evolution of charter schools, home schooling, and vouchers. Most recently, is the high stakes accountability movement, which has included the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the implementation of the Common Core standards. Additionally, there have been many state and local reform agendas, such as algebra for all and college entrance requirements, which also impact schools (Lee & Reeves, 2012; Nomi, 2012; Smith & Teasley, 2014).

Embedded in the organizational context are principals' leadership styles. Principals have more relationships and obligations to manage with internal constituents as well as external entities, such as state and federal governments as a result of these reforms. Because of the complex nature of federal, state, and local reform initiatives, each school poses a unique context for which no one style of leadership can prove to be successful. Brossert, Dwyer, Rowan, and Lee's (1982) seminal study found that "no single style of management seems appropriate for all schools, . . . principals must find the style and structures most suited to their own local situation" (p. 38).

Next, personal context impacts principals' WLB, which is particularly the case for women. During the past 40 years, the number of women participating in

the labor market has steadily increased. Since the second wave of the feminist movement of the 1970s, more women have entered the teaching profession and risen in the ranks of school leadership. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), in 2011, 52% of all public-school principals were women, which is a notable increase of 21% since 1990. This may be attributed to the increased percentage of teachers, which grew from 70% to 76% during the same time. However, a gap continues to persist in the relative percentage of women in administration in comparison to women in teaching. Women are proportionally underrepresented in higher-level positions, including the principalship. While a larger percentage of classroom teachers at the elementary level are women, a disproportionate percentage of principals are male (Kerr, Kerr, & Miller, 2011). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), 76% of all public-school teachers were women in 2011. Although women represented the vast majority of teachers, they only represented half of all elementary principals. Furthermore, large numbers of school districts had no women in administrative positions (Kerr et al., 2014).

According to Hoff and Mitchell (2008), for women, entry into school leadership roles often depends upon timing, career planning, and time demands at home. Women often taught for more years before entering school leadership roles and were more likely to delay entry into these roles until they had met most of the requirements or until someone encouraged them to enter school administration. Women also reported more tension between the time demands of work and their home, which often deterred women from pursuing principalships.

Hochschild and Machung (1989) first coined the term “second shift”, which refers to WLB challenges specific to the personal context of women. According to Hochschild and Machung (2012), “Most women without children spend much more time than men on housework; with children, they devote more time caring for both house and children. Most women work one shift at the office and a ‘second shift’ at home” (p. 4). With limited hours in the day, about 42% of women reported that they reduced their work hours in order to care for a child or other family member, while 28% of males said they had done likewise (Parker, 2015). In addition to the responsibilities of the principalship, women principals, perhaps more so than their male counterparts, also manage family obligations such as child rearing and housework.

According to Marshall (1994), women in educational administration faced a “new politics of gender and race”, which subtly perpetuated institutionalized sexism.

Educational administration is a prime example of a discourse that has been shaped by men’s experiences. Whether married or single, few male administrators in the past have had to include the duties and responsibilities typical of mothering discourses in their daily routines. . . . With some ingenuity, women principals and superintendents do arrange their work schedules in such a way that they can also take care of their families; but for many, it is the clash of priorities and values inherent in the different discourses that takes its toll. (p. 526)

In other words, women, more often than men, have the added responsibilities that may be a result of their gender within their personal context.

Lastly, work overload, organizational contexts, and personal contexts all impact principals' WLB. In particular for women, the compounding effects of lack of time, ballooning responsibilities, and the uniqueness of each school's context and each administrator's personal context, interact to create tension in a principal's WLB. According to Shoho and Barnett (2011), "It was readily apparent that being single and having no kids made it easier for new principals to fully engage in their job without any outside concerns for neglecting other commitments. Based on these findings, the question then becomes, can people who aspire to be highly effective 21st century principals have balanced professional and personal lives without sacrificing one for another?" (p. 578). In their study of K-12 principals, Kochan, Spencer, and Mathews (2000) reinforced that "managing their work and their time and coping with the stresses, tasks and responsibilities of the job" (p. 305) was the main issue for both men and women. The sheer volume of work has overloaded principals of both genders.

Over the course of the past few decades, WLB has steadily become a priority for employees (Breugh & Frey, 2008, p.345). While WLB has always been of interest to those concerned about the quality of work life within the broader context of life in general, it has come to the forefront of modern-day company policies and human resources debates (Poelmans, Kalliath, & Brough 2008, p. 229). In public education circles, however, there have been few applications of policies to address WLB concerns for school administrators. It is

worth studying what principals perceive to be challenges within their organizational and personal contexts and how they manage WLB.

Problem Statement

WLB is a critical issue for principals today. As the role of the principal has grown steadily during the past few decades, the issue of WLB has increasingly become an ongoing challenge to meeting the time demands of the principalship and the responsibilities at home. Many different factors contribute to this dilemma, including work overload (Bitterman et al., 2013; Read, 2000; Usdan et al., 2000), organizational contexts (Hausman et. al., 2000) and the principal's leadership style within that context (Brossert et al., 1982), and personal context, which poses a unique challenge for women (Hothschild, 2012; Parker, 2015). While there is some literature about women principals and the challenges they face because of their personal contexts, it is limited. The literature also does not make connections between how work overload, organizational contexts, and personal contexts compound the challenges of balancing between work and home life specifically for women. The problem this study addresses is how organizational contexts and personal factors impact the work-life experiences of women elementary principals in Southern California.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine what women principals in Southern California perceive to be the contextual factors in their organizations and personal lives that shape their work-life experiences as principals and how school districts can use this information to implement policies that encourage

women principals to persist in the field. The information may also be useful for placing principals, particularly those who are new to the profession. If candidates are matched to a school's context that is better aligned with their personal context, they may be better able to manage WLB. This may lead to a stronger likelihood of decreased principal turnover. Lower turnover in the principal role yields many benefits at a school site including: less teacher turnover (Béteille, Kologrides & Loeb, 2011), stability for sustained school improvement (Seashore-Louis, Dretzky, & Wahlstrom, 2011) and a reduction in the district's time and fiscal costs (CHURN Report, 2014).

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What do 11 women elementary principals in Southern California perceive as the contextual factors in their organizations that affect their WLB?
2. What do 11 women elementary principals in Southern California perceive as the contextual factors in their personal lives that affect their WLB?
3. How do 11 women elementary principals in Southern California report managing WLB?

Significance

This research is important and will make a significant contribution to educational leadership for a number of reasons. First, this research will contribute to the existing body of research regarding organizational and personal

contexts and their impact on the WLB of principals. Second, school districts could use this valuable information to better place and match principals based on the organizational context, leadership style within the organizational context, and personal context. In considering these factors, schools and principals could experience greater success, which may lead to overall job satisfaction and, therefore, longer tenure both at their schools as well in the profession. Finally, the findings of this study may also help shape district practices for rethinking the traditional principal role and perhaps pilot innovative practices such as a co-principalship.

Scope of the Study

This research was conducted as a qualitative study involving 11 women principals who served as an elementary principal for at least three years. The sample was drawn from Southern California. There were assumptions, delimitations, and limitations, which I discuss in the following sub-sections.

Assumptions of the Study

The research was structured and conducted as a qualitative study. As such, it was assumed that all participants responded honestly to interview questions and shared thoughts and views that were true to themselves. It is also assumed that each participant's recorded perceptions are a representation of past events and experiences, and, therefore, represent and are accepted as their truth.

Study Delimitations

This study is delimited to participants in Southern California. Participants were women elementary principals who held a principal position for at least three years. There were no age, marital status, or ethnicity, requirements, although I actively sought participants of differing ages, marital status, ethnicities, districts of employment, and points in their career. The participants were located in Southern California, which is in close proximity to my home and were, therefore, convenient. This also made the participants more readily and frequently accessible.

Study Limitations

Because the findings of the study are specific to participants in Southern California, the findings have limited generalizability. Given more time, a mixed methods study would have been preferable in order to increase the number of participants, which could increase the scope of generalizability. It may have been beneficial to study participants in different geographic locations and different types of schools, such as private or independent. It may have also been beneficial to study differing school levels such as high school and differing administrative positions such as superintendent, assistant principal, or dean.

Definitions of Key Terms

Administrator. For the purpose of this study, administrator refers to a school site administrator with a professional title such as principal, assistant principal, director, assistant director, or dean at a traditional public school or a director at a charter school.

Elementary school. For the purpose of this study, an elementary school is defined as a K-5 or K-6 school.

Organizational context. This term refers to (a) the socioeconomic background, demographics, and academic performance of the school; (b) the school culture, and (c) the expectations of the board and community.

Personal context. Personal context is defined as the personal conditions, personal situations, and personal lives of the participants. This includes marital status, children, care-giving responsibilities, gender, and any other factors at home that may impact work and/or health.

WLB. For the purpose of this study, WLB is defined as one's satisfaction and perception of harmonizing work and home life. It is not defined by an equal distribution of time spent at work in comparison to home but rather to one's personal perception of what feels or seems balanced. For some, balance refers more to quality rather than quantity of time spent.

Organization of the Dissertation

In Chapter 1, I provided the framework for this dissertation. The purpose of the study is to examine how principals manage WLB and how school context, personal context, and gender impact their experiences. Also, Chapter 1 included the significance of the study, the scope of the study, and the definition of the key terms. Chapter 2 provides a critical review of the literature concerning the research questions. The review of the literature includes the philosophical underpinnings for this study and research on school context and women in the principalship. Chapter 3 contains the research design, including the setting,

participants, data collection and analysis methods. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, and Chapter 5 presents the conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations for policy and practice.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The responsibilities and scope of the school principal have grown steadily during the past few decades. As is the case for all working people, principals must navigate the increasingly complex organizational contexts that sit on top of their personal contexts. Thus, the issue of WLB has become an ongoing challenge in meeting the time demands of the principalship and the responsibilities at home, which for women often adds another layer of responsibilities. This study seeks to understand how women elementary principals experience and manage WLB given their organizational and personal contexts. This chapter begins with the theoretical foundation for this research study. I then provide an extensive review of the empirical research. Next, I will connect the theoretical foundation with the empirical research to detail the conceptual framework of this study and conclude with a chapter summary.

Theoretical Foundation

This study is grounded in collectivist theory, context responsive leadership theory, and WLB theory. More importantly, it is the intersection of these theories that informs this research study.

Collectivist Theory

Collectivist theory is founded in the epistemology of constructionism. According to Marion and Gonzales (2014), in constructionism “reality is what we

define it to be, how we interpret it, or bring meaning to it” (p. 3). In other words, two people can view the same incident and interpret it differently. Marion and Gonzales (2014) contended:

Constructionism is also about how perceptions of reality are created by interacting, interdependent people; hence collectives form around common understandings—often called complex adaptive systems or culture. Under this collectivist umbrella, leadership is achieved through interaction, interdependencies, and thus through constructivism. This, then, is the link between constructionism and the collectivist perspective: Both traffic in interdependent relationships and common understandings. (p. 3)

Sensemaking theory is closely tied to constructionism. Weick (1995) contended, “Sensemaking is about authoring as well as interpretation, creation as well as discovery” (p. 8). In other words, people within organizations, clarify their situations in a forward motion by authoring, creating, or defining but also in a backward motion by making meaning of situations in hindsight via interpretation and discovery (p. 11).

Collectivist theory is an extension of constructionism and sensemaking. According to the collectivist perspective, leadership is the impetus that nurtures change within the relational networks within an organization (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). From this viewpoint, leadership is not necessarily a function of a formalized position such as principal, and it is not something that one person does to another. Instead, it is inherently contextual and change occurs because

of the organizational conditions that are present and that allows for a symbiotic relationship between the leader and the organization.

One of the leading theories under the collectivist umbrella is complexity theory. True to collectivist theory, complexity theory is about “how networks of interdependent individuals shape the collectives they are members of and how they are, in turn, shaped by those collectives” (Marion & Gonzales, 2014, p. 235). It is necessary to consider organizational contexts because the individuals and, therefore, the networks are different and dynamic depending on the relationships in the environment (Keene, 2000). As relational beings, we are bound by our relationships and how those interactions affect the environment of the organization. The participants interact and change in surprising and unpredictable ways. Leadership, therefore, is an ongoing process not a series of events.

The role of the leader is significantly more about being a facilitator and teaching “people the knowledge and skills they need to become self-managed, productive co-creators which will also release their inherent creativity as individuals as well as that of the system as a whole” (Keene, 2000, p. 17). By building members of the organization into co-creators, there is a shared sense of stewardship and accountability for the outcomes.

Furthermore, Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch (2002) posited that context is complex and affects leadership practices and outcomes. It is the context of the organization that directly impacts a leader’s style and effectiveness:

Effective leadership is not universal, but depends on a wide variety of environmental (culture, economic, industry setting, etc.) and organizational (strategy, size, technology, structure) conditions. The meaning and importance of various leadership dimensions varies by context. Contexts can be so complex that no single microscopic view is sufficiently detailed and comprehensive to suggest a singular productive view of leadership or leadership effectiveness. There is a need for a series of theories rather than a theory of leadership. (p. 807)

For this study, collectivist theory is foundational to understanding how contexts impact a principal's experience.

Context-Responsive Leadership Theory

Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) posited that leaders must be responsive to the context in their leadership practices. They concluded:

Impressive evidence suggests that individual leaders can actually behave quite differently (and productively) depending on the circumstances they are facing and the people with whom they are working. This calls into question the common belief in habitual leadership 'styles' and the search for a single best model or style. (p. 11)

In other words, leaders, who are aware of the contexts in which they work, can and should understand context and leadership as a mutually reciprocal relationship (Bredeson, Klar, & Johansson, 2011). This perspective challenged the traditional beliefs about leadership as being successful only when prescribing to a set model that would be successful regardless of the context. According to

Leithwood and his fellow researchers, applying a fixed leadership style without considering the context of a school could be futile.

Leithwood, et al., (2008) also posited that strong school leaders generally implement four core leadership practices: building vision and setting directions, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the teaching and learning program. These are foundational practices for successful leaders within any context. However, strong leaders must be sensitive to the context. It is important to acknowledge “the ways in which leaders apply these leadership practices—not the practices themselves—demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work” (p. 31). In other words, successful leaders do not change their core leadership practices; they adapt the application of the core leadership practices in response to the context in which they work.

