

WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY
ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS

By

ELLEN VANNOY

Bachelor of Science in English Education

West Virginia State University

Institute, West Virginia

1999

Master of Science in Educational Leadership

Salem International University

Salem, West Virginia

2005

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Dissertation Approved:

Dr. Mary Jo Self

Dissertation Adviser

Dr. Jon Loffi

Dr. Penny Cantley

Dr. Ashlyn Feigener

Dr. Toni Ivey

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Title of Study: WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS

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Abstract: School administrators face unanticipated challenges daily in a dynamic and political atmosphere. These scenarios sometimes need hasty decisions with limited time to assess all the intended and unforeseen implications. Administrators must balance work, family, and personal life, which can lead to overwhelming stress. Assistant principals must notify teachers and report to their principal and other district administration. This study examines these crucial mid-management administrators. This study examined school principals' stress experiences using Work-Family Conflict theory. This study may illuminate educational professionals' varied experiences beyond burnout and attrition (Hoffman et al., 2007). Portraiture was utilized to examine principals' thoughts, feelings, and possible reasons of Work-Family Conflict.

Work-family conflict causes tiredness, skepticism, and workplace disengagement. Extreme depression, physical illness, relational breakdowns, and burnout may result (Lane et. al, 2021; Figley, 1995; Maslach & Leiter, 2018; Felt, 2003). Most school leaders can draw from experimental reservoirs of traumatic events while interacting with staff, students, and the community (Lane et. al, 2021). Mid-level school administrators must balance senior management, labor, parents, and the community. At a period with fewer resources and greater accountability, educators are expected to handle more complex family or community functions, more change, larger disputes, and unreasonable expectations. Stress in principals' personal and professional lives is a major issue (Felt, 2003).

As the major contact for students, teachers, parents, the site principal, and central office officials, secondary assistant principals were the focus of this study. Due to professional stress and high demands, high school assistant administrators may face Work-Family conflict. Assistant principals make disciplinary judgments and supervise crucial teaching and learning areas, therefore how they handle work stress may damage their personal lives. Due to COVID-19 pressures including contact tracing, staff shortages, community uproar, and family health concerns, assistant principals have even more tension between work and home. Assistant principals may react differently to children, parents, and teachers if they are stressed at work and home. I want to study work-family conflict and how to assist this high-stress job to retain good administrators and secure their mental, physical, and spiritual well.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation presents the findings of a qualitative study of secondary school assistant principals across Oklahoma. A principal's ability to maintain good balance in family and home relationships may be hampered by high job stress and responsibilities. If this is the case, future school leaders, as well as those studying for the principalship, should be made aware of this potential imbalance and have access to information not only about the potential for unforeseen work-family conflicts; but also, about possible solutions to help mitigate these imbalances once they have decided to pursue a career in educational leadership.

Emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and detachment from the workplace are all consequences of work-family conflict. Extreme despair, physical sickness, relational breakdowns, and burnout are all possible outcomes (Lane et. al, 2021; Figley, 1995; Maslach & Leiter, 2018; Felt, 2003). When interacting with employees, students, and the school community, most school administrators can draw from experimental reservoirs of traumatic occurrences (Lane et. al, 2021). School administrators, who are considered mid-level managers, are stuck between the demands of senior management, labor, parents, and the community. Educators are supposed to take on more complex family or community functions, are subjected to more change, larger disputes, and unrealistic expectations at a time when there are fewer resources and greater accountability. Principals' stress and the impact it has on their job and personal lives is a serious concern (Felt, 2003).

This study explores the lived experiences of secondary assistant principals as the assistant principal is the main point of contact for students, teachers, parents, the site principal, and central office administrators. As a result of high demands and multiple job duties, high school assistant principals may experience work-family conflict because of stress of their positions within the hierarchy. Because assistant principals are accountable for disciplinary decisions and manage areas critical to teaching and learning, how they deal with work stress may decide how much their personal lives are affected. Now, due to the tumultuous time of COVID-19 assistant principals have even more conflict between work and home due to the additional stressors such as contact tracing, staff shortages, and community outrage all while worrying about their own families' health. If assistant principals are privately dealing with work-related stress as well as pressures at home, their approach to situations with students, parents, and teachers may be influenced. It is my goal to explore the impacts of work-family conflict and how supports can be put into place for this high stress position to not only retain quality administrators; but to ensure their well-being mind, body, and soul.

Background of the Problem

Few studies have examined the impact of Work-Family conflict on public school administrators. Even fewer have explored the impact on specifically the assistant principal. As I reflect on the decade in which I have filled the role of an assistant principal, as a researcher, I am aware of the prolonged impact work-family conflict has played in both my professional and personal life. Routinely I have dealt with insomnia, high blood-pressure, issues with my eyesight caused by eye strain, and anxiety. I am studying the impact of stress on assistant principals through the larger body of knowledge on work-family conflict.

The literature demonstrates clearly research is limited on the workload of principals. The career is a known demanding profession given the wide range of responsibilities. It is essential for school leadership to identify the causes of stress and be serious-minded in the search for coping strategies that will lower educational leaders' stress for the purpose of retaining quality leaders (Kebbi, 2018). The purpose of this qualitative portraiture is to explore the impact of Work-Family Conflict on school assistant principals.

Statement of the Problem

Work and family symbolize the most crucial components of life (Kara, et. al, 2021). The linkage between work and family and a possible conflict between the two is a topic of interest as today's organizations expose workers to increased occupational stress (Colombo & Ghislieri, 2008; DiRenzo, Greenhaus, & Weer, 2010, Muasya, 2020; & Michael, et. al, 2008). As dual earner households have increased over time, people have experienced high levels of stress as both individuals are simultaneously engaged in work and family domains (Seiger & Wiese, 2009; DiRenzo, Greenhaus, & Weer, 2010). Each role has expectations and there are times in which the two roles are in conflict (Ahmad, 2008; Aryee, et. al, 1999; & Kara, et. al, 2021). The perception of workload may be either objective or subjective (Turkigku & Cansoy, 2020). Maintaining the balance between domains occurs constantly. For a principal to be effective for both themselves, staff, and students, the factors of stress related to the profession and the ability to maintain appropriate boundaries in each domain must be addressed (Arar, 2018; Turkoglu & Cansoy, 2020).

However, work and family domains can be incompatible resulting from different norms and requirements. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) described three types of work-family conflict:

time based, strain based, and behavior based. In time-based conflict an individual is unable to meet the needs of his or her roles with adequate time to spare. Time distribution cannot be balanced between work and family roles. Time based conflicts occur when the duties of one role are discordant with the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Strain based conflicts result from fatigue, anxiety, and tension as motivators for work factors in which the role assumed hinders family responsibilities (Netemeyer et.al., 1996). Behavior based conflicts occur when a pattern of behavior is required for a certain domain and is incompatible with the other domain. One example would be a father serving in the military who imposes staunch discipline on his children (Palmer et al., 2012).

Work-family conflict theory could give insight on how individuals manage these possibly incompatible domains by segmentation, spillover or coping resources. This theory represents the central construct in studies regarding work-family balance (Colombo & Ghislieri, 2008; Pollock & Hauseman, 2018; Turkoglu, & Cansoy, 2020). Work-Family conflict theory aides in exploring possible antecedents and possible outcomes of problematic feelings, balancing family and professional roles causing work dissatisfaction, depression, and one of the possible determinants of absenteeism (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Colombo & Ghislieri, 2008; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998;

Pearson & Keough. 2003). A principal's wellness can directly impact staff job satisfaction, culture and climate within a building, and desired community goals and objectives (Richardson, 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the impact of Work-Family conflict on the lived experiences of secondary assistant school principals.

Research Questions

1. How is Work-Family Conflict portrayed by selected assistant principals?
2. What are the antecedents of Work-Family Conflict for selected assistant principals?
3. What is the relationship between Work-Family Conflict in school assistant principals and work satisfaction?
4. What is the relationship between Work-Family Conflict in school assistant principals and support systems?

Epistemological Perspective

An epistemological perspective offers a basis for forecasting, defining, motivating, and deconstructing worldviews, thus expanding the base of knowledge, and improving comprehension of qualitative research's intent. (Merriam, 2009). My epistemological perspective related to Work-Family conflict is the constructivist perspective. Constructivist perspective states all knowledge is constructed from human experience. Crotty (1998) described epistemology as “a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know” (p. 3). It is known that stress impacts assistant principals’ lives as we glean knowledge from their lived experiences.

As stated by Creswell (2018), constructivists believe the goal of research is to “rely as much as possible on the participants’ view of the situation being studied (p.8).” I wrote interview questions that were broad and general so my participants could construct meaning created through our discussions and interactions. As the researcher I listened carefully to my participants in relation to their daily activities regarding both work and home. As a constructivist researcher I

understand the influence of interaction between participant and researcher. Moreover, I have a unique perspective studying assistant principals as I have personal experience in the professional role.

Theoretical Framework

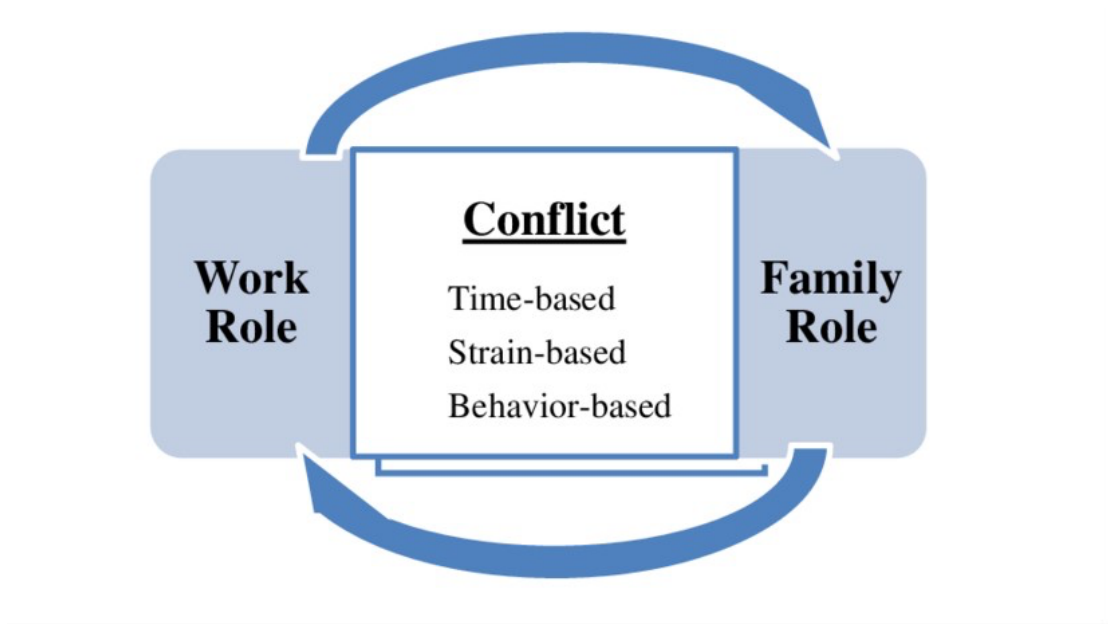
The work-family conflict construct has been a crucial element in research on job-home interface (Colombo & Ghislieri, 2008, O'Driscoll et al., 2006; & Rothbard & Dumas, 2006). The work-family conflict theory is derived from Merton (1957) role theory stating that every day activities are products of the socially defined roles society has for every individual. Each role is a set of rights, duties, expectations, norms, and behaviors that a person must face and fulfill. Further development of Merton's theory is detailed in Goode's (1960) role-strain hypothesis (Colombo & Ghislieri, 2008).

Greenhaus and Beutell penned their now classic paper (1985) defining work-family conflict as "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect, that is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role" (p.77). Through their work, Greenhaus and Beutell reflected on conflict theories in the 1960s with Kahn and collaborators and the basis of interference (Kahan, et al., 1964; and Katz & Khan, 1966). These theories say a person is not able to aptly meet all expectations and requests coming from the various roles. Time is not the only source of pressure, but also "stressors in both life domains and from incoherent behavioral requests from different life contexts" (Colombo & Ghislieri, 2008, p. 38). Greenhaus and Beutell state the work-family construct is bidirectional. It can be asymmetrical or reciprocal Work → Family; Family → Work. Figure 1, as adapted by Chan,

Kwok, and Siu (2015), depicts the simultaneous flow of each conflict on each domain and illustrates the conceptual structure of the work-family conflict model.

Figure 1

Work-Family Conflict Model (researcher-prepared)



Procedures

Many enter the profession of educational administration thinking the job is teacher evaluation, curriculum, and discipline. However, assistant principals are often crippled by the emotional side of the career. School safety, curriculum and instruction, daily operations of the school site, extracurricular supervision, and teacher and staff assessments are all obligations that assistant principals take on when leaving the classroom for a position in school administration. I

chose qualitative methodology because understanding people's individual experiences is the primary concern (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell (2014), interviews provide an avenue for the researcher to construct meaning. Thus, in this research, portraiture, a genre of qualitative inquiry, is embedded to capture each complex layer of the lived human experience of teachers.

Lawrence-Lightfoot explains, "Portraiture very purposefully says we're going to try to understand what's worthy and strong; always recognizing of course that goodness is inevitably laced imperfection" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016, p. 20). The use of portraiture provides a lens in which to gain a deeper understanding of urban high school teachers' experiences with compassion fatigue. The use of portraiture is important because portraiture "attempts to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life (Lawrence Lightfoot & Davis, 1998, p. xv).

My personal background as a researcher is important to note as it may influence this study. I taught in a highly rural impoverished school system in southern Appalachia for over a decade before entering school administration. From there I worked in a larger rural high school near the brink of being taken over by the state department of education for poor academic performance. To alleviate any natural biases, I purposely chose assistant principals in large 6A school districts. Data collection occurred through observation, open-ended interviews, and electronic communications. Following data collection, data was coded into identified themes.

Trustworthiness was guaranteed by establishing credibility, transferability, and dependability. Merriam & Tisdell explain "human beings are the primary instrument of data collection and data analysis in qualitative research" (2016, p. 243). Internal validity is a qualitative analysis power. The viewpoints of all those concerned are crucial (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016). Triangulation occurred through checking my multiple data sources at different benchmarks throughout my research process.

Population

A listserv of roughly 2,000 individuals who belong to a state-wide professional association was used to obtain participants. Not everyone on the listserv are administrators in the secondary arena, which was one of the boundaries of this case. Approximately 890 of the overall population are in the secondary area. A call to action was sent to the listserv for assistant principals who fit the boundaries of the study. The email highlighted requirements for participation in the study. The call included a link to a google form for interested individuals to complete if they wished to participate. Forty-eight individuals completed the google form. The google form asked individuals to detail their life circumstances based on the theory.