Furthermore, Belchetz and Leithwood (2008) contended that it is not so much what leaders do, their actions and leadership practices, but rather how they do it, with an iron fist or with finesse. According to Urick and Bowers (2014), “Principals simultaneously practice leadership behaviors associated with multiple leadership styles in accordance with their background and school context” (p. 97). Because contexts are complex and differ from school to school, leaders must be able to decipher and understand all of the contextual factors and adapt their leadership skills accordingly. Urick and Bowers (2014) concluded that “the school context was crucial to help predict the different ways in which principals decided to lead their school” (p. 116).

In sum, the context of a school and its symbiotic relationship with the leader is at the foundation of context-responsive leadership theory. The leader cannot be effective without understanding and responding to the context of the school. When leaders are able to discern the many facets of a school's context, they can and should adapt accordingly.

WLB Theory

Contrary to intuition or popular misconceptions, WLB is not a new issue as a result of the technology revolution of the 21st century. The issue of work hours and regulating work hours has been a hard-fought issue since the labor movement in the United States that began during the colonial days. Labor unions organized in order to seek protection for workers. In 1938, the Fair Labor Standards Act was enacted establishing the standard 40-hour work week (Grossman, n.d.).

The theory of WLB has many variations and conceptualizations. Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2003) defined the theory of WLB as “the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in—and equally satisfied with—his or her work role and family role” (p. 513). It is not simply the amount of time spent at work and home, but WLB encompasses the actual amount of engagement in work and family as well as the satisfaction one has with his or her work and family. This implies that employees may spend a significantly greater amount of time at work and yet still feel equally satisfied with their non-work-related life.

Greenhaus et al. (2003) posited three components of WLB: time balance, involvement balance, and satisfaction balance. Each of these components

undulates between positive and negative balance as they interact with one another. WLB should be seen “as a matter of degree, a continuum” and “conceptualize balance as independent of an individual’s desires or values” (p. 513). There is a strong sense of satisfaction based on one’s perception of balance.

Similarly, Poelmans et al. (2008) defined WLB as consisting of “the management and balance of work responsibilities and non-work responsibilities” (p. 233). Poelmans et al. (2008) also referred to harmonizing work, family, and personal life and concurred with the aforementioned notion that “balance or harmony are states of satisfaction” (p. 228) and that satisfaction is subjective. Thus, it is not necessarily a matter of actual equality of time but in one’s perception of devoting equal amount of devotion and deriving an equal amount of satisfaction from each realm. In this regard, each individual’s idealization of WLB is different.

Conversely, researchers have also found that there is an actual, rather than simply perceived, deterioration of the quality of life outside of work. Guest (2002) posited, “The pressures and demands of work, reflected in longer hours, more exhaustion and the growth of evening and weekend work, leave less scope for ‘quality’ family time” (p. 257). In other words, if employees are actually spending more hours working, it encroaches on hours that are spent outside the traditional work day. This inevitably impacts the amount of time left for personal family and leisure activities. Skinner and Pocock (2008) found that WBL was

significantly impacted by work overload, the sheer amount of work that is required of employees. Their study concluded,

Work overload was the strongest predictor of full-time employees' work-life conflict. Work hours, their fit with preferences, and control over work scheduling also demonstrated small to moderate associations with work-life conflict. Time-based work-life policies and interventions are necessary, but not sufficient for addressing work-life conflict. Effective management of work overload, with its potential to contribute to emotional strain/exhaustion and long work hours, should be considered as a keystone strategy to support a healthy work-life relationship. p. 303

Corporate organizations have been implementing policies in support of WLB in attempts to improve work conditions and employee satisfaction. These policies include working remotely or telecommuting, reduced hours, and flexitime (Drew & Murtagh, 2005; Matthews, Swody, & Barnes-Farrell, 2011; Poelmans et al., 2008). Given the nature of the work of a principal, working remotely or telecommuting on a regular basis is not feasible. However, by incorporating flexible or co-principal models, some schools have managed to offer a new approach to WLB by sharing the load (Eckman, 2007, p. 334).

In schools, Wells (2013) found that aside from the stress of fiscal management, principals were most consumed with "insufficient time to get the job done, constant interruptions, keeping up with email communications, WLB, loss of personal time, and job expectations of the principal" (p. 34). Simply put, there are not enough hours in the day to complete the work that is necessary to

avoid disequilibrium in WLB. Yet, maintaining balance is crucial as Wilmore (2004) stated, "Principals must learn how to balance their job and personal time before they realize they have nothing else to give physically, mentally, or emotionally" (p. 141).

Review of the Scholarly Empirical Literature

In this section, I will provide a review of the scholarly empirical literature, which presents research findings that are relevant to this study. A review of the research will focus on the changing roles and responsibilities of school principals, organizational context, personal context, and how these impact school principals' WLB.

Changing Roles and Responsibilities of School Principals

The role of the school principal has evolved and grown during the past few decades, particularly during the No Child Left Behind era. These radical changes have been documented by multiple studies (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffett, et al., 2003; Kochan et al., 2000; Shoho & Barnett, 2011) and have concluded that the principalship is no longer simply about being a good administrative manager.

Principals reported five major themes in how the job changed during the past decade: "broadened accountability, expanded technology, lack of parental and community support, increased student problems, and implementing site-based management" (Kochan et al., 2000). The change most commonly reported by principals was the widened accountability loads placed upon them, which is in stark contrast to the traditional managerial and operational responsibilities of the principal.

Furthermore, principals must possess essential skills in order to manage the expanded responsibilities. According to Day (2014), there is a greater need for principals to possess and exercise a greater range of strategic and interpersonal qualities and skills than ever before. In addition, the range and number of stakeholders with whom leaders must now interact externally on a regular basis has increased enormously—a by-product of the new age of public accountability. (p. 639)

In other words, the age of accountability has brought about one of the biggest shifts in responsibilities for principals with minimal subtraction of traditionally held responsibilities. At the cornerstone of these shifts is the requirement for principals to be actively engaged as instructional and transformational leaders. Because this is tied to external accountability measures of student performance, leaders must interact with various stakeholders from parents and community members to politicians. All of these additional responsibilities on top of managing the day-to-day managerial needs of a school leave principals with little time to do the work of instructional leadership. One way well-meaning administrators seek to fulfill this role is by frequenting classrooms on an informal basis. However, with competing incidents and urgent needs, principals find themselves thwarted from their plans to check in with teachers in classroom settings with the regularity that is needed for improved instruction and the giving of feedback. Hallinger and Murphy (2013) found:

Principals who begin the morning with an intention to visit classrooms often find themselves waylaid by students, teachers, staff, and parents

with urgent problems to be solved. The 'classroom visit' that requires an uninterrupted block of time is postponed. Or the principal intends to spend an hour refining the leadership team's proposal for a school-wide professional development program, only to be called away to an urgent and unexpected meeting at the central office. One way or another, the principal finds it difficult to maintain a focus on key instructional leadership tasks in the face of an unrelenting series of requests, crises, and meetings initiated by others. (p. 6)

The lack of sufficient time to complete all the necessary tasks leads to overload or "work intensification" (Pollock, Wang & Hauseman, 2015, p. 556). West, Peck, and Reitzug. (2014) noted, "Their [principals'] work was increasingly becoming more overloaded with budget cuts because they were losing positions in their schools. Paperwork demands amplified. Emails also continued to grow, and principals stated they increasingly used their personal time to meet the demands for responses" (p. 387). The changing role of principals has become increasingly more difficult and challenging for one person to bear.

Organizational Context

There is considerable literature that supports the relationship between organizational context and leadership roles. First of all, organizational context is defined as more than just the physical attributes, demographics, and surface-level characteristics (Bates, 2006; Heck, 1996; Lumby, 2012; Mitchell & Castle, 2005). Mitchell and Castle (2005) concluded, "We have come to see that context goes deeper than physical phenomena. It also speaks to the tacit agreements

and implicit psychological contracts—between principals and other members of the educational community” (p. 428). Context can be defined by five overarching themes: (a) school district size; (b) organizational culture; (c) community characteristics and geographic location; (d) financial situation; and (e) political climate (Bredeson et al., 2011; Glasman & Heck, 1992; Gordon & Patterson, 2006; Wimpelberg et al., 1989). These themes overlap and interact within complex relationships. Contexts differ from organization to organization, which has direct implications for the leader. Some types of variables within the context can require more of the principal’s time (Bredeson et al., 2011; Day, 2014), which has implications for a principal’s personal context.

Secondly, organizational context is critical because it affects leadership style (Day, 2014; Gordon & Peterson, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2004; Osborn et al., 2007). Leaders who understand the organization within its context are better able to adjust their leadership style to address the needs of the organization and move the school forward, particularly in the area of student achievement (Bredeson et al., 2011; Brown & Conrad, 2007; Klar & Brewer, 2013). There is no single leadership style that can be applied successfully to each and every organizational context (Bredeson et al., 2011; Brown & Conrad, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2008). Organizational contexts then interact with personal contexts.

Personal Context and Gender

Personal context includes one’s personal conditions, personal situations, and personal lives. One critical aspect of personal context is gender, which correlates to organizational context (Kruger, van Eck & Vermeulen, 2005). While

both men and women are confronted with WLB challenges, this study is bound in the intersection of women and leadership and the unique challenges they face.

Women in school administration face similar experiences as their counterparts in the corporate sector who are also striving to manage a balance between work and home life. In the corporate setting, women are often blamed for not being more cognitively present at work, not wanting to climb the leadership ladder, or not knowing or caring enough to break the negative stereotypes about women (Sandberg, 2013). While there may be some merit in these perspectives, they do not negate the conflict that many women face between work and family and, perhaps, the harsh truth that having a robust career and being a super mom might not be possible for women in high level positions, at least not long term (Slaughter, 2012). For women, personal context may lead to different challenges than their male counterparts face when serving as a principal.

Because of the sheer quantity of work as documented at the start of this section, women face unique time constraints because they are often the primary care giver for children and carry more of the household responsibilities. According to Loder (2005), women shoulder a disproportionate amount of childcare and household responsibilities, which has been a significant barrier to their career advancement in administration. Furthermore, during women's principal tenures, women may face changes in family obligations, which may affect career aspirations and expectations. According to Loder (2005), it is "woefully apparent that the overwhelming responsibility for managing work-family

conflicts falls largely on women administrators” (p 768). Because of this competing demand for time, the role of principal is self-selected by women who either (a) did not have opposing family obligations or (b) have especially flexible and accommodating systems of family support, including spouses and extended family (Loder, 2005; Moorosi, 2011).

Women principals reported a higher degree of stress because they lacked the time to get the work done and because of the inordinate amount of paperwork required (Klocko & Wells, 2015). They also expressed more concern with balancing home and work life responsibilities (Kochan, et al., 2000).

In conclusion, in addition to organizational contexts, women principals have the added burden of their personal contexts, some of which may be gender specific. Personal contexts may entail marital status, family life, child rearing responsibilities, other care giving responsibilities, and health conditions; some of these factors may be more specific to women (Kruger et al., 2005), which is linked to a principal's ability to achieve WLB.

WLB

WLB is not a problem that is unique to school principals. It has been the center of studies within a variety of private sectors as well as school leadership. WLB has been at the core of many studies in various employment sectors. In the previous chapter, WLB was defined as one's satisfaction and perception of harmonizing work and home life. When employees are unable to find a balance that is acceptable, they experience inter-role conflict, a tension between competing pressures of work and home life (Moen, Kelly & Huang, 2008). In this

section, I will discuss empirical research addressing WLB as it affects all workers and more specifically how it affects women.

The actual number of hours a person works contributes to the time-based aspect of WLB since there are a set number of hours in a week—120 hours in a five-day, traditional 40-hour, full-time work week. For principals, the number of weekly work hours has increased on average over the past 30 years from an average of 53.2 hours per week (Martin & Willow, 1981) to 58.1 hours per week (Bitterman et al., 2013), with some principals reporting upwards of 70 hours per week (Read, 2000; Shen, 2005; Usdan, McCloud, & Podmostko, 2000). Read (2000) reported that all of the increased expectations and excessive workload has resulted in dissatisfaction in the role, which has led to greater turnover. In 2011, over a decade later, principals reported the lowest level of job satisfaction since 2001 with 75% citing that their job is too complex and 50% experiencing significant stress “several times a week” (Markow, Macia, & Lee, 2013, p.33). While the amount of time spent at work versus home is not the only factor in WLB, it is a significant factor because the hours in a day are fixed. There is no avenue for creating more hours with which to complete work or devote to home life.

Secondly, there has been a steady rise in the literature on WLB during the past 15 years (Budd & Mumford, 2005, Fleetwood, 2007; Greenhaus, 2008; Sánchez-Vidal, Cegarra-Leiva & Cegarra-Navarro, 2012). One of the causal factors that has received attention is working women. The demand from labor markets for more workers has encouraged women to enter the workforce, many

of whom enter as part-time employees or opt for flexible work hours. Employers offering part-time or flexible work hours marketed these options as family-friendly. However, two notable barriers arose from these practices. First, “women were still charged with performing domestic labour in the family” (Fleetwood, 2007, p. 394). In other words, women were able to participate in the work force but were still carrying the demands of home life creating a double burden (Fleetwood, 2007) or the second shift for working women (Hochschild, 2012). Secondly, “part-time work was not always conducive to family commitments” (Fleetwood, 2007, p. 394). Some part-time and/or flexible work arrangements were twilight hours, which would allow a partner to manage the evening childcare. While this solves the childcare problem, it does not negate the fact that the employee is excluded from many companies that do not have twilight hour positions and is not able to be present at dinner, help with homework, or spend time with their partner if these positions are available. This scenario begs the question of whether a twilight shift is really a family-friendly choice.

For principals, overload, lack of time, and feeling overwhelmed are recurring themes in the literature regarding WLB, particularly for women (Klocko & Wells, 2015; Kochan et al., 2000; Pollack et al., 2015). Similarly, in the corporate world, Schueller-Weidekamm and Kautzky-Willer (2012) found:

The sporadic focus on career advancement, time-consuming child care, responsibility for family life, and a woman’s tendency toward understatement were barriers to career development. For each individual, the allocation and interaction of different resources such as time, money,

scope of decision making, and physical, emotional, and social resources, were essential to maintain the individual WLB. (p. 244)

For women, the availability and allocation of resources is a critical part of their ability to balance work and home life.

Third, WLB can be impacted by an employee's career and life stages and how these interact (Chandra, 2012; Darcy, McCarthy, Hill, & Grady, 2009). There are four age groupings for professional career stages: early career stage, developing career stage, consolidating career stage, and pre-retirement career stage. Darcy et al. (2009) found that WLB is an important issue for employees at all of the stages of their careers, although likely for different reasons, such as marital status and child-rearing or elder care responsibilities. All age groups struggled to find a satisfactory balance regardless of where they stood in the career stages as commitment to their work and actual advancement could affect the number of work hours required, which then affects the time remaining to devote to home life.