Using the list of the forty-eight individuals who completed the google form, I reviewed each individual's response. Using the theoretical framework of Work-Family Conflict, and the antecedents that exist in the theory, the sample was purposely selected. The sample which fit the boundaries of the case was eight individuals. The boundaries of the case, which are the antecedents of the theory, were working as an assistant principal in a 6A secondary school, having children at home or the sole financial provider for an aging parent, being in a dual earner home with spouse or partner, and serving in the role of assistant principal for three or more years. All eight were contacted. Two individuals felt they could not commit to the time. One individual never responded to any of my communications. Thus, the result was five individuals who were eligible to participate in the study. All five individuals participated.

Specifically for this study, only 6A schools in Oklahoma as identified by the State Department of Education and the Secondary School Association were included. The designation as a 6A school is determined by the number of students enrolled. (<https://sde.ok.gov/>). The second criteria were the length of time the assistant principal has been in an administrative role. A probationary teacher is 0-3 years as per the instrument known as Teacher Leadership and Effectiveness (TLE), for evaluating teachers in the state of Oklahoma. After the probationary period the teacher is then considered to be a career teacher. I used the same number of years for my sample of assistant principals. Principals can be terminated at any point but would still retain their teaching certificate. The three-year window was used to be congruent with their status as a career teacher.

The purpose of this study was to explore Work-Family Conflict on the lived experiences of secondary assistant school principals. To fulfill this purpose, I set one of the parameters of the study, schools which have the highest student population. Assistant principals working in these schools customarily have higher levels of responsibility which could lead to more conflict. In Oklahoma currently these schools are designated as 6A high Schools. There are currently 32 6A high schools in Oklahoma (<https://sde.ok.gov>) which have the highest student populations. A high case load of students per principal, which are more likely to be in a larger school could potentially increase the workload of the assistant principal. Based on the theory, the higher level of responsibility could potentially increase Work-Family Conflict. In Oklahoma, these larger school districts are classified as 6A schools. A caseload of 300 students per assistant principal was used as this high of a case load would more likely increase work responsibilities which include all aspects of the student. Often assistant principals have a wide range of responsibilities such as discipline, attendance, compliance with federal laws such as IEPs and 504 plans as well

as interactions with family and other caregivers. Depending upon the size of the school district and the number of assistant principals' caseloads can vary greatly. Caseloads are distributed by grade level or by the alphabet. Each school district determines the case load of an assistant principal.

Given the purpose of the study and the need to include participants with potentially higher levels of work-family conflict, I administered a survey to screen participants based on antecedents of work-family conflict as determined by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) theory. The three antecedents used are:

- Each participant must have experience as a teacher and hold either a traditional or alternative education certificate.
- Each participant had dependents residing in their home, or care for an aging parent.
- Each participant was married or lived with a significant other.

Using the data obtained from the initial participant survey, only individuals who met all three antecedents were contacted to request participation in my study. I sent an email to each potential participant, including necessary consent forms based on an approved IRB. It was not known the number of individuals that would be in the sample. My goal was to have five to seven individuals willing to participate in my study. As the sample was larger than the number needed for the study, I used random sampling to select participants.

Data Collection

Purposeful sampling was used in this study to select participants. Data collection occurred through a variety of sources including interviews, observations, and artifacts. These face-to-face interviews assisted in engaging unstructured, and open-ended questions that are few

and intended to elicit views and opinions of the participants (Creswell, 2018). Interview questions can be found in Appendix B. Any system of data organization and synthesis must be flexible enough to allow the researcher to shift gears and change direction as she moves from fieldwork to analysis and back to data collection (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997).

Significance of the Study

To Practice

This study assists districts develop a plan for support for their site leadership. It can lead to quality and successful professional development. This study can help school sites mitigate processes for all educators reporting extreme fatigue. This study was created to help policymakers, school boards, superintendents, and lawmakers gain a better understanding of what assistant principals go through in all facets of their employment, including the negative aspects that arise from suffering care and advocacy. Compassion exhaustion is a major problem for administrators, according to this research. To help alleviate its effects, districts must be aware to best support employees.

The findings of this study have the potential to assist future principals in making well informed decisions to avoid potential challenges related with their chosen profession. This information will allow administrators to strengthen family ties by being aware of the potential dangers of the assistant school principal title. This study may be used by future school leaders, such as prospective principals or postsecondary education leadership programs, to help them prevent future job discontent.

To Research

The findings of this study may have an impact on policy recommendations. This study could be used to inspire the formation of mentoring programs, establish hiring quotas, and navigate employee helper programs, among other things. Assistant principals may use the statistics to justify requests for increased third-party help at their schools, such as more student crisis counselors, social workers, or additional staff, such as athletic directors or activity coordinators. The role of the assistant principal may be shifted by the research of this study.

To Theory

Finally, this research aimed to continue the work of Greenhaus and Beutell as it relates to school leadership in present-day public-school settings. The current research adds to the understanding to the interactions between assistant principals and Work-Family conflict. Work-Family conflict as a theoretical framework adds to the understanding of how best to support school leaders in our ever-changing world. Through the lens of work-family conflict this research may significantly aid in identifying potential issues with the position and seeking out viable solutions to help prevent problems in the career. This research could possibly add to creating innovative methods in supporting assistant school principals mind, body, and soul in their pursuit to support student learning and positive school climate. One of my goals is to investigate if school districts have viable supports in place to help assistant principals navigate work stressors. This is an area of my study in which little to no specific research has been found. Therefore, my research could help fill a distinctive gap in the literature on the assistant principalship.

Definition of Terms

- Affective commitment refers to an employee's perceived emotional attachment to their organization (Yang et al., 2021).
- Anxiety is a normal and often healthy emotion. However, when a person regularly feels disproportionate levels of anxiety, it might become a medical disorder. Anxiety disorders form a category of mental health diagnoses that lead to excessive nervousness, fear, apprehension, and worry. Anxiety is a cause of stress (Feriam, 2000).
- Career Administrator (www.tulsaschools.org, 2013)
- Career Adaptability is the set of attitudes, competencies, and behaviors that individuals use in fitting themselves into a profession (Ocampo, et.al., 2018).
- Emotional spillover is allowing the emotions of one event to continue into the next. Work-Family conflict as a framework suggests emotional spillover between work and home sets the stage for work dissonance (McMullan, Lapierre, Li, 2018; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).
- Ideal Worker Culture is the idea an employee's commitment is measured by the number of hours he or she works and if they make work their top priority always (Lippe & Lippenyi, 2018).
- Invisible labor historically was a term used to highlight the unrecognized labors of women. However, now research has adopted the term in relation to any task in a job in which labor is not visible such a caretaker role, providing interpersonal comforting, and sacred work (Barker & Arghode, 2020).

- Job Demands may be physical, psychosocial, or institutional facets of a profession that demand to the physical and mental exertion and are related with those physiological emotional, and mental consequences (Bakker & Geurts, 2004).
- Mid-career is a period that opportunities for self-investment are necessary for continued growth (Ocampo, et al., 2018).
- Role Facilitation means to successfully balance the domains of work and family. This aspect of multiple role research enabled a balance between these domains without feelings of guilt or regret (Reecks-Rodgers, 2013).
- Social support comprises the emotional, instrumental, appraisal, validation, and informational resources provided to an individual which frequently reduces stress and improves well-being (Brue, 2018).
- Surface Acting involves faking the required emotions (Silbaugh, 2021).
- Task autonomy involves freedom to make decisions in relation to the job with limited control from supervisors (Yang et al., 2021).
- Task fatigue is a decline in performance on a prolonged or demanding research task that is generally attributed to the participant becoming tired or bored with the task (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).
- Whole Child Approach- ASCD's Whole Child approach is an effort to transition from a focus on narrowly defined academic achievement to one that promotes the long-term development and success of all children (www.ascd.org/whole-child.aspx).
- Work-Life Balance is a “canopy term” involving multiple social concepts such as work, life, family, home, balance, harmony, equilibrium, conflict, or enrichment (Brue, 2018 p.220).

- Work-Family Conflict (WFC) is a framework that can be viewed in much of the initial work-life balance research beginning with Greenhaus & Beutell's 1985 study suggesting WFC occurs when pressures, actions, and behaviors of one role impedes the responsibility and fulfillment in another role.
- Work-family culture is the shared assumptions, beliefs, and values regarding the way in which an organization supports and values the integration of an employees' work and family (Thompson et al., 1999 p. 394).
- Work engagement is a positive, fulfilling, and work-related state of mind (Schaufeli et al., 2002).
- Work- family enrichment is when one's role enhances or benefits another role (Brue, 2018).
- Work-Family integration and blurring- the multifaceted relationship between work and family roles in which the micro-strategies and boundaries used to isolate and integrate work and family domains are examined (Brue, 2018).
- Whole Teacher- the philosophy to consider the entire employee just as the whole child approach to promote long term teacher retention.

Summary and Organization of the Study

This study is organized in chapters. Chapter I introduces the study with the major components including the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and the identification of four research questions. Portraiture is used in this study to examine the role work-family conflict plays in the lived experiences of assistant principals. The theoretical framework informing this study is work-family conflict theory.

Chapter II offers an in-depth review of the literature that may assist in a better understanding of the research topic. Specifically, the following topics are addressed: workload, domains, time, strain, and behavior-based conflicts, compassion fatigue, the role of gender, personal and workplace supports, and the impact of the COVID-19 on the Work-Family conflict of assistant principals. Finally, the literature review concludes with an explanation of a potential reason why some assistant principals are heavily impacted by work-family conflict and others are not.

Chapter III provides a detailed explanation of the research methods and procedures to be implemented in this study including participant selections, data collection, and data analysis technique. Ethical considerations are addressed regarding research background and bias as well as gaining access to the school site. The chapter will end with sections on trustworthiness of findings and limitations of the study.

Chapter IV presents the data and provides a full description of the site selected and participants. All data collected through interviews, surveys, observations, artifacts, and field notes is presented in detail. Each chapter will be a portrait of each participant and his or her classroom setting. Coherence develops within each chapter as “narrative unity” with a beginning, middle, and end emerge tied together with emotions, texture, and insight (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p.256). Participant portraits end with my own portrait as researcher. As (Lawrence-

Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 86) remarks the researcher’s voice is both “central and peripheral.”

Chapter V concludes the study with conclusions, interpretations, and implications. Implications include the significance of the study to practice, to research, and to theory. Finally, recommendations for future research provided.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the impact of Work-Family conflict on the lived experiences of secondary assistant school principals. Educators across the board are required to fulfill a multitude of expectations in the twenty-first century. Educational leaders are the facilitators of learning, caregivers, and role models in morality. Administrators are burdened with the pressure to help all students succeed whilst being the voice of teachers within the community.

Through these multiple roles principals play in the lives of others they can rarely avoid the impact of both work and family stress on their own lives. Tim Walker, 2019 said secondary traumatic stress is a byproduct of successful teaching. Educators probably won't avoid it if they care about students. These emotional weights spill over into the personal lives of principals as well. These emotional weights can add to mental health issues and speed up their departure from education as a career, substance abuse, and complications in personal relationships. The negative consequences of work-family conflict are becoming more prevalent among school administrators. Persons with dissatisfaction in family life fail to reach satisfactory work concentration with significant reduction in overall general success. This ultimately affects the administrator's family life (Aras & Karakiraz, 2013).

The review of the literature for this study is a discussion of related research findings revolving around key topics relevant to the study of work-family conflict and school principals. Areas discussed in this literature review include: (1) History of Work-Family Conflict; (2) Role and Expectations;(3) Workload; (4) Family Domain;(5) Multi Directionality; (6) Family Domains;(7) Time Based Conflicts; (8) Strain Based Conflicts; (9) Behavior Based Conflicts;(10) Compassion Fatigue and Work-Family Conflict; (11) Gender Roles and Work-Family Conflict;(12) Personal Support Systems;(13) The Role of School District and Work-Family Conflict; (14) COVID 19 and Work-Family Conflict; (15) Use of Emotional Labor Strategies.

History of Work-Family Conflict

Research in both employee workplace and home life balance is vital because of potential guidance on both the organization's success and the personal lives of employees (Ofelia et al., 2005). For numerous individuals, their career is "inextricably bound up with professional work and progress along a certain path in an organization" (Oplatka, 2010 p. 779). There have been significant changes in the workforce. One of the most significant changes is the fact a greater number of women have entered the workforce as well as a higher number of couples where both partners have a paid occupation (D. A. Major & Germano, 2006). Over the last five decades gender roles in both the work and home have changed dramatically. More women have entered the workforce and there have been reductions in fertility (Percheski, 2008). Dual-workers or dual-career couples and single-parent families have shifted the role of work family conflict in the lives of employees (Roshan & Arulrajah, 2021).

While the industrial revolution focused on separation through fragmentation, specialization, and compartmentalization of jobs, the information era focuses on the fusion of different life concepts (MacDermid, 2005). Many factors have an impact on work-family conflict. Professional hours and work roles, relationship status, children, social support, and imbalanced participation between the work and family roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; and Wattoo, Zhao, & Xi, 2018). Though there have been substantial changes in the dynamics of the both work and home lives of employees, the social organization has not changed much resulting in permeating work-family conflict (Percheski, 2008).

Role and Expectations

The position of an assistant principal is rewarding as there is an ariel view of all classes and students. An assistant principal often oversees teacher evaluations, student discipline and attendance, curriculum, and instruction, and supervises extracurricular events. But, with increased expectations, reduced authority, increasing time demands, and responsibilities principals are finding difficulty balancing work and home life (Cushing, Kerrins & Johnstone, 2003). Normative expectations about the work of principals must be analyzed to make recommendations on how principals might adopt stress-reduction methods that will help them lead more effectively while maintaining satisfaction at home. The principal's role is demanding. Faced with a myriad of different stressors, principals must demonstrate the ability to run a multisystem organization with managerial and leadership skills (Arar, 2018; Brauckmann & Schwarz, 2015; LaFrance & Beck, 2014). Principals must be experts in the areas of educational pedagogy, culture, climate, administration, technology, and human resources (Arar, 2018). As a

school principal progressing through the career, he or she often must reconstruct their personal and professional identities (Arar, 2018).

Principals set the tone for the site and are responsible for ensuring students meet both federal, state, and local levels of proficiency. While evaluating educators and assuring student progress is on track, they are held publicly accountable for their sites. Stakeholders in the school look to the principals to "create a balanced set of student outcomes." (Reilly-Chammat, 2008 p.9). Educational outcomes have increased partly due to the social emotional learning responsibility placed on schools. The whole child approach to education is necessary. However, it places the onus of responsibility on the school leader to be at the helm of their students' social, emotional, and physical developmental needs (Hester, 2020). Rothstein et al., (2007) states that the whole child approach has strong roots in the American education system. However, the philosophy is not practiced consistently strong leaders must consequently provide an example in addition to their abilities.