Ultimately, however, it is critical to understand an individual's perception of WLB. A woman principal may devote 70% of her time to work and 30% to home, and yet, she may feel a perfect sense of WLB. On the other hand, another principal may have the reverse situation and still feel that she has not achieved a suitable WLB. The actual amount of time spent at work in comparison to home is not necessarily a precise gauge of WLB. Instead, it is one's own perception of what feels balanced that better embodies the meaning of WLB (Fleetwood,

2007). In this way, perception of WLB varies from person to person making it more difficult to define what the ideal WLB situation looks like.

For men and women alike, the role of the principal has grown to the point of work overload making the position nearly impossible to successfully complete given the actual limitations of the time that is available. This has led to studies about WLB for principals and more specialized studies regarding WLB and women principals. WLB research is one of the underpinnings of this study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in three concepts: principal role work overload, organizational and personal contexts, and WLB. For this study, it is important to understand the relationship between these concepts. Schools are organizations that are complex and dynamic and a leader has a responsibility to respond appropriately to the unique culture and context within that organization. However, the role of the principal has grown and changed in such a way that is leading to overload. This overload and other contextual factors of the organization impact the personal context of the principal, which includes the ability to manage responsibilities at home. Personal contexts may also impact a principal's ability to devote the required time to complete all the tasks at work. The ebbing and flowing relationship of organizational and personal contexts impacts WLB. It may be challenging to define WLB in absolute terms as much of this definition lies within one's perception of what balance means and looks like. Through this study, I sought to understand how the growing role of the principal and the organizational and personal contexts impact women administrators'

ability to balance work and home life. Below is a diagram of the relevant concepts that I detailed:

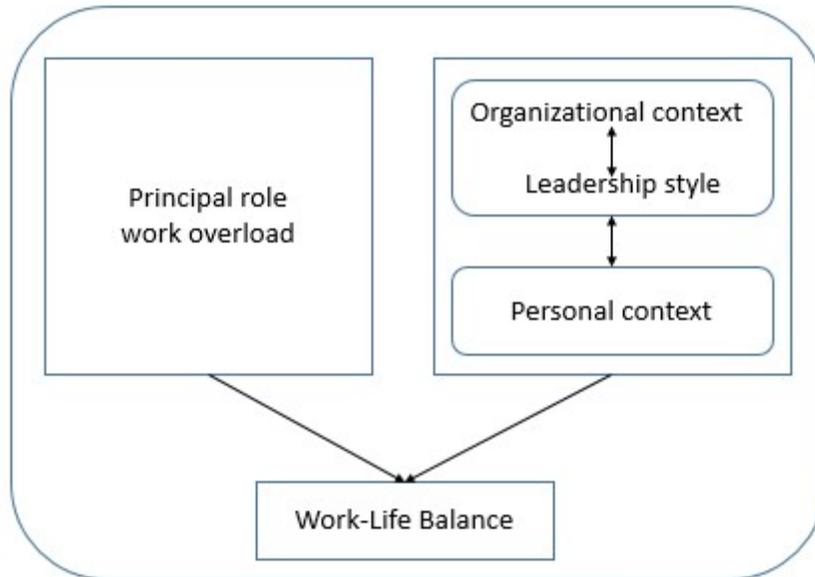


Figure 1. Conceptual framework diagram.

Chapter Summary

Current research shows that the responsibilities and role of the school principal have grown increasingly during the past few decades. Principals have reported that this growth in responsibilities has led to a greater commitment in time, often spilling over into evenings and weekends. In general, there is an overall sense of work overload, defined as not having enough time to accomplish all that needs to be done. Personal contexts and organizational school contexts also impact the experiences of principals. As a result, the issue of WLB has increasingly become an ongoing challenge in meeting the time demands of the principalship and the responsibilities at home. Concurrent to the growth of the role, women entering the principalship have added another layer to the WLB.

The research has focused on how organizational contexts and personal contexts impact WLB for principals. The literature is limited when addressing whether gender has any impact upon the work-life experience of principals. This qualitative study seeks to take a closer look at how principals manage WLB and how they perceive their organizational contexts and personal contexts as impacting their ability to balance work-life.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD OF INQUIRY

The role of the school site principal is ever growing with principles having more and more responsibilities. Principals are no longer simply operational managers but instructional leaders and professional developers and are more publicly accountable than ever before. With these ever-increasing responsibilities and pressures, the issue of WLB has become an ongoing challenge to meeting the time demands of the principalship and the responsibilities at home. Additionally, personal contexts and the organizational contexts of the school may also impact the experiences of principals. This is particularly of concern because the percentage of women entering the principalship has also grown steadily. This poses a problem for a profession that is already facing a shortage of qualified candidates.

The purpose of this study was to examine how women elementary principals in Southern California manage WLB and what they perceived to be organizational and personal contexts that shaped their experiences as principals.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What do 11 women elementary principals in Southern California perceive as the contextual factors in their organizations that affect their WLB?

2. What do 11 women elementary principals in Southern California perceive as the contextual factors in their personal lives that affect their WLB?
3. How do 11 women elementary principals in Southern California report managing WLB?

In this chapter, first I discuss the methodology for this study including a presentation of its philosophical foundations. Second, I describe the research design within my selected methodological approach for this study. After the research design, I explain the specific research methods used in this study. This description includes information about the setting, sample, the data collection, including instrumentation and procedure, and the data analysis, including validity/trustworthiness and the role of the researcher. I conclude with a chapter summary.

Qualitative Methods Research

According to Creswell (2014), “Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). Qualitative research focuses on the use of words and open-ended questions, drawing conclusions based on themes and make meaning of the data through interpretation. Qualitative research empowers participants, giving voice and validity to their understanding of their experiences. Data are typically collected in the participant’s setting and is interpreted with the participant’s input and feedback. The researcher allows for flexibility in the research process, which is reflected in the final written document. Most

importantly, the researcher honors the participants by actively engaging their perspectives and acknowledging the meaning of their experiences. For this study, in depth interviews that utilized open-ended questions allowed participants to share their voices. It also allowed me to make connections and draw common themes from the interview transcripts.

Each of the research methods has unique strengths and limitations. Qualitative research allows the researcher to explore a concept or phenomenon that has not been adequately studied. In these cases, the topic may be new or theories have not been tested with certain samples or groups of people. Because qualitative research involves fewer participants, it allows the researcher to probe at a deeper level, drawing out data that may otherwise have not been discovered. Qualitative research, however, also limits the generalizability as findings may be unique to the group being studied or the setting of the study. Qualitative research is often more time consuming both in data collection and data analysis. Also, because qualitative research topics are often deeply personal to the researcher, the study is susceptible to researcher biases (Creswell, 2014; Hatch, 2002).

Quantitative research allows the researcher to test a theory or an explanation. It relies heavily upon numbers and statistics with a larger scale of participants. The results are often generalizable provided the data are collected from a random sampling of a significant number of participants and the results have been replicated across different populations. The findings are based on statistical analysis, which is less time consuming, and less prone to researcher

biases. Quantitative research, however, might not necessarily reflect the participants' voice or understanding of experiences as questions are predetermined, which does not allow for flexibility. It is also possible that a researcher may miss emerging data because of fixating upon the theory at hand (Creswell, 2014; Hatch, 2002).

I chose to conduct a qualitative study for several reasons. First, I am seeking to understand the problem and world view from the perspective of principals who have lived it. Allowing their voice to be heard empowers them to share their lived experiences. Their perceptions and understanding of their experiences can be drawn out with much depth in a qualitative study resulting in rich data. The qualitative method also allows me to engage over an extended period, ask follow up questions, and process the information together with the participants. This engagement and personal relationship is not possible with a quantitative approach. Given the question I am seeking to answer, qualitative methods could yield the most relevant and meaningful results.

Research Design

In this section, I will give an overview of the research design for this qualitative study based on responsive interviewing grounded in the interpretive constructionist philosophy. This approach, according to Rubin and Rubin (2005), recognizes the fact that both the interviewer and interview are people, with feelings, personality, interests, and experiences. Because the interviewer and interviewee interact and influence the other, the interviewer has to be

self-aware, examining his or her own biases and expectations that might influence the interviewee. (p. 30)

Since I have held the role of principal, I remained mindful of my own emotions and biases in what I asked, how interviewees responded, and how I drew conclusions from the responses.

Research Methods

In this section I will give an overview of the specific research methods that I applied to this qualitative study based on interview data. I will discuss the setting, sample, data collection, and data analysis. In addition, I will describe the steps taken to ensure validity and trustworthiness.

Setting

Each participant of this study was located in a different setting and locale within the geographic boundaries of Southern California. All the participants worked in a public, traditional K-12 elementary school setting. Their current settings did not impact the execution of this study. The research was conducted in a location that was selected by the participant.

Sample

Participants for this study were women who lived in Southern California. Each participant had a total of three or more years of experience as an elementary school principal and was serving as principal at an elementary school site during the time of the study. Some participants had principal experiences at a few different sites for a differing number of years, but all participants had at least three years experience as a principal.

To procure a purposeful sampling of 11 participants, I began by casting a wide net and then intentionally chose participants who represented diverse backgrounds in order to draw some common themes based on their shared experience as elementary school principals. I solicited names and contact information from my committee members, professors within our institution, and administrators with whom I was acquainted. I sent out a cover letter via email that included information about my study and asked for demographic information that helped me select a diverse participant pool. I maintained this information in an Excel spreadsheet to keep track of the source of each participant referral along with her contact and demographic information. All but two of the participants worked in the same district.

To protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, I used pseudonyms for them as well as the schools and districts they referenced during our conversation. It was important to maintain anonymity and confidentiality because the conversations may have included some criticism of former supervisors, colleagues, school stakeholders, and staff members. Some of the participants were still working in the same school district where they were school site administrators or they were working in neighboring school districts. Since the participants were from one geographic location and the education community is well connected, anonymity and confidentiality helped protect their current and future career opportunities.

Data Collection and Management

According to Creswell (2007), data collection across all types of research requires standardization and must be collected in an ethical manner. In this section, I will address (a) instrumentation, (b) procedures for data collection, and (c) data management strategies.

Instrumentation. In qualitative research, the researcher is the research instrument. According to Hatch (2002), “the principal data for qualitative researchers are gathered directly by the researchers themselves” (p. 7). I collected data primarily through in-depth interviews with participants. The interview protocol was scripted and consisted of six primary questions, all of which had one to four additional probes (see Appendix A). For the sake of standardization, I used the same procedures and protocol with each participant. After completing the first draft of the interview protocol, I tested it with a classmate and professor. Upon receiving feedback from my classmate and my professor, I revised the protocol. I then conducted an interview with a former colleague who fit closely with the participant profile I was seeking. I revised the protocol a third time to better target the answers to the research questions.

After each interview, I also collected relevant artifacts from each participant’s present school site. This helped me describe the context of the schools in detail and relate them to the interview data. Artifacts include items such as School Accountability Report Cards and contextual information about the informants’ school site that was accessed as public information on their

respective district and school websites. These artifacts provided specific demographic information about each school site.

Procedures. I began sourcing potential participants in the fall semester of 2015. During that time, I initially contacted via text message, phone, or email over a dozen former administrator colleagues who are in Southern California. Once I heard back from them with an affirmation to participate, I asked if they would prefer meeting in person, via video conferencing, or phone. I accommodated whatever they requested.

For participants whom I did not personally know, I contacted them via email and shared a brief introduction of my study and myself. With the initial contact, I specified the requirements for the participants and asked if they would be willing to participate or if they knew anyone whom I could solicit to participate. If I did not hear back from them, I followed up one more time via email. Once I heard back from them with an affirmation to participate, I asked if they would prefer meeting in person, via video conferencing, or phone. I accommodated whatever they requested.

During this time, I drafted a consent form, which was collected from each participant prior to interviewing. I also drafted my interview protocol and practiced the interview once with a former colleague in Los Angeles, California, who closely matched the type of participant I was seeking and with my professor at California State University, Fullerton. I secured five participants by the fall of 2016. I completed all 11 initial interviews between November 2016 and the end of December 2016, after securing IRB approval. Table 1 outlines the timeline for

these interviews. This weekly schedule allowed me to be singularly focused on collecting data through interviews and allowed me to spend January and February focusing on transcribing, coding, writing memos, and drawing the codes into themes.

Table 1

Timeline for Interviews

| Date | Action Item |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Week of November 6, 2016 | Interview 1 and 2 |
| Week of November 13, 2016 | Interview 3 and 4 |
| Week of November 27, 2016 | Interview 5 and 6 |
| Week of December 4, 2016 | Interview 7 and 8 |
| Week of December 11, 2016 | Interview 9 and 11 |
| Week of December 18, 2016 | Make up week |

Each initial interview was recorded using two devices and required approximately 60-90 minutes. The length of time varied based on the participant's depth of description and willingness to answer follow up questions. The initial interview was conducted one-on-one in a quiet location of the participant's choosing. I took hand-written notes and double recorded each conversation. Informants were participating on a voluntary basis and could stop the interview at any time, choose not to answer any questions, or ask that I stop the recorder for any questions. I followed up with participants for a second interview if needed.

Data management. I implemented a few protocols for data management. First, I housed all files in electronic format in two locations. The first location was

on Microsoft's One Drive and the second location was on a portable external hard drive in my home office. Both were password protected, had large storage capacities, and served as mirrored backups. Secondly, each informant had a separate file folder that housed electronic information including transcriptions and digital audio recordings. Each item was saved with the date and the informant's initials to enable ease of tracking and organization. I backed up the two locations every time that I worked with the files to ensure that nothing was lost. Finally, only I had access to all of the data that was collected.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Because this was a qualitative study, it was important to keep the focus on understanding the experiences of the participants. "Data take on no significance until they are processed using the human intelligence of the researcher" (Hatch, 2002, p. 7). I did do so by addressing (a) data analysis, (b) validity and/or trustworthiness, and (c) the role of the researcher.

Data collection in qualitative studies involves written data such as interview transcriptions and observation notes. This study collected data from 11 interviews. Dedoose was utilized for all the stages of coding and data analysis. Dedoose is a secure online qualitative data storage and analysis software.

Interview notes and transcriptions were used for the first cycle of coding. The first cycle stage began with initial coding to employ in vivo coding, which "uses words or short phrases from the participant's own language" (Miles, Huberman, Saldaña, 2014, p. 74). This was the first step in looking for words and

phrases that were commonly used by participants, thus, “prioritizing and honoring the participant’s voice” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 91).