School improvement efforts are led by school principals. These efforts are student focused. However, school improvement requires support for those serving as role models for students (Reilly-Chammat, 2008). Principals are expected to be experts in the initiatives of his or her schools. Furthermore, staff look to them as any solution seekers for present or future problems in school programs or curriculum. Site leaders are responding to expectations for increased student achievement with little support on how to achieve these results (Klocko & Wells, 2015). As principals continue to keep up with the demands for increased student success, their evaluations are tied to student success (Klocko & Wells, 2015).

Employee wellness is yet another role and expectation for school principals. Jones (2007) concludes that, to improve the students' academic progress, administrators need to consider all variables, including staff wellness, which influence student success.

Workload

Many educational systems in Western countries have undergone large-scale changes since the 1990s, including school-based administration, standardization, and school choice, with the goal of reorganizing the schooling process and introducing responsibility into the context of school structure. As a result, the tasks, and realms of responsibility of principals have multiplied and diversified (Optalka, 2016). Workload is defined as “a job demand or stressor that represents a consumption of energy in terms of time and psychological resources” (Goh et al., 2015, p.67). Variables that increase the workload of school principals are unplanned work, school funding, formal correspondence, time to solve communication issues, poorly managed meetings, the multiplicity of documents, state and federal reports, and time spent giving face-to-face time to stakeholders such as staff, community members, students, etc. (Optlatka, 2017).

Perceived workload may be subjective or objective. Employees may be tasked with the same duties. However, the concept of perceived workload may vary according to the individual's perception. The subjective idea of workload internalizes the ease or difficulty of one's personal work. The objective workload encompasses evaluations and quantity of work (Turkoglu & Cansoy, 2020). Employee burden has been built and investigated in terms of pressure, stress, and job volume. Essentially, it has been characterized as an employee's feeling that one has far more work than one can complete in each amount of time. Longer working hours, pressure to work extra, undertaking activities in addition to regular work, and a faster pace are all examples of

work overload. The term "overload" is commonly used in the literature to describe a high workload.

Workload can be quantitative or qualitative in nature. When an employee is asked to do multiple tasks in a short period of time, the quantitative level of work rises. However, the qualitative levels increase when the person is asked to complete complicated and difficult jobs. For example, in health-care companies, workload may be measured by the number of physician teams that need to be coordinated or the number of patients on contact precautions or in isolation (Optalka, 2016). As a result, the nature and assessment of workload are highly contextualized, mostly depending on the type of profession or organization. Educational administration is not unlike the health care profession.

Several components may influence perceived workload on school administrators. Archer said, "Administrators must cope with the fact that many of them will spend up to 60 hours per week on the job" (as cited in Roush, 2008, p. 21). Uncertain expectations of site or district leadership, flux of business of the season of school (such as semester exams, holiday breaks, and graduation), inadequate numbers of staff (substitute teacher shortages or lack of qualified applicants to fill a position) are reasons workload could be increased among principals. A principal's undermined sense of autonomy and lack of supportive cultural characteristics may also lead to a higher sense of workload (Turkogly & Cansoy, 2020). According to Tingly (2008), "Between sports events and school performances, a high school principal can expect to be out two or three nights a week and for some, the time commitment is a deal breaker" (p. 4).

Technology has created incredible ease in the workplace which allows work to continue 24/7. However, this ease and ability for lightning-fast communication has also led to complex organizational and social structures in the workplace. Email and texts have helped facilitate

communication across school sites. However, it has also increasingly added to the workload of school principals (Comert & Donmez, 2019).

Workload may have negative effects on school leaders. The literature suggests Work-Family Conflict for principals can lead to bleak outcomes such as: principals leaving the profession (Wu, 2005); the inability to give significant time to special education students (Naz & Sulman, 2012), and more emphasis on managerial tasks over instructional leadership (Brauckmann et al., 2015; Johari et al., 2018; Klocko & Wells, 2015; Oplatka, 2017; Turkoglu & Cansoy, 2020). Workload raises the potential for administrator burnout (Yildirim & Dine, 2019).

Legislative action has changed the course of daily lives of building principals. Race to the Top of 2009 was to assist in the innovation of state education reformers and develop the capacity to effectively implement changes. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 Public Law 107-110 continues to add more to the workload of school administrators with its list of accountability measures, sanctions, rewards for school districts, and requirements (Klocko & Wells, 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic has added additional state mandates to site leadership requiring tracking of positive cases, quarantine, and CARES Act requirements (Turkoglu & Cansoy, 2020).

Multi Directional

Work and family relation is bilateral. Inter-role conflicts are caused by incompatible role pressures from the work and family spheres. This is evidenced as different domains of Work-Family Conflict begins when demands at one's job become unmatchable with the demands of family life. Moreover, Work-Family Conflict can affect personal social structures and career (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Matthews & Barnes-Farrell, 2010; Akram & Hussain, 2020).

Work-Family conflict is an inter-role conflict that exists when the requirements for engaging in one domain conflict with the requirements for participating in other domains. The result is the employee suffers a negative impact (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). It can be observed that demands of a job i.e., long hours, work role ambiguity, job demands, etc. can overload an individual and negatively impact the family life. Thus, conflicts and issues at home can directly impact work success such as work satisfaction, career advancement, and or engagement (Akram & Hussain, 2020; Grzywacz et.al, 2007).

Models of Work-Family conflict consider a variety of elements, including the conflict's origins, bidirectional nature, and effects. Role values from everyday life should be incorporated into such simulations. What an individual considers to be significant, central, or a priority in his or her life is referred to as life role values. Thus, if a single mother spends more time with her children it may result in conflict in the workplace and vice versa (Kara, Gunes, & Tuysuzer, 2021).

Family Domain

A study conducted by Befort et al. (2008) stated principals are less likely to participate in research that involves a sensitive topic or that they do not believe is credible. Before participating or permitting anybody else in their school to participate, principals want to know that the research was thoroughly developed (Befort et al., 2008). Befort et al. also discovered that knowing that the research will "make a lasting impact and may affect future decisions to participate in research" is one of the motivators for principals to participate in research (p. 584). There is a scarcity of information about the principalship and its effects on families and

marriages. As a result, there remains a pressing need to learn more about Work-Family conflict and its effect on the personal lives of school principals.

Several variables in a principal's personal life can impact Family-Work or Work-Family Conflict (Kara, Gunes, & Tuysuzer, 2021). Often, work intensification while simultaneously dealing with student discipline, interactions with parents, classroom walk-throughs, and community needs interrupt the work-life balance of school principals (Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2020). Family responsibilities have an impact on work life. This direct contact between the responsibilities of home on work can potentially lead to reduced satisfaction from personal relationships as well as career contentment. "Presence of conflicts or disharmony between family and work increases the risk of physical and mental health issues" (Kara, et al., 2021 p. 253). Factors such as work hours, workload, marital status, and number of children may lead to an imbalanced participation between activities in the home and work (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Rousch (2016) looked at other occupations to discover how some of the same attributes' principals portray would affect the family domain. She explored if there were similar situations in the business world with a CEO or management that is under a lot of stress and works a lot of long hours? "Aggressive and unreasonable timelines for management and technical initiatives enhance work-family conflict by driving employees to carry extra work home at night and on weekends," according to Messersmith (2007). (As cited in Rousch 2016, p. 27). "Seasonal changes in employment requirements, ad hoc projects, and a plethora of other company requirements might frequently necessitate managers' time and attention during off-duty hours." As a result, during both work and non-work periods, the manager's family and work functions overlap" (Leaptrott & McDonald, 2011, as cited in Rousch p. 27). Would managers adjust their

long work hours if they had more freedom? Mayo et al. (2011) concluded. “Managers with high job control would be highly committed to their jobs, and despite having the freedom to cut in the number of hours, they chose to remain on their jobs long hours and the larger the manager’s span of control, the more housework is absorbed by the spouse” (p. 345). Even though research on school principals and how their occupations affect families and marriages are scarce, the studies on the corporate world are useful in providing a basic understanding of the subject of work-family conflict and how it correlates to the lived experience of a school site principal.

Time Based Conflict

In time-based conflicts, individuals are unable to spare adequate time for each role in his or her life. Conflicts occur because of not being able to be in two places at once (Brue, 2018; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). A school administrator may face conflicts where the requirement of one role is disproportionate to others. For example, school principals working multiple extracurricular events in the same week may interfere with their role as a parent missing their own child’s events.

A person's time may be divided between multiple roles. In most cases, time spent on tasks in one function cannot be used for actions in another. Meaning roles may compete for time (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Time-based conflict is compatible with Plock, et al 1980's excessive work time and schedule conflict dimensions, as well as role overload first identified by Kahan et al. (1964). Time based conflicts may take two forms. First, due to time constraints imposed by one function, it may be physically impossible to meet demands imposed by another role. Secondly, even when one is physically attempting to meet the needs of another position, stresses may cause an obsession with one role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Time based conflicts may include the number of hours worked per week, including the amount of time commuting to and from the workplace. Work-family conflict has also been linked to the amount and frequency of overtime worked, as well as the existence of shiftwork irregularity. The inflexibility of the work schedule can produce work-family conflict. Jiang and Zhao (2014) study of secondary headmasters in China revealed over 30% school principals work more than 60 hours per week. This demonstrates that most secondary school principals spend more time at work, resulting in decreased family time and work-family conflict. As a result, it's especially vital to investigate the impact of work-family conflict on site managers.

Strain Based Conflict

Strain based conflicts result when the role in one domain spills over and contributes to interaction within the other domains (Brue, 2018, Barnes et al., 2012, Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). This type of role strain makes it harder to meet deadlines or perform effectively in another role. Workplace pressures have been shown to cause strain symptoms as tension, anxiety, weariness, sadness, apathy, and irritability. This strain results in work-family conflict as the constant ambiguity between role satisfaction leads to strain (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Principals are unique kind of instructors that serve as both educators and leaders (Yang et al., 2021). These inter roles create work demands that impact both the physical and psychological for staff. Changes in the professional environment, boundary-spanning activities, communication, and the mental attention required at work all contribute to strain conflicts (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

It can be evidenced that an overabundance of autonomy can result from high levels of strain-based conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Due to the isolation principals sometimes feel

working in multiple roles, emotional spillover may occur due to strain-based conflicts caused by task autonomy (Yang et al., 2021). Kanter (1977) suggested employees who experience interaction fatigue may withdraw from personal contact at home.

Behavior Based Conflict

Behavior based conflicts occur when one behavioral pattern required for a role is not compatible with the required behavior pattern of another. Actions such as leadership, management, or interpersonal styles that are acceptable or even praised in one domain but incompatible in another. One example might be a mother who is a teacher and treats her own children as students. Because educators are required to fulfill a multitude of expectations such as being facilitators of learning, caregivers, and role models in morality, administrators may fail to recognize the need to adjust attitudes, actions, and behaviors between home and work (Brue, 2018; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Teachers and school principals are burdened with the pressure to help all students succeed further than just the classrooms. Such burdens can blur behavior patterns in different roles impacting empathy and compassion (Lane, et al., 2021).

A person's conduct is likely to be strained if he or she is unable to adapt behavior to meet the requirements of several positions. Behavior strain may also cause a person to feel a sense of restrictiveness. An employee may believe that employment necessitates a strict professional code. Their family role expectations, on the other hand, are the opposite, with complete openness demanded from family members (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Work-related emotional spillover such as bleak emotions, attitudes, abilities, and behaviors generated in the work and family domains spill over into each other, according to Work-Family conflict theory. Individuals' time

and energy are depleted because of negative spillovers, resulting in discontent. Furthermore, job satisfaction may be negatively impacted due to this behavior strain conflict (Yang et al., 2021).

Compassion Fatigue and Work-Family Conflict

Through these inter roles educators play in the lives of students they can rarely avoid the impact of secondary stress on their own lives. These emotional weights spill over into the personal lives of educators. Thus, adding to mental health issues, speeding up their departure from education as a career, substance abuse, and complications in personal relationships. School principals are tasked with this same secondary stress involving both their students and their staff. Principals are charged with absorbing the needs of both staff and students. School leaders work in a storm of people in crisis including staff, students, parents, and community members (Lane, et al., 2021).

Compassion fatigue is the result of helping or wanting to help a traumatized person (Figley, 2002). Practitioners may experience satisfaction from listening to and comforting their students and staff when responding to incidents. Principals may be traumatized when showing compassion and empathy (Bernstein, Chernoff, 2016; Lane, et al., 2021). Another description of compassion fatigue can be secondary traumatic stress since the helper does not experience the trauma firsthand (Newell & MacNeil, 2011). Traumatic elements may include poverty, physical, mental, or sexual abuse, death, suicide, illness, and now in our society- the pandemic (Lane, et al., 2021; Kara et al, 2021; Karakose, Yici, & Papadakis, 2021). This interaction regarding traumatic events can be “a major source of stress for principals and a force that has organizational effects” (Lane, et al., 2021 p.17).

According to Figley, one can be susceptible to trauma without directly having witnessed the trauma firsthand. Compassion fatigue may cause care workers to be susceptible to trauma making traumatization occur from simply learning about the event (Figley, 1995). For practitioners, fatigue manifests from establishing a relationship with students, learning about students' exposure to and resulting from trauma, and from lacking professional training support (Hoy & Nguyen, 2020). Compassion fatigue can derive from the desire and commitment to help (Lamendola, 1996). It is fueled when you "witness the capacity of the human spirit to endure" and it "may be ignited by the courage you see in others" (Lamendola 1996 p. 154).

Administrators often draw from "experiential reservoirs of traumatic events they experienced while working with students, staff, or their school community" (Lane, et al., 2021 p.17). This desire to help can lead to deep compassion fatigue when the exposure to those circumstances that require such endurance are constant or long-standing (Zartner, 2019).

School principals may experience emotional trauma in two areas. First, a principal may be witness to trauma by working through a trauma with others. In the process the principal may experience trauma by providing information, materials structural, or emotional resources to help the person mitigate through their crisis. Next, a principal may face anxieties or stress when forced to confront staff on infractions or mistakes. Even though confrontational, the principal may empathize with the staff member, or know the extenuating circumstances surrounding the person. Even when the leader believes the criticism is warranted the assertion of power may inflict serious and mental physiological effects on school leaders (Lane, et al., 2021).

While school administrators are sometimes referred to as disciplinarians, their work is guided by what researchers refer to as the ethics of care. Care is an essential aspect of education

according to Noddings (1984). Her study explores the idea that teachers live the ethic of care daily through their rapport with their students. Moreover, Noddings states teachers deep regard for the wellbeing of students can be dangerous for themselves as caregiver: “It is clear that my vulnerability is potentially increased when I care, for I can be hurt through the other as well as through myself” (1984, p. 33). Beck (1992) built on Noddings previous work to extend the idea of the ethic of caring to school principals. Receiving the other's perspective, responding to the awareness that arises from this reception, and continuing in the caring connections for an appropriate amount of time are all behaviors that Beck characterizes as part of the caring process.