The Dedoose software enabled me to move forward with the second cycle coding beginning with pattern coding. Here, common major themes were identified and I considered “rules, causes, and explanations in the data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 211). I used focused coding to decide which codes appeared most frequently to cultivate the most significant categories in the data and determine which codes made the most sense.

Finally, once it was determined which themes were most prominent “categories of categories” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 250), I looked for possible structures and relationships to guide me towards theories, concepts, or key assertions.

Table 2 shows the timeline for data collection, analysis, and completion of my study.

Table 2

Timeline for Data Collection and Analysis Completion

| Month | Action Item |
|---------------------|---|
| September - October | Formation of committee Defend proposal |
| November | IRB application submitted |
| November - December | Source participants Complete 11 interviews |
| January - February | Transcribe interviews Begin initial coding in Dedoose Validity steps – test the coding schema with a code book and a second coder |
| March - April | Second cycle coding in Dedoose Creating themes in Dedoose Memoing |
| April – May | Write chapters 4 and 5 |
| May | Defend dissertation |

Procedures to Ensure Validity and Trustworthiness

Creswell (2007) defined qualitative validity as the researcher checking “for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures. Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, participant, or the readers of an account” (p. 201).

Maxwell (2013) posited that validity “does not imply the existence of any ‘objective truth’ to which an account can be compared. Validity, as a component of your research design, consists of your conceptualizations of these threats and the strategies you use to discover if they are plausible in your actual research

situation, and to deal with them if they are plausible” (p. 122-123). It is critical to acknowledge what these threats may be and how to keep them in check.

Furthermore, according to Maxwell (2013), there are two particular threats to validity in qualitative research because the researcher is a research instrument: bias and reactivity. Qualitative research must address bias and reactivity in order to uphold the integrity of the study. In order to ensure such trustworthiness and credibility, the following validity strategies were employed.

In this study, first, I tested my coding schema with a code book and a second coder. During this process, I checked for calibration across one to two interview transcripts to achieve a valid and reliable coding schema.

Second, I used rich data and descriptions to communicate my findings. According to Maxwell (2013), “In interview studies, such data generally require verbatim transcripts of the interviews, not just notes on what you felt was significant” (p. 126). I also gave a clear and detailed description of the relevant school settings in which each participant served as principal. By carefully transcribing the interviews and thoroughly describing the settings, “the results become more realistic and rich. This procedure can add to the validity of the findings” (Creswell, 2007, p. 202).

Third, I ensured that I selected participants who represented different work and personal contexts. Being purposeful in the selection of participants enabled me to gather data from those who had differing perspectives, thoughts, and ideas about the WLB of elementary principals.

Role of the researcher. As mentioned previously, in qualitative research, the researcher is a research instrument. It is the researcher's responsibility to make sense of the data and draw sound conclusions. According to Hatch (2002), "The logic behind the researcher-as instrument approach is that the human capacities necessary to participate in social life are the same capacities that enable qualitative researchers to make sense of the actions, intentions, and understandings of those being studied" (p. 7). Because the researcher is the instrument, it is critical that the researcher, "explicitly identify reflexively their biases, values, personal background, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status that shape their interpretations formed during a study" (Creswell, 2014, p. 187).

As a heterosexual, married woman with children, I approached this study through the normative gender behaviors of a wife and mother. Because this study is specifically grounded in gender, it is one aspect that I have a vested interest in regarding WLB. From my perspective, I felt the job of principal was too time consuming to achieve a balance with my familial responsibilities. Even with a spouse who was supportive and helpful with household duties, I struggled with guilt, stress from working around the clock, and feeling as though I was not giving my family enough time, either physically or emotionally. I tried serving at different types of schools such as an affluent, high achieving, predominantly White suburban charter school and a Title I, minority-majority, low performing, and high needs population urban school. I felt the work was equally demanding and stressful in different ways regardless of the different contexts. Ultimately, I left the

profession after having my second child. I was fortunate to have a spouse whose earnings made it financially viable for me to not have to work full-time. I understand that not everyone has this option.

My bias is that the principalship has not adjusted to the demands of modern day life, including the reality of dual income families with children. It also seems apparent that the principalship does not accommodate for working mothers, as there is little flexibility in the work hours or the way in which work can be accomplished. I acknowledged that it is possible that other women may not share this view. It also knew that it was possible that males could share my perceptions of the principalship and that my view was not gender specific.

I acknowledged that my background as a second generation, upper middle class, suburban, Asian American in her early forties could impact the participants' willingness to openly share their story with me. I understood the privileges that have been afforded to me because of my socio-economic status, race, and education. I was judicious in my efforts to minimize the reactivity and any divide by considering where interviews are conducted, what equipment I brought along, and how I presented myself, including my clothing and appearance, when meeting in person.

I also have two school-aged children and worked at my pleasure after having my children. The financial circumstances within my personal context afforded me the option of working part-time, and there were two different stretches of time when I was willingly unemployed and not seeking employment. Many women principals do not have the option to leave the principalship because

of their financial circumstances. I was purposeful in making connections with these women through shared work and life experiences. I sought to minimize the differences in our backgrounds by focusing on what we had in common professionally and personally. I was also careful not to mention my financial circumstances and reinforced the fact that I continue to work and do so because I enjoy working.

I understand that every principal's story is different and their personal contexts and professional contexts may well differ from mine. For some, they may simply enjoy being a school administrator and not find any issues with WLB. For others, they may have felt that education is simply their calling, and the work is worth the sacrifices. Others still may see the principalship as a stepping-stone to higher level positions within the school system and view it as a temporary imbalance in work-life before they move to higher level positions. Whatever experiences principals had, I was open to hearing their thoughts and views to see if there were any common themes. I refrained from sharing my story with participants unless they asked for details so as not to influence their answers. If they were interested in hearing my story, I shared it with them upon the completion of the initial interview.

To address validity threats, I began with testing my coding schema with a code book and a second coder to calibrate and ensure reliability. Then I engaged in member checking. Member checking is the process of "systematically soliciting feedback about your data and conclusions from the people you are studying" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126). Because I had hypotheses and biases from my own

experiences, I shared my data and conclusions with participants after coding, analyzing the data and drawing themes and conclusions from that process. Member checking gave me the opportunity to entrust my findings back to the participants and ensured that I was not misinterpreting their words, thoughts, or intended communications. I also needed to ensure that my interview transcripts were verbatim and detailed so that I could provide a clear picture of the participants. This use of rich data helped to minimize my bias in leading participants to answers I was looking for and in listening only for what I hoped to hear.

Chapter Summary

The role of the modern-day school principal has morphed into the equivalence of two full-time positions. For many principals, this poses a formidable challenge in balance work and home life. Additionally, for working mothers, the principalship can seem like an impossible role, which may lead to stress and work overload. For single participants, there may be other reasons such as elder care responsibilities that may lead to an imbalance between work and home life. This qualitative study sought to find how 11 elementary women principals manage WLB. In the next chapter, I discuss the findings as it relates to the research questions.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter focuses on the key findings from the in-depth interviews with 11 women elementary principals in Southern California and how they perceive WLB within their organizational and personal contexts. I met with each participant at the location and time of their choosing. All interviews were voice recorded and transcribed. The findings are based upon interview data and additional organizational contexts that was gathered from individual school data from the 2014-15 California School Accountability Report Card (SARC). Chapter 4 begins with a description of each participant's demographics as well as the demographics of the school where the participant was serving as principal at the time of this study. Next is a summary and table containing additional themes, which surfaced from more than four participants. For the remainder of the chapter, the most significant data is used to address each research question. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Participant Descriptions

Participants for this study were women elementary principals in Southern California with at least three years of service as a principal. Five of the participants had 10 or more years of experience as a principal. One participant was single, one was recently divorced, and the remaining nine were married. Five of the participants had no children, while one was in the process of

adoption. One had two young children under the age of seven. One had one child under the age of seven. Two had secondary school aged children, and two had children in college. Five of the participants were White, two were Latina, two were African American, one was Asian, and one was Asian/African American. Six of the participants were at Title I schools and five of the participants were at schools with more than 500 students. These demographics are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Participants Demographics

| Name of Participant ¹ | Number of years as principal ² | Marital Status | Number of Children | Age(s) of Children | School Demographics ³ | Ethnicity |
|----------------------------------|---|----------------|--------------------|---------------------|---|------------------------|
| Annie | 8 | Single | 0 | N/A | K-6, 450 students, Title I, 72% FRL, 27% EL, 13% SpEd | Asian |
| Diane | 10 | Married | 2 | 13, 16 | K-6, 670 students, 17% FRL, 20% EL, 8% SpEd | White |
| Barbara | 4 | Married | 0 | N/A | K-6, 358 students, Title I, 71% FRL, 38% EL, 18% SpEd | Asian-African American |
| Rebecca | 15 | Married | 0 | N/A | TK-5, 453 students, 23% FRL, 8% EL, 12% SpEd | White |
| Abigail | 10 | Married | 0 | Adoption in process | K-2, Title I, 400 students, 84% FRL, 59% EL, 8% SpEd | Latina |
| Pam | 9 | Married | 2 | 19 months, 6 | TK-5, 530 students, Title I, 31% FRL, 27% EL, 7% SpEd | White |
| Lisa | 4 | Married | 0 | N/A | TK-6, 750 students, 14% FRL, 17% EL | White |
| Elena | 6 | Divorced | 3 | 11, 16, 21 | TK-6, 918 students, Title I, 90% FRL, 68% EL, 9% SpEd | Latina |

1. The names of the participants are pseudonyms

2. The number of years as principal includes the year during which these interviews were conducted.

3. FRL denotes participation in a free and reduced lunch program; EL denotes students who are identified as English learners; SpEd denotes students who are in a special education program.

Table 3, *cont.*

| | | | | | | |
|---------|----|---------|---|---------------|---|---------------------|
| Dorothy | 8 | Married | 1 | 5 | K-6, 480 students, Title I, 85% FRL, 79% EL, Dual Immersion program, 8% SpEd | White |
| Leanne | 10 | Married | 3 | 19, 21, 22 | K-6, Title I, 626 students, 94% FRL, 52% EL, 9% SpEd | African American |
| Esther | 13 | Married | 2 | 21, 22 | K-6, 474 students, 34% FRL, 13% EL, 8% SpEd | African American |

Summary of Additional Themes

Eight additional themes or factors surfaced from the participant interviews. These themes were deemed significant because they were reported by at least four participants and are noted in Table 4. For this study, I focused on the themes and factors that most closely aligned to the research questions.

Table 4

Additional Themes from the Data

| Theme | Number of Participants Mentioning |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Feel constantly on | 5 |
| Delegate, need to delegate | 5 |
| Enjoy work | 4 |
| Experience feelings of guilt | 4 |
| Keep home/work separate | 4 |
| Not caring for self | 4 |
| Enjoy relationships | 5 |
| Make personal sacrifices for the job | 6 |

N = 11

Research Question One

Research question one sought to understand what 11 women elementary principals in Southern California perceived as the contextual factors in their organizations that affected their WLB. There were four main contextual factors within their work organizations that participants reported as impacting their WLB: special education, parents, the superintendent, and the site team. Table 4 shows the number of participants who reported these four contextual factors within their organization and lists the details from the respective interviews.

Table 5

Contextual Factors Within Organizations as Reported by Participants

| Contextual Factor within the Organization | Number of Participants Mentioning | Details/Highlights |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| The Site Team | 11 | <p>All participants reported their site team as impacting their WLB.</p> <p>Three participants reported their team as a positive impact; one participant had an AP, one had a part-time TOSA, and one had a large full-time office and instructional support staff.</p> <p>All participants who did not have an AP reported that having an AP would positively impact their WLB. Also, having an AP creates a team for the principal.</p> |
| Parents | 8 | <p>Reported as positive and negative impact upon time. Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) with greater parent involvement was reported as helpful.</p> <p>Unreasonable or difficult parents were reported as a negative, especially when communicating student discipline issues.</p> |
| Superintendent | 9 | <p>Participants reported superintendents as positively impacting WLB by implementing policies such as principals need not attend board meetings.</p> <p>Conversely, superintendents negatively impacted WLB by implementing policies such requiring principals to attend local city council meetings in addition to school board meetings.</p> |
| Special Education | 7 | <p>More students with IEPs led to a greater time drain particularly because of principals being required to attend IEP meetings.</p> <p>SDC classes negatively impacted WLB dependent upon student behavior needs.</p> |

N = 11

Support for WLB because of the site team. Elena was the only principal who had an assistant principal (AP) on site. Her school had 918 students and had a high English learner [EL] and free and reduced lunch [FRL] population. She also had a full-time literacy coach and a full-time technology/science coach, along with the support of a school psychologist for special education (SpEd). Elena expressed that it was critical to her success as a school leader to have a robust and effective team. Elena stated, "I would not be able to function [without my AP]. Obviously, [she's helpful because she's] doing the tasks that I'm not able to do. She does a lot of the operational tasks. But my AP is also valuable as a colleague to bounce ideas off. It's difficult for me to do that with any other staff member because I [really] can't." For Elena, her AP provided administrative support in getting work completed, but moreover, she also provided a sense of collegiality and collaboration as a fellow administrator. When issues could not be discussed with teachers or office staff, Elena had her AP, with whom she could brainstorm, discuss, or problem solve. While having sufficient support members on her team was vital to Elena's WLB, she was adamant that her AP was indispensable for her WLB.

Leanne and Diane were also content with their site team and reported that their WLB was acceptable because of their team. Leanne's site has 626 students and a high FRL and EL populations. Her site is well staffed. She stated, "I have a secretary. There are two attendance clerks. Then there's a health tech aid and a counselor. They're all full-time. I have a math instructional coach and an ELA instructional coach. I have an intervention teacher that's out of the classroom like

an RTI [spell out the full term for RTI here] person.” With a well-staffed, effective instructional and support team, Leanne reported that she felt a better sense of WLB.

Diane also reported that her site team positively impacted her WLB because she was able to share the work and had a lateral colleague on site with whom she could collaborate. She stated,

I have a teacher on special assignment [TOSA] who is here three days a week. It makes the job very enjoyable because as a principal I think this can be a lonely job if you don't have colleagues [on site]. You know we all need our own professional learning communities and the closer that is to us [physically] the better. We can learn from each other during the day and distribute managerial duties that come up. I think that has helped me balance because now I don't deal with discipline all day so I don't have to do all my paperwork at home. [With my TOSA's help,] we can get it done in the same day. In positions where I haven't had [a TOSA] it's been a lot more challenging.