Administrators experience compassion fatigue because “they have cared too deeply for those in their charge “(Lane et al., 2021 p.19).

Gender and Work-Family Conflict

Work leaders must function within many roles (Brue, 2018; Kara et. al., 2020; Akram & Hussain, 2020; Lippe & Lippenyi, 2018). They oversee both work and family obligations. With the awareness of work-life balance dialogue, clarifying the management of work-family conflict is important for leadership advancement of women. Women remain underrepresented in leadership positions (Bruce, 2018; Gunes, & Tuysuzer, 2020). This may occur as both genders experience unique differences in their leadership journeys (Bruce, 2018).

Historically, the family unit was designed in which only males were employed outside the home; and females held the responsibility of raising children, keeping the home orderly, cooking, and other household chores (Cloutier, 2020; Kara, Gunes, & Tuysuzer, 2021; Akram & Hussain, 2020). The pressure to grow women in leadership is increasing. However, women often experience role blurring between their professional and family roles. Brue (2018) suggests

women experiencing overlapping role demands are less likely to seek promotions in the workplace. According to various studies, female employees take on greater duties in their personal lives, resulting in more work-family conflict (Kara, Gunes, & Tuysuzer, 2021; Sittar et al., 2020; Ozkul & Comert, 2019). Due to the stress and uncertainty associated with their obligations, female instructors who are also moms may experience more pronounced Work-Family Conflict. Thus, it can be concluded female school administrators experiences with Work-Family conflict may be due to societal gender roles they feel through pressures of being both mother and supervisor (Kara, Gunes, Tuysuzer, 2021).

A chief consideration in gender when regarding work-family conflict is that research shows women judge their utility based on different criteria than their male counterparts. In a study by Sprung et. al (2015) men believed work-family benefits useful to their job performance particularly when a spouse is working from home. Women, however, tend to assess their effectiveness based on their ability to reduce work-family conflicts. Greenhaus & Kossek in 2014 found men held trepidations to the idea of working from home for the fear of negative work outcomes and professional growth. In Bohlen & Viveros-Long's (1981) study they suggested flexible scheduling was insignificant to reduce conflict for working mothers. Moreover, the female employees experience added conflict by the women balancing childcare responsibilities and more personal responsibilities to their routine.

Making women feel forced to choose between family and career can keep women from entering the administrative field. Sharp et al.'s (2004) study states, "Domestic relationships may restrain many women from pursuing higher levels of responsibility, and increased time demands may cause family problems" (p. 25). Many traditional women believe it is their responsibility to raise their children and hence postpone or refuse to pursue a career in administration (Rousch.

2016). While women believe their families are a barrier to their professional job choices, Coronel et al (2010)'s study of work-family conflicts indicated that they are still more dedicated to their families than their careers, and that some domestic responsibilities are not worth giving up. Some women don't even want to advance in their careers because it would mean more time away from their families, especially if they have newborns or small children at home. This is a personal choice that each person must make.

Men's roles have altered over time, and they are beginning to share more tasks in the household. “In considering work-family conflict as a management and occupational health issue, insufficient attention has been paid to the impact on family relation and interactions, especially in regard to the impact of a father’s work” (Lau, 2010, p. 365 as cited in Rousch, p.25). In dual career families, do fathers take on additional responsibility? According to research, the answer is no. Pleck (1977) suggested that for men, work domain roles are more likely to intrude into the family domain, whereas for women, family domain duties are more likely to interfere with work domain responsibilities. As a result, men are more likely to have Work-Family conflict whereas women are more likely to have family work conflict. But does this remain true in the current climate in schools?

Personal Support Systems

Success in career does not only occur within the profession itself. Employees naturally draw from two types of support to aid in facilitating work and career performance and balance. The first types of support originate from perceived organizational support (POS). The next is support stemming from non-work environments. This can derive from the support of a significant other, social groups, faith-based groups, etc. Ocampo, et al., (2018) study of

perceived spousal support and career outcomes contend positive personal support systems increase an individual's prolonged career engagement as well as help cope with Work-Family conflicts.

These personal support systems may help mid-career employees in reacting to career stressors and challenges (Akram & Hussain, 2020; Ocampo et. al., 2018). For example, spousal support may provide feelings of safety and self-esteem that are crucial for addressing the demands of work-family conflict. The goal of social support is to exchange resources between individuals with the hope of assisting them. Stronger support from spouses can potentially “curtail work-to-family or family-to-work strains enabling employees to allocate resources such as time, energy, etc. to ease job demands” (Ocampo, et al., 2018 p.166). Matthews and Toumbeva (2015) explained social support in the workplace help employees perform their jobs. Coworker support can be considered social supports.

Work- family enrichment is when one's role enhances or benefits another role. Researchers using Work-Family conflict as a theory suggest this positive emotional spillover, such as family support, comes from family support as a source of fulfillment and energy that may “empower work performance, facilitates bi-directional skill development, broadens network and social capital resources for employees” (Brue, 2018 p. 221).

Role of School Districts in Work-Family Conflict

Work-family integration, connection, and support can provide mutual chances and methods for knowledge transfer, encouragement, growth, and cross-role contributions for any employee (McMullan, Lapierre, & Li, 2018). The overlapping role demands and obligations for

school principals can also lead to heightened perceptions of work-family conflict. Work-family conflict has a profound impact on staff. Therefore, it is crucial to create workplace supports for segments of the society where studies have not been conducted (Akram & Hassain, 2020). One such segment of education is school administration. Poorly managed Work-Family conflict may result in negative professional outcomes such as career stagnation, absenteeism, substance abuse, both physical and mental health issues, and decreased work production (Brue, 2018; Yang, et.al.,2000).

Much of the literature on Work-Family conflict is focused on the impact of the leader's conflict on staff (Brue, 2018; Morgan et al., 2018). Little research is available on the role a school district plays in helping school leaders mitigate their personal Work-Family conflict. Work-family culture is "shared assumptions, beliefs, and values regarding the way in which an organization supports and values the integration of employees' work and family" (Thompson et al., 1999 p.394). Allen (2001) describes a supportive organization culture as one that acknowledges and validates employees' both personal and professional situations. The organization promotes flexibility and tolerance for needs outside the workplace.

Norms that respect an employee's personal and family time are created through a supportive work family culture. This is in great contrast to the idea of the ideal worker culture that promotes long hours and employees to arrange all responsibilities around their paid work (Lippe & Lippenyi, 2018). Moreover, school administrators play a vital role in securing a supportive work-family culture for all staff while possibly experiencing intense ideal worker culture themselves.

District administrators have the power to steer the district's course by prioritizing student and staff needs and allocating resources such as time, money, and manpower to the areas they believe most important. Because they have the potential to impact long-term change, their support for workplace wellness initiatives is crucial to the achievement of the organization's performance goal and to mitigate through the lived experiences of Work-Family conflict among staff. Sustaining employee wellness without district-level support, even if teachers and site managers are on board is almost impossible. Strategic stakeholders buy-in and support are essential for a successful and long-term implementation plan to help staff (Hood, 2018).

Work-Family Conflict Amid COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 virus originated in Wuhan, China in December of 2019 and spread to other countries, including the US by March of 2020. Becoming a serious global health threat due to its rapid infection rate, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 to be a global pandemic accounting for: the spread rate of infection, severity of human impact, number of countries affected, and the exponential increase of number of cases (Karakose, Yirci, & Papadakis, 2021). Schools across the nation were forced to close as COVID numbers were on the rise. Almost all national governments took strict measures to prevent the rapid spread of the virus to reduce the number of casualties. Requirements such as facemasks, public hand-washing practices, travel restrictions, lockdowns, curfews, and social distancing and isolation were implemented as prevented measures (Karakose, Yirci, & Papadakis, 2021).