For Diane, having a TOSA for three days a week, allowed her to share the administrative responsibilities that normally she would have to deal with alone. When she was able to do that, she regained some of her work time so that she did not have to take work home. Like Leanne, Diane also expressed gratitude for a fellow administrator on site with whom she could collaborate, problem solve, and share thoughts. Diane viewed her TOSA as her team and her team was a contextual factor at her school that positively impacted her WLB.

Challenges to WLB because of the site team. Abigail is the principal of a K-2 Title I school with fewer than 400 students. She did not have additional support staff at her site, which posed challenges. She made it a point to delegate and to build the capacity of their teachers to take on leadership roles to help her with the work load. Although she expressed contentment with her teaching staff and had very few student discipline issues, she also stated that her support staff was lacking in head count. Insufficient full-time support staff greatly impacted her WLB negatively. Because she lacked staff, she was often pulled in different directions to fill the voids. She stated,

The school is small, but I'm the only one. There are no TOSAs, no AP. I have a part-time psych, part time RSP [spell the complete term for RSP here], and basically all my support staff is part-time . . . Let's say a child [has a melt down] in the classroom. It's me. A classroom [without a substitute]; it's me. There are a lot of those types of demands because we are small. I have done everything from help clean in the lunch area to being the custodian. I've served in the cafeteria line if necessary. I'm usually the nurse because if my clerks are busy I'm doing that. So, one of the biggest issues is that we may be small, but it is still a high-needs population.

Without sufficient full-time staff, Abigail, as the principal, is responsible for ensuring that every need at the school is met. This negatively impacts her WLB because she is often taking time to put out fires.

Only one participant had an assistant principal, despite some having a total enrollment over 600 students, Title I, and/or high FRL and EL populations. When asked, what would help make for a more positive WLB, everyone responded by asking for an assistant principal (AP). Even Leanne and Diane, who had robust full-time support staffs, stated that an AP would be their first request. Regardless of the school demographics, Title I status, enrollment size, the participant's years of experience, marital and family status, or gender, participants stated that an AP would positively impact their WLB. Rebecca, principal of a school of 450 students in an affluent area stated, "An AP would be great. It would be great to have someone there to help because often you've got all these things you're trying to deal with, and it always happens all at once. When it rains, it pours." In these types of instances, which are not uncommon, an AP would be able to help lighten the load.

Many participants reported that having an AP is not only for the administrative or operational help but also that having an AP would provide a reduced sense of isolation, a shared sense of responsibility, and collaboration within a team. Annie stated that for elementary principals, the need for an AP is decided simply based on student enrollment numbers. She compared this to middle schools where even if the school does not have high enrollment numbers, they are given an AP. She stated,

When you don't have a team of people everybody is expecting you to be doing everything. I think everybody needs an AP. It's not simply having the extra help to do the work; it's the working as part of a team. At an

elementary school, we're solo. We work by ourselves. Even middle school principals always say they've got the best gig in the world. And I agree because they have the same number of kids, if not less, and they have a dean and an AP. They all work together as a team. That's the missing link for elementary schools. We don't have a team that we work with. My team is my secretary and she doesn't understand the things that go on in the school.

Participants reported that the support of an AP, and the formation of a team could positively impact their WLB.

Parents

Eight of the participants reported parents and parent relationships as a factor that impacted their WLB. Some reported that parents positively impacted their WLB mainly through the support of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Others reported that parents negatively impacted their WLB because of the time involved with parent communications.

Support for WLB because of parents. Lisa, a four-year veteran, reported the difference between the PTA at the Title I school in a neighboring district, where she had previously served as a TOSA and the PTA at her current school, which was not Title I. She explained her experience in detail.

I have a super active PTA. The school I came from, the entire PTA meeting, including leadership and members, was maybe 20 people. When I came here and met the PTA officers, it was approximately 25 leaders alone! They're chairing different events and super excited. They're willing

to go out and do whatever it takes to make their years here super memorable. I'm so fortunate.

This type of active and engaged parent community can be a positive because they provide support for events, fundraising, and activities that enhance students' experiences at school and support the needs of the school. When parents organize events, the principal is relieved of this responsibility, which can be a significant time saver. When parents organize fundraisers, it can alleviate some of the stress of having to seek out grants or other funding sources for the school's needs.

Challenges to WLB because of parents. Participants reported that having the support and engagement of parents could also have a negative impact on WLB because of parents' expectations. For Leanne and Rebecca, it was clear that parents expected them to be present at events, which were often held after school and sometimes on the weekends. Although parents expected them to be present, both participants expressed that they had a sense of expectation themselves to be present regardless of parents' expectations because they enjoyed the events, and it gave them an opportunity to build rapport with parents and students. Thus, although events impacted the principals' time, there was not appear to be a sense of resentment. The principals seemed to perceive these events as a valuable use of time.

Participants reported parent relationships as negatively impacting their WLB when it came to communicating discipline issues. Several participants reported that investigating discipline issues prior to contacting parents absorbed

a significant part of their work day because of how thoroughly they needed to prepare before calling parents. Participants reported that parent attitudes concerning discipline impacted how much time they had to spend on these matters. Annie stated,

Nowadays, parents automatically assume their kid did nothing wrong. I put so much time into making sure that I dot my i's and cross my t's for everything. Therefore, a minor little incident, I have to interview seven kids, [instead of just the two who were involved]. There are sometimes when a minor discipline issues can take me all day long. I can forget about what's on my calendar.

When there are discipline issues that require parent follow up, it can take a significant amount of time to prepare for the parent communication because of the possibility of a negative reaction. The phone call itself or an in-person parent conference can consume time as well.

Two participants also cited unreasonable and unresponsive parents as impacting their WLB. Elena, a six-year veteran at a Title I school explained, "Unreasonable parents are difficult for me to navigate. . . . I have to be patient and understand the difficult parent or the unresponsive parent. That's probably my least favorite part of the job." When parents are unresponsive, it can be a time drain for principals as they may have to call repeatedly or try different methods of communicating, all of which take up time in the work day.

Likewise, Barbara, a four-year veteran at a Title I school reported that she spent time during the work day contacting parents regarding attendance and

educating parents about the importance of regular, timely attendance. She stated,

The parents are sending [their kids] to school, but we can barely get them here on time as it is. I'm spending a lot of time even trying to get students here on time and helping parents understand that it's important. Whereas there are other schools where the parents are affluent and well educated, so they understand the importance of school attendance.

Barbara implied that there are likely fewer attendance issues at non-Title I schools because parents may be more aware of the importance of school attendance. She spent a good portion of her work time contacting parents, which was a negative impact on her WLB because of the time requirements.

In summary, eight participants reported parents and parent relations as a contextual factor in their organizations that impacted their WLB. In some cases, parents provided a much needed and appreciated support for organizing activities and events that relieved the principal from such responsibilities. This allowed principals to conserve some of their time. In other cases, parents negatively impacted their WLB because of the time principals devoted to communication with parents. Thus, participants perceived parents and parent relations as positively and negatively impacting WLB.

The Superintendent

Nine of the participants reported their superintendent as a contextual factor in their organization that impacted their WLB. Some reported that their superintendent positively impacted their WLB, mainly through general support

and policy changes. Others reported that their superintendent negatively impacted their WLB because of the requirements placed upon them and the general lack of support and communication.

Support for WLB because of the superintendent. Leanne viewed her new superintendent as positively impacting her WLB. She stated that one of the first changes the superintendent made upon arrival was to remove the requirement for principals to attend every board meeting. As a result, the principals were able to reclaim some evening time to devote to other responsibilities. Her superintendent also approved her vacation, which was in September to celebrate her 25th wedding anniversary. The superintendent stated that this was a life accomplishment that deserved to be celebrated and recognized. Leanne reported feeling a sense of relief and joy that her superintendent approved and gave her blessing for this vacation. The actions of her superintendent positively impacted Leanne's WLB.

Abigail made a comparison between her current district and her previous district, which was a smaller community. At Abigail's current district, the most recent superintendent had a talk with her about why she was not in attendance for the district teacher of the year awards dinner. Abigail stated that she was not aware that she was required to attend. She was quickly informed by the superintendent that this was a required evening event. In this case, Abigail perceived the superintendent's requirement as negatively impacting her WLB because it was an evening event that took from her family time. Conversely, the superintendent at Abigail's previous district did not pressure principals to attend

the many events that took place in the community. Abigail stated that in her previous district principals were permitted to miss events if they communicated their absence in advance to the superintendent. She also did not fear retribution if she was unable to attend. Her previous superintendent's approach to extra events positively impacted Abigail's WLB because she did not feel work had to take priority over her home life.

Challenges to WLB because of the superintendent. Two of the participants, employed by the same district, reported that their superintendent required them to be present regularly at community events such as city council meetings. This is an unusual requirement because principals generally do not attend these types of meetings on a regular basis. The participants attributed the requirement to the fact that the superintendent had never been a principal and seemed to be less aware of the time constraints of being a principal. Annie stated,

Our superintendent has never been [a principal] at the school site. I think that says a lot because one of her biggest priorities is to always get out there and be the face of the district in the community. Often, principals are expected to be at every [school, district, and community] event because otherwise she will make a mental note and remember that you weren't there.

Barbara, who is employed by the same district, reported similar thoughts when she stated, "With our current superintendent, the community perception is everything. That's been very clear. Nobody told me when I became a principal

that I was going to have to be so involved with the community, the political arena, and engaged with the city council.” Annie and Barbara perceived required attendance at extra meetings that were not directly relevant to the happenings at the school site as a time drain. In this case, the superintendent’s requirement for the principals to attend community meetings was seen as negatively impacting WLB.

Elena and Lisa reported that their respective superintendents negatively impacted their WLB because of their lack of support. They cited as examples, their superintendents’ lack of clear communication and lack of understanding of the school. In general, Elena and Lisa did not view their superintendents as being a helpful resource. Elena stated, “I think the biggest help would be if she knew my school so that at least she can have a conversation and offer perhaps guidance in maybe specific situations. I think that would [helpful] to have a resource to bounce ideas off.” Elena’s superintendent’s lack of understanding of her school site and ability to help as a resource negatively impacted her WLB. If her superintendent were able to provide some sense of support, Elena may be able to problem solve more efficiently and effectively, thus, saving her some time.

Lisa reported that the lack of communication from her superintendent negatively impacted her WLB because, at times, it created more work. She gave the example of the rollout of the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) program. Lisa stated, “In our district [we are lacking] communication. We will often find things out after the fact . . .ie., BYOD roll out. Once we got all the information, we [pointed out several things that had not been considered], but it had already gone

out. Principals ended up wasting a lot of our time because we were doing damage control for a while.” Lisa Indicated that when the superintendent’s communication was not clear and principals were not included in important conversations, it had a negative impact on WLB because of the work it created for principals after the fact.

In summary, nine of the participants reported their superintendent as a contextual factor in their organizations that impacted their WLB. In some cases, superintendents provided much needed support and implemented policy changes that supported WLB. This allowed principals to regain some of their time. In other cases, superintendents negatively impacted principals’ WLB because of requirements to attend additional events, the lack of communication, and the lack of general support. These all required more time of the principals. Participants perceived their superintendent as positively and negatively impacting WLB.

Special Education

Participants reported several contextual factors within their organizations that can be categorized as negatively impacting their WLB. Of these factors, seven participants reported that special education related responsibilities took up a substantial amount of time at work. These responsibilities included the large number of Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings held on campus and their required attendance at the IEP meetings, as well as the presence of one or more Special Day Classes (SDC) on campus. Participants reported that having a large special education population drained more time from their work day.

Annie, an eight-year veteran principal explained that her site had two SDC classes, one Resource Specialist Program (RSP) class, and one speech class taught by three speech teacher. She indicated that because of the special needs of SDC students sometimes student safety and discipline-related issues consumed her work day. She explained, "Whenever you have special day classes, it's always an X Factor because you never know how the kids are [going to behave] in class. If there are crazy behavior issues [such as a child who runs out of the classroom], then half the day you're running around the playground trying to get the child [back into the classroom]." Typically, elementary schools do not have a school resource officer or additional campus security support. As a result, the principal takes on this responsibility. Therefore, if a student's special need is behavior related, and it involves running away or lashing out violently, the principal is responsible for securing the student. According to Annie, this can become a significant time drain during the work day.

Annie also reported that the actual number of IEP meetings were a significant time drain. She explained,

Not all schools are created equal. It's difficult not to look at other principals' school sites and see how easy they have it [because they don't have an SDC program] . . . But I think what the district doesn't realize is the principal of the school [with the SDC program], has 50 additional IEPs to attend. Whereas the school that doesn't, [the principal attends closer to] 30 IEPs [without the additional load]. At my school, I counted 135 IEP

meetings. Sometimes, there's a disparity, but [the district office] doesn't care about that.

Thus, having a large number of IEP meetings that must be attended accounted for many hours of work time. This time was then not available for other tasks that needed to be completed.

Lisa shared about the difficulty she faced her first few years as principal due to a district-wide pre-school special education program that was housed at her site. She stated, "SpEd was . . . such a time drain, and the program itself was floundering, and it was horribly draining. It was over a hundred IEP meetings a year, not including my K-6 kids. That's just preschool and so when that moved it was night and day."

During Lisa's fourth year, the preschool special education program was moved to another school site to better serve the needs of the students and families. As a result, the time commitment that was required to attend IEP meetings before, after, and during school hours was reduced by at least 10 hours per week, giving Lisa back time for other areas that needed her attention. Lisa expressed a more satisfactory balance of work-life during her fourth year because with the time she regained, she was able to be in classrooms, be out on the playground during recesses, attend PLC meetings, and overall have much more enjoyment in her job.

Finally, Abigail reported that if she could be relieved of her responsibilities with managing SpEd, she would do so—not because she does not care for

students who are in the SpEd program—but because she trusts the team that is managing the program. She stated,

The [SpEd] teachers as a whole are so good about keeping me informed of every child. They'll let me know [how] the kids are [doing]. I have no qualms because their reports are up to date and everything [is] in the right place. Therefore, sitting there the entire time for an hour and a half [IEP meeting] seems like a poor use of my time. In the back of mind, I'm thinking of all the other stuff to do. But our director of special ed wants us at all of these.

Seven of the participants reported that special education programs negatively impacted their WLB because the meetings were a drain on their limited time. Attending IEP meetings took time from other responsibilities, such as observing in classrooms and being present at Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings. Participants reported that when they were relieved of special education related responsibilities, they had more time to devote to other aspects of the principal role that they felt were important to moving the school forward and were more enjoyable.

In summary, participants reported a variety of contextual factors in their organizations that impacted their WLB. Their responsibilities regarding parents and the special education programs on their sites as well as the superintendents of their districts were reported as negatively impacting WLB. Parents were also reported as having a positive effect because of their support and involvement in site PTAs. The site team was also reported as a positive when a site had a

supportive and high functioning team members that were present. The site team was also viewed as a negative when support staff lacked a sufficient number of members. It is evident that participants perceived contextual factors within their organizations as having an impact on their WLB.

Research Question Two

Research question two sought to understand what 11 women elementary principals in Southern California perceived as the contextual factors in their personal lives that affect their WLB. There were three main contextual factors within their personal lives that participants reported as impacting their WLB: spousal support, children, and finances. Table 6 shows the number of participants who reported these three contextual factors within their personal lives and lists the details from the respective interviews.

Spousal Support

Married participants reported that their spouse was the greatest contextual factor in their personal lives that positively impacted their WLB. Participants cited that their spouse was supportive and contributed to childcare and household responsibilities, which significantly helped their WLB. An overall sense of spousal support appeared to be helpful as many participants cited this as a key factor in their relationship with their spouse.

Table 6

Contextual Factors Within Personal Lives as Reported by Participants

| Contextual Factor within Personal Lives | Number of Participants Mentioning | Details/Highlights |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| Spousal support | 9 | Spousal support and understanding of work reported by all married participants. Spouses carried household responsibilities such as cooking. |
| Children | 5 | Four participants reported the ability to devote more hours to work because they did not have children. The one participant with two young children reported the negative impact on WLB due to having children. |
| Financial Need | 4 | Two participants had no other source of income other than their own. They did not have any choice but to work. Two participants earned a larger income than their spouse so work was necessary to sustain the family financially. |

N = 11

Abigail reported, "I'm really very happy with my husband. He's one of the calmest people I know, which calms me down because the principalship does feel overwhelming." For Abigail, the emotional support and encouragement of her spouse was one important factor that she shared several times during the interview.

Rebecca also reported how her spouse helped her to maintain WLB. She stated, "My husband has been very supportive when it comes to balance. My balance is about making time for him. He's been very supportive and understanding of the commitment [to my job]."

Several participants reported that their spouse carried a large share of the household responsibilities such as cooking. Pam reported, "My husband is a very good cook. So he cooks dinner every night, which is a huge blessing for me." Likewise, Rebecca reported, "We share [the household responsibilities]. My husband cooks. He takes care of all the bills and does the shopping. Whereas, I do all the cleaning. I don't have a house keeper." For Barbara, who reported that her husband is independent by nature, stated, "He cooks way better than I do. He's particular about his laundry so he'll do his own." Lisa also stated that they cook together as a way to stay connected on a regular basis and nurture their relationship. Having a spouse who was helpful in this way allowed the principals not to be consumed with household needs and therefore maintain a better WLB.

Participants also reported that their spouse's profession and work schedule were invaluable aspects of their lives that helped support WLB. Barbara reported that her spouse's work schedule had a positive impact on her WLB. She stated,

One thing that helps in terms of my marriage is that my husband works a swing shift . . . It's not as difficult to balance, because [my husband is not there when I get home]. My husband works 2[pm] to 10[pm] and if he works overtime, he might not come home until midnight. In the evenings, I have a little time to do [wife-like things], but I am inundated with work. So I fill all that time with work because I didn't want to be buried under work [at the office]. But I'm buried under work everywhere. I feel like if he worked a regular schedule it would be much more stressful because he'd be home

by 5:00 while I am still at work. He doesn't go to work on Fridays. On those days, he'll call me at 5:30 asking when I'll be home.

Barbara's spouse's work schedule released her from the typical evening routine that many married couples are accustomed to, such as having dinner together. However, rather than taking care of household responsibilities, Barbara used that time to complete work tasks. Barbara expressed an understanding of her husband's expectation that on the days he was not at work, he expected her to be home for dinner.

For Pam, a recent change in her spouse's work schedule negatively impacted her WLB. He was unemployed for a short time and was able to help with childcare drop off and pick up. However, because he has now secured employment, she stated, "it's difficult now [because] he works 9am to 7pm, which is really hard on me because I depended on him a lot [for childcare needs]". Pam was no longer able to rely on her spouse to help with drop off and pick up so the responsibility fell back to her. This posed a problem due to the time constraints of daycare hours, and therefore, this change negatively impacted her WLB and caused her stress.

Abigail's spouse worked from home in the information technology field, which afforded him the flexibility to manage household affairs such as taking care of the dog. Diane's and Esther's spouses were teachers, which they reported as good professions because they shared the same schedule as their children. All the other spouses had flexible work arrangements that enabled them to provide help and support, which positively impacted the participants' WLB.

In summary, an intense work schedule such as that of a principal can take its toll on marital relationships. However, as reported by all the married participants in this study, a spouse's support, understanding and sharing of household and child rearing responsibilities can help to alleviate the tension of WLB.

Children

Another contextual factor in the personal lives of participants that impacted their WLB was children. For those participants who did not have children, they reported that not having children had a significant time impact upon their WLB. For those participants who had children, the responses were mixed depending upon the number and ages of their children.

Support for WLB because of no children. Rebecca, who is married, with no children, stated, "I think not having children allows me to dedicate a lot more time to my job. I think I've got a lot energy as a result because I'm not having to go home to [children]. . . . It's just my husband. I think I'm fortunate because I don't have children. I've been able to dedicate a lot more of my own time to what I do."

Lisa, Abigail, and Barbara, who are also married without children, reported that they imagined it would be challenging to have children while maintaining a sense of balance. Lisa stated,

In this position, especially starting out, you have to devote the majority of your time and attention to your school site because you have to figure that out. Of course, that means your children are not your priority, and you're

not as available. If you don't have a partner that steps in and can pick up the slack, I can see that being really stressful emotionally, hard on the kids, and hard on the marriage. I think it's very difficult to maintain balance.

Thus, even participants who did not have children reported believing that having children could negatively impact managing WLB.

Abigail, who was in the adoption process during the study, reported that without her spouse working from home, they might not have considered adoption. She stated, "My husband works from home in information technology. He gets jobs every so often that require him to go out of the house, but most of the time, he works from home. The only reason we decided to do the adoption is because he would be at home taking care of the kids. If it was a [commuting] job, we'd have to think about it because I'm so busy." Barbara stated, "We thought about adoption but thinking about the stresses of my job and all that it entails, it's difficult to think [about adopting]. Could I start a family? There are days when I do not regret that decision because I'm so tired at the end of the day trying to get through everything I need to get through." Abigail and Barbara conveyed their views about how challenging it might be to their WLB if they had children and their perceptions weighed into their decision-making about adoption. Participants without children reported they understood the ways in which not having children affected the time they had available for WLB.

The responses of the participants who were married and had children depended upon the number and ages of their children. Elena was the exception

as she was the only participant who was a single parent of three. Leanne and Esther had older children who were in or had graduated from college. They did not report that having children impacted their WLB either positively or negatively. Diane had children who were in secondary school, but she also did not report that having children impacted her WLB either positively or negatively. She did express that it was challenging when her children were younger, but during that time, she held a cabinet-level position.

Challenges to WLB because of having children. Pam, a nine-year veteran, reported struggling with WLB because she had young children. At the time of this study, she had a six-year old and a 19-month old. Pam got married and had her first child during her first year as principal. Pam stated, “Having to balance myself was very difficult in the beginning because as a woman you have a lot of emotions. I had a lot of emotions about leaving my daughter and not being a good mom.” She even considered going back to the classroom. However, with the support of her superintendent and assistant superintendent, she decided that she wanted to be a principal and so she “started to get some clarity about becoming a new mom and started to learn to balance in a way.” Pam’s solution was to push herself hard to be great at being both a great mom and a successful principal and, therefore, “killing” herself. For Pam, having young children negatively impacted her WLB because of the additional responsibilities that came with children. Pam stated,

I think about it when I'm with the other principals [in my district]. They get to go home, decompress and relax. Then they get to check their emails,

be on top of things and plan things at home . . . Being a principal is not obviously a 7-5 job because the work is continuous. When I'm here, I try to be in the classrooms, and so a lot of work needs to be done at home. The difficult part for me is that when I'm home, I need to be a mom. I have to do the laundry. I have to make dinner, and now I have to do homework [with my daughter].

Pam does not resent having children or the responsibilities that come with having children. Rather she desires to be a mom and feels she does not have the time to do all that she would like to do as a mom. She wants to give her attention to her children when they are at home. To do that, she reported that she often works from 10pm-12am after her children have gone to bed. Pam also reported feeling like she is always rushed and rushing her children. She stated, "My concern is that my daughter is always rushed. I'm always saying we have to go now. Mommy's late. Mommy has an IEP. Mommy has this. I feel like there's a lot of stress on her. I try to shelter her from my stress." Pam's children also feel the time crunch that Pam experiences, which causes stress.

Recently, Pam once again considered going back into the classroom because she felt a teacher's schedule might be more amenable with having young children. She expressed the difficulty of being everything to everyone. She shared:

But I was thinking [going back to being a teacher] might be best for my family at this time. [If I were a teacher], there aren't as many night events or super early meetings. For a principal, there are additional stresses.

Every morning there are 7,000 people coming at you at one time. You just learn to juggle, which is fine. However, it's hard to be that and then everything to a child and your husband and everyone.

When I asked Pam if it was financially viable for her to stay home and be a mom, whether she would take that option. She responded without hesitation, "Yes. However, I am a worker. I mean I love working. I am inspired by education, children, and their success. I like that. I love this job. But if I had to choose, I would raise my children and then go back to work." For Pam, the struggle between balancing her responsibilities as a mom and her responsibilities as a principal was real. She had twice contemplated going back to the classroom to be a teacher because that seemed to be a better job for managing WLB.

In summary, participants who did not have children reported that this contextual factor positively impacted their WLB. Without children, participants could devote more time to work and/or their spouse. Participants who had older children did not report children as a contextual factor that either positively or negatively impacted their WLB. The one participant who had younger children expressed that this negatively impacted her WLB mainly because she wanted to spend more time with her children and was not able to do so.

Finances

Finally, participants reported finances as a contextual factor in their personal lives that impacted their WLB. Financial need can be a complicated contextual factor because "need" can depend on one's perspective. For participants without a spouse, work was not optional, and, therefore, financial

needs impacted their WLB. Some participants reported that they were the main financial provider for the family, despite having a spouse who also works. Thus, for those participants who were the only, or the main, source of income financial need impacted their WLB. The remainder of the participants reported that financial need did not impact their WLB because their spouse's income could be adequate for their financial needs.

Four participants reported working out of financial necessity. Annie, who was single, reported that her salary as a principal could not be matched in other education-related positions she was interested in pursuing. Annie provided for her parents, had a mortgage, and had other financial obligations. When I asked her what she would do if she did not have to be concerned about her many financial obligations, Annie responded that she would not be a principal. For her, financial need had a negative impact on her WLB because she felt that she is not able to leave her position and secure a different position with the same salary level. At the same time, Annie acknowledged that her salary also provides her with the financial freedom to do things she would like to do such as travel.

Elena, a divorced mom of three, reported that she worked out of financial need to help provide for her children. However, Elena reported that this did not negatively impact her WLB because she enjoys the work. Although the financial need is real, she finds ways to make everything work within her ability. Elena reported that she would not be a principal forever, not because she does not enjoy the work, but because she aspires to move up in the ranks. Regardless of the stress of the job, Elena reported that she enjoys being a principal and would

continue to work in that capacity even if she did not have a financial need to work.

Barbara and Pam are both married and earn a larger portion of the household income. When asked about doing something else, Barbara responded, “Yes I would. I would move to Hawaii and since my husband is a good cook, could open our own little restaurant. We could live simply. If we could afford that, I would do it in a heartbeat.” Barbara also mentioned downsizing to a “tiny house” so that the financial need would be far less of a factor in their lives. She did not explain why she has not actually done this yet.

The remaining eight participants reported that financial need neither positively or negatively impacted their WLB. Some reported that they worked as principals because they simply enjoyed the work.

In summary, participants who had financial need reported that this contextual factor negatively impacted their WLB. Participants who did not have financial need, did not view this as a contextual factor that either positively or negatively impacted their WLB. One of the participants who had younger children expressed that this negatively impacted her WLB mainly because if she had the option, she would choose to stay at home to raise her children or find another position that offered a better WLB.

Research Question Three

Research question three sought to understand how 11 women elementary principals in Southern California managed WLB. First, it is important to note that several participants described the emotional toll that managing WLB had on their

lives. Second, participants reported specific logistical strategies that helped them manage WLB. Finally, participants reported personal thoughts about WLB and what that means for them. Table 7 summarizes how participants reported managing WLB.

Table 7

How Women Elementary Principals in Southern California Reported Managing WLB

| | Number of Participants Mentioning | Details/Highlights |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Emotional Toll | 10 | Participants reported feeling isolated and lonely. Participants who worked in administrative teams in the past noted the contrast in working alone versus working with a team. |
| Logistical Strategies | 11 | Participants hired help at home, took conscious breaks from work, prioritized and let some things go. |
| Personal Thoughts | 11 | Participants reported that balance looks different for everyone. They reported the value that their experience taught them about WLB. Participants reported that self-care is needed. |

Emotional Toll

It is important to note that all but one participant reported the emotional toll that being principal exerted on them. Seven of the participants reported feeling lonely; this was especially the case for those participants who had previously served in an administrative team setting. Leanne, who had served as an administrator in a team setting at other school sites for many years, shared:

“There’s a loneliness that comes with it [being an elementary principal], and it really struck me like last year. I was thinking everything is great, and I couldn’t ask for a better site. But why do I feel lonely during the day? I realized I don’t have anyone that is my direct support.” For many years in various administrative roles, Leanne had grown accustomed to working with a lateral team. As an elementary principal, however, she experienced what it was like to be an administrator without a job-alike team. This caused her to feel lonely.

Pam shared this sentiment. She stated, “Being an elementary principal, one thing that I dislike the most is that it’s lonely”. Likewise, Lisa stated, “It’s very lonely. No one knows your reality. It’s a very lonely profession.” For many of the participants loneliness was at the forefront of their thoughts and this sense of loneliness was apparent in the interviews.

The stress of being principal was most evident in the interviews with Annie and Barbara, who were the only two participants from the same district. Annie reported,

I feel like I don’t have a life. I’m always thinking about what I have to do next—short term planning and long-term planning. It’s very all consuming. Often, I don’t have a lot of time to think about what do I want to do for me. When I do have free time, I don’t want to do anything because it’s too tiring. I think the sense of responsibility is totally different for a principal. Likewise, Barbara began the interview with, “Well, it’s stressful” and then continued by sharing about how much principals give of themselves. She reported, “Principals give so much of themselves. I see people around me who

either are not married or divorced. They're not starting their families when they want to because there's intense pressure to perform and do well and to get awards for your school and have accolades in the community. Everyone looks to the principal to make that happen. It's very difficult." For Barbara and Annie, the principalship brought a sense of pressure and responsibility as a heavy weight that takes its toll.

In summary, participants reported the impact that being a principal had on their emotional well-being. Isolation, loneliness, stress, and a sense of responsibility all contributed to the emotional toll that participants reported feeling.

Logistical Strategies to Manage WLB

All participants reported various strategies for managing WLB. Participants reported hiring help at home, taking a conscious break from work, and prioritizing and letting some things go.

Hired help. Pam and Dorothy, who had young children, sent their children to daycare as neither of them had family or other support for childcare. For Pam, whose daughter also attended her school, the daycare was on site. But because the daycare closed at 4:30, her work hours on site were bound by the daycare service hours. Her 19-month old son was with a paid daycare provider who was the parent of a former student at Pam's school. The provider's home was close to the site, which made for an easier drop off and pick up. Pam reported how grateful she was to have a daycare provider close to her school site and someone she knew and trusted.

Dorothy's daughter went to an extended daycare center close to her school site. Because of the longer daycare center hours, she did not have to rush to pick her daughter up after school. This also allowed her to run errands if needed before picking up her daughter. Dorothy also reported that her daughter enjoyed daycare, which helped relieve a sense of guilt for leaving her there on longer days.

Five participants reported having a house cleaner or having had one previously. This service helped alleviate the time participants had to spend taking care of household needs. Diane reported, "I have a house cleaner, and we have a gardener because there were times in my life when I was resentful that on Saturday morning, I was spending four hours cleaning or gardening." With limited free time, Diane and other participants reported not wanting to spend time cleaning the house.

Conscious break from work. Ten of the participants reported that they made conscious decisions to take a break from work by turning it off. Several participants indicated that after years of experience, they had learned that they needed to take a break from work once they arrived home. They cited that early in their career, they would work after hours at home regularly. However, now they realized that the work would still be there the next day. Rebecca reported, "I try to turn off when I get home. Even if I'm taking work home, at least when I get home, I take the first two hours when my husband and I can just be together and switch off from the things that occurred that day. If I do have work, then usually I get to it at about 9:00 or so. I'll come home, try not to check email and be present in the

moment with my husband.” Similarly, Barbara reported, “I really have to shut down and know that it’s going to be there tomorrow. I’m trying to put more limits on my personal time. I’m still working long hours, but I’m at least trying to limit the things that I do when my husband and I are home together.” Rebecca and Barbara consciously took the time to connect with their spouses by taking a mental break from their work. Participants expressed the need to take a break from work in order to be present at home with their family and for their mental health. Diane reported,

I am very intentional about turning my job off so that I can be a mom and a wife and be in the moment with my family. I think we can get too wrapped up into this idea that ‘Oh I have get everything done today’. So [there] needs to be in a way where you can just take control and say I am done for the day, you know, and take care of ourselves. Often as women, we are so apt to take care of everybody else whether it’s our work situation or our husbands or our children. We don’t take enough time to think, to be reflective, to have that quiet time, to exercise, or get a pedicure. It’s ok to be a little selfish because that brings us balance and helps us to be better people.

It is evident that participants developed the ability to take a conscious break from work over time. Having years of experience helped principals to know that taking those conscious breaks helped them to be better principals, moms, and spouses.

Prioritizing and letting some things go. All participants reported the importance of prioritizing and letting some things go, including both work and

home. At work, participants reported the need to do the work that they valued the most first, such as visiting classrooms and, at times, leaving other work to be done another day. Elena reported,

It depends on how the day is going. It can be a challenge with all the responsibilities and everything that needs to get done. I've had to learn to let go of certain things at work as well as certain things at home. For example at work, if I don't get to the paperwork, I don't stress about it as much. I never [have enough time to get it all done], and I think that part of what has made me be okay is I've had to learn to let go of certain things. That's when I think this is the best that I can do because I don't have enough time. I've given myself permission to let go of certain things. And with that I mean at home, too. Cooking a hot meal daily is just not doable.

When time is limited, participants reported that certain things must take priority and certain things must give in order to get the important items accomplished. Participants reported that the ability to prioritize and to let things go both at work and at home took some time to accept as a reality of time constraints.

Annie shared that experience has taught her how to work smarter. She reported, "Beginner principals want to do their best and get everything right so they put in all this time. Now [with years of experience], my time is distributed differently. I know what I need to focus on, and what I need to do. At the same time, the work is harder now so that's why the time is still more, but I feel like I'm working smarter." As Annie gained experience as a principal, she was able to better decipher what needed to be done first and what could wait or what she

could let go. Because of time limitations, it was not possible to get everything done.

In summary, all participants reported various strategies for managing WLB. With experience, participants reported accepting the need to hire help at home, learning how to take a conscious break from work, and prioritizing and letting some things go. Given the limited amount of time and the responsibilities of work and home life, principals managed their WLB by implementing these strategies.

Personal Thoughts About WLB

Participants reported differing personal thoughts about their WLB and what it means for them. Three participants, all of whom had ten years of experience, reported that they felt balanced. Rebecca reported,

For some of us, sometimes being at work, giving of our time, if that's where you need to be, then that's where you should be. For me, I just get so much joy. I love my job. I love what I do. I love the people I get to work with. For that reason, because I enjoy it so much, because I want to do well and do a good job, I give it more time. I don't feel pressured to cut back. Because I have a supportive husband who is very understanding and because we are able to make a lot of time for each other, I feel I am balanced, even though I do spend a lot of my time working. But that's what I love and enjoy. I get a lot of value out of it. For that reason, I'd say yes, I feel balanced.

Despite admittedly working long hours, Rebecca felt balanced because she enjoyed her job and was not bothered by the work load. She did not define WLB by the amount of time she spent at work or at home but by the joy she found in each.

Elena reported feeling balanced 50% of the time. Elena measured her WLB based on whether she had the time or energy to enjoy activities outside of work. She reported,

I wish I could read because I love it, and I used to read a lot prior to becoming a principal. I can't read for pleasure anymore. I don't watch TV because I don't have the energy or the attention span. If I can read a book or even engage in a leisure activity with the energy that I think I should have, then I think that that's when I know I have balance. If I'm exhausted at the end of the day, and I just can't muster up any motivation or initiative to do anything else, that's when, perhaps, I spent too much of myself at work [leaving me with little] energy for the outside. I feel balanced about 50% of the time during the week.

All participants reported the value of their years of experience. Even participants with only three full years of experience expressed that they had a better grasp of how to focus on the work that was important and needed to be prioritized for the sake of moving the school forward. Participants also expressed that experience taught them to be comfortable with taking a break from work and pursuing other priorities. Barbara, who was in the middle of her fourth year, reported, "What has changed is knowing there will always be work, and it can

wait till tomorrow. I'm allowing myself to say it's okay. Sometimes you have to stop. You have to get up and go home. I can shut down, watch my favorite television show, and know that it's going to be there tomorrow."

However, despite their intention to spend more time on their personal lives, one of the greatest challenges the principals reported was finding time to take care of themselves even after more than three years in the role. Pam reported thinking about her well being and what that meant regarding WLB. She stated:

I wonder how long I can do this before I break. I have two older sisters, . . . and they say, "Pam, eventually you're going to get sick." I feel like I need to start budgeting in some time for myself. I have trouble doing things for myself, which I think most women do, but I feel like I need to do that. I don't exercise. I don't do yoga . . . because any spare time I have, I want to spend it with my kids or I feel guilty. If I don't take care of myself, eventually, I'm not going to be with them.

Pam recognized the need to care for herself physically so that she could be there for her children and family in the long-term future. Abigail, Lisa, and Diane also reported wanting to spend more time on self-care through exercise and making time to fulfill other roles such as being a friend, wife, and/or mother.

In summary, participants reported different personal thoughts about their WLB and what it meant for them. Participants viewed WLB differently. While some reported that they felt balanced, despite the long work hours and stress, others reported that through their years of experience, they learned to be

comfortable with turning work off, focusing on the tasks that were most important, and making time for self-care and fulfilling roles other than that of principal.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to report the key findings for each of the three research questions. For research question one, there were four main contextual factors within their work organizations that participants reported as impacting their WLB: special education, parents, the superintendent, and the site team. For research question two, there were three main contextual factors within their personal lives that participants reported as impacting their WLB: spouses, children, and finances. For research question three, participants reported the emotional toll of managing WLB. Participants reported specific logistical strategies that helped them and personal thoughts about WLB and what it means to them.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The responsibilities and scope of the principalship has grown significantly during the past 30 years. This has led to work overload, stress, and challenges to WLB for school principals (Friedman, 2002; Mulford, 2003). For women, there are often additional home-life responsibilities that compound the challenges to WLB. Given the realities of a limited number of hours in a day, principals struggle to find a way to meet their work and home responsibilities. The purpose of this study was to examine what women elementary principals in Southern California perceived to be the contextual factors in their organizations and personal lives that shaped their work-life experiences as principals, and how school districts can use this information to implement policies that encourage women principals to persist in the field. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What do 11 women elementary principals in Southern California perceive as the contextual factors in their organizations that affect their WLB?
2. What do 11 women elementary principals in Southern California perceive as the contextual factors in their personal lives that affect their WLB?
3. How do 11 women elementary principals in Southern California report managing WLB?

For this qualitative study, I utilized in-depth interviews with 11 women elementary principals in Southern California. While the focus of this study was women and their experiences with WLB in elementary principal role, many of these findings may also be relevant to men. Likewise, the implications, and recommendations for policy and practice may benefit principals of all genders. For the remainder of this chapter, I will first discuss the interpretations about personal support for women elementary principals. Next, I will discuss the implications and recommendations for policy and practice. Finally, I will end the chapter with implications for future research.

Implications and Recommendations for Policy and Practice

As the role of the principal continues to grow in scope and responsibility, the struggle for WLB is actual and persistent for elementary women principals in Southern California. The findings from this study show that support from spouses and additional resources are strong recurring themes and key contextual factors essential to WLB. Participants who were married gave much credit to their spouses who shared and often carried the load in household responsibilities, such as cooking and doing laundry. Spouses often had flexible work schedules, which allowed them to do most of drop off and pick up children from daycare. Participants also shared how spouses provided invaluable emotional support, understanding, and care.

Within organizations, the key contextual factors that elementary women principals reported as affecting their WLB included: the site team, parents, the superintendent, and special education. Elementary women principals also

reported recognizing the emotional toll of managing WLB, provided practical logistical strategies that they used, and shared personal thoughts about WLB. The findings from the data suggest: (a) support within the organizational context is vital to WLB; (b) time must be allocated effectively, with tasks being prioritized; and (c) WLB is often a matter of the principal's own values and perceptions.

Organizational support

The second finding of this study was the need for support within the organization. Factors within in organizational support included strong site team support and the superintendent's support of WLB.

Site team support. Participants repeatedly cited the need for a strong site team. The site team could include full-time support staff such as instructional coaches as well as having an assistant principal. When asked what would help them better manage WLB, participants consistently wished for a full-time assistant principal. An assistant principal could provide actual support relative to the work that needs to be completed. Research shows that assistant principals are immensely valuable and can assist with instructional leadership and stand in for the principal when the principal is off site (Hilliard & Newsome, 2013; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012; Osabutey-Aguedje, 2015). Perhaps more importantly, an assistant principal could help mitigate principals' feelings of isolation, loneliness, and working alone, which emerged as a theme in participants' responses. For elementary principals, working alone is not uncommon (Goldstein, 2010; Lopez, Ahumada, Galdames, & Madrid, 2011). Participants cited as a negative factor district policies that grant elementary

schools with assistant principals only when the student population exceeded greater than 750 when middle schools almost always have an assistant principal, even if the student population is as low as 500. Without an assistant principal or lateral colleague on site, elementary principals reported feeling alone in their decision-making, have no one with whom to collaborate, and struggling with loneliness. Participants reported reaching out to colleagues off site but admitted that often they did not have the time to do so, particularly when dealing with urgent matters.

While there has been a consistent push in recent years for teachers to engage in PLCs, it has not been the case for administrators, despite research supporting this need. Turnbull, Riley, Arcaria, and MacFarlane (2013) concluded that principals value professional learning opportunities within collegial teams and communication. Principals who participate in professional learning communities may reduce the sense of isolation and this may lead to greater success in the role (Bauer & Brazer, 2013). The addition of an assistant principal at elementary school sites may serve to create the added benefit of an onsite PLC for administrators.

Superintendents' support. Superintendents can play a critical role in establishing WLB throughout an organization. The expectations of superintendents, their values and how they model and practice them, often set the work culture. Superintendents can support and foster effective use of time by minimizing attendance at unnecessary meetings, such as board meetings and by setting limits on weekend and off-hour communications. Several participants

noted that their superintendent's policy of not requiring principals to attend every board meeting provided relief from significant monthly time commitments.

Diane noted that she does not receive emails from her superintendent on the weekends, which relieves her from the need to be connected constantly. She is able to shut take a break from work on the weekends because she is not worried that she is missing something. Her superintendent only contacts principals on the weekends via phone or text message and only if it is truly urgent and time sensitive. This practice is district-wide so the superintendent has set expectations about weekend work. The message he sends is clear. Weekends are for personal time.

Special education support. Several participants also cited the time drain that occurred from having to attend every IEP meeting. Participants reported that often they didn't speak during these meetings, causing them to wonder why their presence was required. For principals who have a significant SpEd population, this can be a notable time drain. With an effective SpEd team in place, principals may not need to be present at every IEP meeting. Modifying this practice in such a way that releases principals from attending every IEP could reclaim a significant amount of work time.

Use of Limited Time

It is well known that principals have more work to complete than the number of hours permit (Adams, 2000; Braukmann & Schwarz, 2015; Okoroma & Robert-Okah, 2008). With a limited number of waking hours, elementary women principals must contend with the reality that there are simply not enough hours in

the day to do it all. Several participants reported that they had learned this lesson. During the first few years of being a principal, participants reported trying to do everything all the time before ultimately coming to the realization that it was not sustainable on a long-term basis. To make the work manageable, participants discussed learning how to make effective use of limited time. Grissom, Loeb, and Mitani (2015) concluded that stronger time management skills are linked to lower principal job stress.

Prioritize and let go. This study found that because time is limited, participants expressed how they have learned to prioritize tasks and let go of those they deemed non-essential. For new principals, this may be particularly challenging, as it may be difficult to leave any task incomplete. However, with experience, the reality of limited time often forces principals to learn and value prioritizing and letting go. For example, participants cited district office paperwork as time consuming and often a task they would move to the bottom of their to-do list. While participants were not necessarily content with pushing some tasks to the bottom of their priority list, they made the decision to do so to manage a sense of balance and sanity. The literature supports the need for principals to develop prioritizing as a skill set. Marsh-Girardi (2011) concluded that it was essential for principals' success to focus on priorities. Furthermore, Botha (2013) recommended that principals should set their own priorities and devote sufficient time to them as a means for managing their time more effectively and efficiently in the school context.

WLB Is a Matter of Perception

Finally, this study found that different participants defined WLB differently. Although it is important to note that there is an actual time-bound aspect to each day, participants did not define WLB simply by the number of hours spent at work in comparison to home. The literature supports this finding that people “interpret WLB differently, with some needing more personal time than others, to experience well-being” (Chandra, 2012, p. 1041). Depending on one’s life stage, career progression, and personal values and needs, WLB can look, feel, and be defined in many ways. Rebecca admittedly worked more hours than she spent at home, however she explained, “I feel I am balanced, even though I do spend a lot of my time working. That’s what I love and enjoy, and I get a lot of value out of it.” Because Rebecca found much joy in her work, she felt balanced despite spending many more hours working than pursuing other interests. Diane, Lisa, and Dorothy also expressed that they felt balanced because they did not feel that they were sacrificing their families or personal life for work and vice versa. They cited the undulations of the work load during the school year and how some months of the year were certainly busier and more time consuming than others. However, they seemed to understand and accept that this was the nature of the principal position.

For other participants, balance did not seem to be something that was attainable as the demands of work and home seemed to be more than could be achieved within the realities of time constraints. This did not seem to have any bearing on the number of years of experience, size of school, superintendent,

marital status, or child rearing responsibilities. The only common thread between these participants was that they were principals of Title I schools. For these participants, there was never enough time to get everything done, and there was not enough support staff on site. They reported feeling like they were constantly working or thinking about work. They cited devoting much time to learning, training staff, and implementing new initiatives and programs, such as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), which supports students who are first generation college-bound students. These participants felt they needed to dedicate a great deal of time to ensure they were meeting the significant needs of the students so they could succeed.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, there are four recommendations for organizational policy and practice: (a) appoint assistant principals for elementary schools, (b) create and foster a culture of WLB with the superintendent's support, (e) provide parity for special education programs at school sites, and (f) develop principals' skills for prioritizing and letting go.

Appoint Assistant Principals for Elementary Schools

The findings of this study show that elementary principals experience work overload and feelings of isolation and loneliness as they usually lead and make decisions alone. With the addition of an assistant principal, principals would benefit from the help and support of an administrative team. Principals who work in collaboration with an assistant principal could carry the work load together and

delegate tasks in order to achieve a better WLB and to mitigate the sense of isolation and loneliness.

Superintendent's Support in Creating a Culture of WLB

Superintendents' leadership should help to create a sustainable model for WLB within an organization.

Create and foster a culture of WLB. The findings of this study suggest that superintendents would be able to help principals achieve a better WLB by creating an organizational culture that values, implements, and practices policies that support WLB. For example, superintendents have the power to minimize the types and numbers of administrative meetings principals are required to attend. They can support principals by considering which meetings are essential and release them from attending those that are not. Superintendents could also implement and adhere to protocols that limit weekend or after work hours. By helping to protect unofficial working hours through their modeling, superintendents may better help principals manage WLB.

Flexible compensation time. Superintendents could offer principals flexible compensation time. While it is not possible for principals to work remotely when school is in session, it is possible to complete some work off site when school is not in session. Also, when there are periods of time that require longer work hours, such as working phone banks and attending meetings to support the passage of a parcel tax or bond, the superintendent could offer an additional day off to compensate for the considerable amount of evening work time. By doing so, superintendent could show appreciation and offer compensation for the

additional time that principals have given above and beyond contracted hours.

This could also build goodwill with principals, which is essential for organizational and personal morale (Baptiste, 2008; Eckert, 2013).

Special Education/IEP Meetings

The findings of this study suggest that principals felt special education programs, especially IEP meetings, drained a significant amount of their time. When the special education teachers and administrators are competent, it may not be necessary to duplicate the work by having the principal attend every IEP meeting. Releasing principals from attending regular and low profile IEP meetings would allow them to use that time for other tasks. Also, superintendents should consider the parity of work between school site administrators when placing special education programs at a site. If a school houses more students with challenging needs that may require more principal's time, that principal should be released from other responsibilities to balance the time commitment of the work involved. These recommendations could reduce the amount of time that principals spend monitoring special education programs.

Develop Skills for Prioritizing

The findings of this study suggest that principals must develop prioritizing skills and learn to let some things go. Principals tend to be high achievers and often strive to accomplish a great deal in a limited amount of time. This can lead to overload and difficulty achieving WLB because it can be challenging to allow tasks to go unfinished. Zigler (2007) stated, "It is hard to measure balance and to know when it has been achieved. But principals do know when they are chasing

something that means an awful lot to them” (p. 32). Not all tasks are worth equal attention or priority. To achieve some sense of WLB, “building principals' time management capacities may be a worthwhile strategy for increasing time on high-priority tasks and reducing stress” (Grissom et al., 2015, p. 773). Districts could benefit from providing training on how to prioritize tasks and in helping principals, particularly new principals, understand that tasks should be prioritized and that other tasks can be delegated or outsourced. Some principals might find this to be a less than ideal strategy; however, by prioritizing and letting go, principals may experience a better WLB.

Implications for Future Research

As principals navigate the ever changing and growing nature of the position, work life balance must be considered for them to persist and succeed in the role. The findings of this study lead to five implications for future research. First, to impact real change within an organizational culture and in policies that affect WLB, additional research should be focused on superintendents' perceptions of WLB and how their values and views impact an organization's policies and practices regarding WLB.

Second, from an organizational context, the findings suggest that Title I school principals may shoulder a greater amount of work that may impact WLB than non-Title I school principals. Further research specifically around Title I school principals could support having more assistant principals at these schools.

Third, the findings of this study suggest that women principals implement prioritizing skills both at work and home and have tremendous support from their

spouses, which is essential to managing WLB. To increase the scope of these findings, it would be beneficial to research whether men also utilize prioritizing skills and whether the support they receive from their spouses is similar.

Fourth, it may be useful to research how effective principals are at prioritizing, since it is based on one's own judgment. Does prioritizing work help WLB?

Finally, to extend the research, it would be beneficial to study how women with young children and how single mothers manage WLB. This study included one single woman with no children and one single mother of three older children. More participants could lead to a stronger generalization of the findings.

Summary of the Dissertation

WLB is a challenge for principals to navigate as the ever-increasing responsibilities of the role requires more time. Because time is limited, balancing between one's work load and home responsibilities can cause a significant amount of stress. In the beginning of this study, I introduced Jane Smith. While Jane was a fictional elementary school principal who struggled with the challenges of WLB as a new principal, she is representative of women elementary principals today. To support principals in their practice and encourage them to enter and persist in the role, better policies and practices should be implemented at the district level. By providing more site level staffing support, fostering a culture where WLB is valued, releasing principals from non-essential meetings and obligations, and training principals to prioritize tasks,

districts can help mitigate the stress and conflict principals experience due to the challenges of WLB.

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APPENDIX A**CONSENT FORM****California State University Fullerton****Research Study Consent Form**

Study Title: Women elementary principals' perceptions of WLB within their organizational and personal contexts

Researchers: Joyce Lee Yang, Doctoral student, P-12 Educational Leadership,
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Dr. Jennifer Goldstein, Dissertation Committee Chair,
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You are being asked to take part in a doctoral research study carried out by Joyce Lee Yang, under the guidance of Dr. Jennifer Goldstein. This consent form explains the research study and your part in it if you decide to join the study. Please read the form carefully, taking as much time as you need. Ask the researcher to explain anything you don't understand. You can decide not to join the study. If you join the study, you can change your mind later or quit at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of services or benefits if you decide to not take part in the study or quit later.

What is this study about?

This research study is being conducted to examine what women elementary principals in Southern California perceive to be organizational and personal contexts that shape their work-life experiences as principals and how

school districts can use this information to implement policies that encourage women principals to persist in the field.

You are being asked to take part because you are a woman elementary principal in Southern California, who has served in a public school principal role for at least three years.

Taking part in the study will require approximately 60-90 minutes and potentially a follow up interview, which may require up to 30 additional minutes.

What will I be asked to do if I am in this study?

If you take part in the study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in an interview, which will take between 60-90 minutes. I will conduct interviews in person at a location of your choosing. If a follow up interview is needed to clarify information that was shared during the first interview, this can be conducted via phone or video conference and should take no more than 30 minutes.
- The interview includes questions about the various schools where you have been a principal, the contexts of those schools/districts, your leadership style, your personal contexts (i.e. marital status) and your thoughts about WLB. You may skip any question(s) that you are uncomfortable answering. You may also request a break during the interview.
- I will use software to voice record the interview on two electronic devices.
- Prior to the publication of the dissertation, I will utilize member checking to ensure the validity of the findings with participants.

Are there any benefits to me if I am in this study?

There is no direct benefit to you from being in this study. However, if you take part in this study, you may help shape policies at the district level that support WLB.

Are there any risks to me if I am in this study?

The potential risks from taking part in this study are:

- Minimal emotional distress or discomfort associated with sensitive questions.
- In order to minimize the risks, questions can be skipped and the interview can be paused at your request.

Will my information be kept anonymous or confidential?

The data for this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. No published results will identify you, and your name will not be associated with the findings. Under certain circumstances, information that identifies you may be released for internal and external reviews of this project.

- Data will be stored electronically on One Drive, Microsoft's online cloud, with a backup located on Dropbox. Both are password protected, and the researcher is the only person who will have access.
- In order to maintain your privacy, you will be solely referred to by a pseudonym.
- For the purpose of accurately transcribing the data, voice recording is required for the interview.

Individuals may keep the data indefinitely in order to be utilized for future publications and/or presentations. The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous.

Are there any costs or payments for being in this study?

There will be no costs to you for taking part in this study.

You will receive a \$20 gift card to Target or Starbucks for taking part in this study, which will be provided to you at the completion of the study. If you withdraw before the study is completed, you will not receive compensation.

Who can I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions about this study or the information in this form, please contact the researchers: Joyce Lee Yang at joyceleeyang@csu.fullerton.edu; Dr. Jennifer Goldstein, jengoldstein@fullerton.edu, (657) 278 - 3963. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or would like to report a concern or complaint about this study, please contact the Institutional Review Board at (657) 278-7640, or e-mail irb@fullerton.edu

What are my rights as a research study volunteer?

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary, and you may choose not to be a part of this study. There will be no penalty to you if you choose not to take part. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

What does my signature on this consent form mean?

Your signature on this form means that:

- You understand the information given to you in this form.
- You have been able to ask the researcher questions and state any concerns.
- The researcher has responded to your questions and concerns.
- You believe you understand the research study and the potential benefits and risks that are involved.

Statement of Consent

I have carefully read and/or I have had the terms used in this consent form and their significance explained to me. By signing below, I agree that I am at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in this project. You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

Name of Participant (please print) _____

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Investigator ___ Date _____

If you are requesting permission to audio or videotape; create a second signature line for that. An individual could conceivably be willing to participate, but not to be included in an audio or videotape.

Your signature below indicates that you are giving permission to audio/video tape your responses.

Signature of Participant Date _____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

Introduction Script:

Hi _____, my name is Joyce, and thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. I know you are very busy so I appreciate the time you are taking to speak with me. As you know, I am a student in the education department at CSU Fullerton. Prior to that, I was a school administrator for 12 years. I want to learn about women who are elementary school principals and what their experiences have been, especially when it comes to WLB.

I expect this interview will take up to one and a half hours. This interview will be conversational, and while there are some things I may specifically ask about, I'm interested in hearing your story. There are no right or wrong answers.

I also want to let you know of your rights as a study participant. To protect your anonymity and confidentiality, I will be using pseudonyms for you as well as all of the schools that you name during our conversation. I will be taking notes and recording as well in order to ensure accurate transcription of your responses. Your participation is voluntary, and you can stop the interview at any time, choose not to answer any questions, or ask that I stop the recorder for any questions. Are there any questions I can answer before we begin?

Interview Questions:

1. Opening question/WLB: What's it like for you to be a principal and also _____ (fill in the blank from above)?

Possible probes:

- a. How would you describe your WLB?
- b. If the participant has worked in a variety of types of schools (ie. charter) and/or at different levels (ie., secondary): What was your experience with WLB in these various roles?

Personal context – Are there other areas of your personal life that are affected by your job as principal?

Possible probes:

- a. Life changes? (ie. babies, divorce, marriage, etc.)
- b. Care giving responsibilities?
- c. Financial obligations?
- d. Hobbies?

2. Organizational context – Are there aspects of your school site and/or district that contribute positively or negatively to your ability to manage your WLB?

Possible probes:

- a. What sorts of differences if any did you experience at different sites/districts?
- b. How did school culture and/or demographic (ie. population, academic performance, size, etc.) shape your experience?

3. Suggestions for policy – What would you change to make your job more manageable? (to address system-wide changes)

Possible probe:

- a. If you could change the role and/or responsibilities of the principalship, what would you change?
4. Closure – In your principal position(s), what aspects of the job do you enjoy and motivate you to stay?
- Possible probes:*
- a. What did you find most rewarding/worthwhile?
 - b. What did you find most challenging/stressful?
 - c. Is there anything else you'd like to share?
5. General probe: That's interesting. Can you tell me more?

Closing

_____, we can wrap it up here. Thank you for your time and openness in sharing your thoughts with me about your career and life. Do you have any questions for me?

I'm going to type up my notes when I have completed all of the interviews. If I have any additional questions or need clarification, would it be ok for me to contact you? What would be the best way to do so? (via phone, email) Thank you, _____! Have a wonderful rest of the day!