Technology allowed teachers and students to continue with learning remotely. Distance learning offered advantages during crisis by simulating a learning environment. However, distance education also increased “reduced social interaction between students, parental burden

of childcare, lack of food access for students, and equality issues regarding technology issues” (Kara, Gunes, & Tuysuzer, 2021 p.252). Like students, teachers experienced a host of difficulties associated with the results of the pandemic and the radical change in their work environment.

These problems include teachers’ inability to collaborate with colleagues face-to-face, lack of experience working from home, feelings of isolation, work/life balance, ergonomic issues at home, and possible inadequacy or lack of technology at home. These negative impacts may be increase because of lack of motivation, work-related duties, and absence of familiar experiences. The pandemic caused a collective sense of powerlessness which caused many to experience fear, uncertainty, and enhanced anxiety (Kara, Gunes, & Tuysuzer, 2021). As people began to worry about their own health, the well-being of loved ones, and the future of their careers, leaders such as school administrators, were faced with aiding staff, students, and community members with ways to cope with the unpredictability of life caused by the pandemic.

Reorientation of human behaviors after COVID-19 has been dubbed, “the new normal.” The effects of the pandemic were first examined through the lens of human health. However, it is now understood “the pandemic has triggered other socio-cultural, economic, and psychological effects too” (Kara, Gunes, & Tuysuzer, 2021 p.2). School administrators are mitigating a population of persons possibly experiencing decreased life satisfaction, emotional discomfort, fatigue, decreased work satisfaction, and economic strife. School administrators are encountering problems through the aftermath of COVID in terms of infrastructure, access, and pedagogical issues occurring during and after distance learning (Aytac, 2020).

During the pandemic the roles and expectations of school administrators shifted completely. In a 2020 job satisfaction survey 32% of leaders reported they were suddenly dissatisfied with their job due to the onset of COVID-19. Leaders responding to the survey stated

the new challenges and pressures placed on them impacted their work role “to a large/very large extent” (Walker, Sharp, & Sims, 2020). Administrators now have concerns about opening and keeping their schools open the future, health and wellbeing of staff, and government directives. Pressures to contact trace, dealing with substitute shortages, mask mandates, and community issues plague school administrators as additional duties beyond their typical workload (Walker, Sharp, Sims, 2020).

As COVID-19 knowledge is growing, and research into the impact of the pandemic on mental health and quality of life is underway, the separation between professional and personal life is vaguer than ever (Rabacal, Oducado, & Ken, 2020). Continued research on the balance of work-life and Work-Family conflict of school administrators can help increase school efficiency (Karakose, Yirci, & Papadakis, 2021).

In a 2020 Turkish survey, Dr. Tufan Aytac explored the problems facing school administrators during COVID. First, school administrators stated that pupils' willingness to learn declined, parents were unable to offer the required comfort and support for students at home, and students had difficulty obtaining information. Difficulty happened with internet access, technology issues, scheduling, or conflicts within the student's home. Due to this teacher sought guidance from school leadership. Administrators found themselves working even longer hours during virtual learning. Often stating, “the line between when my workday should begin and end was completely blurred” (Aytac, 2020, p. 7).

During distance learning administrators were often tasked with exploring ways to meet the needs of special education students. In the state of Oklahoma, site administrators oversaw the daunting task of updated Individualized Educational Plans (IEP) so legally the IEP was correct due to the change of placement from in person to distance learning because of the pandemic.

Administrators report teachers were overwhelmed with paperwork. This situation ultimately caused assistant principals to work even more hours than normal.

Use of Emotional Labor Strategies

Surface acting (SA), which comprises both the inhibition and production of emotions, and deep acting (DA), which is considered an extension of authentic emotions, connecting one's own feelings to the situation, are the two basic activities that make up Emotional Labor (EL) (Maxwell & Riley, 2017). School principals deal with a variety of stakeholders at various stages of development, including children, adult employees, peers, parents, supervisors, and employers, all of whom require varying degrees of emotional display (Berkovich & Eyal, 2015; Maxwell & Riley, 2017). All stakeholders want school principals to have a controlled and calm demeanor while balancing caring and managing (Berkovich and Eyal, 2015; Eacott and Norris, 2014; Maxwell & Riely, 2017). Often, due to high emotional demands, principals fear scrutiny stress in which school leaders are conscious of perceived weakness in their roles if presenting their true emotions (Lasalvia, 2011). Moreover, principals tend to present a dominant “display rule” pressuring themselves to manage emotional responses so they may project their most rational selves (Maxwell & Riely, 2017).

Research suggests that simply being satisfied in the role of principal is not enough to curb the emotional wellbeing of those in the profession. When the level of emotional demand is very high, principals tend to surface act to meet the required demand. Thus, support of their real feelings becomes difficult (Lasalvia, 2011; Maxwell & Riley, 2017).

Summary

In summary, the review of literature was essential in obtaining accurate and current information to help guide my study. The review of literature allowed me to focus my study on my research questions. Each subheading helped serve as a guiding tool to keep my research focused and continuously moving forward. Evidenced in current literature, the fifteen distinct topics are relevant to the impact around the study of work-family conflict and assistant school principals.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

“It is said that stress equals the distance between what you have control over and what you are held responsible for. Using that definition, teaching is a stressful job” (Benjamin, 2019 paragraph 2). This quote speaks volumes to the weight our educators carry with them daily. In this research, portraiture, a genre of inquiry, was embedded into a qualitative case study to capture the richness and complexity of the lived experiences of public-school assistant principals as they balance work-family and support students through social and emotional learning as well (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). This qualitative study was designed to provide an alternative approach to the largely quantitative research on work-family conflict. A qualitative methodology was chosen due to its power in bringing peoples’ lived experiences to light, exploring new and underexplored areas, and supplementing existing quantitative data and studies (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

The researcher can build a narrative portrait that tells a tale using the portraiture process. Being able to independently identify, extract, and record the relationship between external stimuli through portraiture is a crucial method for the current study since it lays the framework for researchers to make an impact (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). More specifically, in this study, in contrast to other ways of documenting human experiences, portraiture can:

1. Illuminate career educational efficiency impacting and influencing assistant principals in a minority group (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).
2. Depict the experience of an individual and create a narrative timeline portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).
3. Identify, extract, and document relationships that may have influenced or impacted the participant's experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).
4. Make specific use of context such as the construction of a rich description of any physical settings (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).
5. Note the researchers' perspective and point of view are valued and crucial during the use of this methodology (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).
6. Underscore the history, culture, and ideology of the setting and environment (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).
7. Identify symbols and metaphors that contour the narrative and permit for artifacts shared by the participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).
8. Portraitists during the data gathering stage focus on the elucidation of the participants' involvement and the specific meaning behind their experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Statement of the Problem

Work and family symbolize the most crucial components of life (Kara, et. al, 2021). The linkage between work and family and a possible conflict between the two is a topic of interest as today's organizations expose workers to increased occupational stress (Colombo & Ghislieri, 2008; DiRenzo, Greenhaus, & Weer, 2010, Muasya, 2020; & Michael, et. al, 2008). As dual earner

households have increased over time, people have experienced high levels of stress as both individuals are simultaneously engaged in work and family domains (Seiger & Wiese, 2009;

DiRenzo, Greenhaus, & Weer, 2010). Each role has expectations and there are times in which the two roles are in conflict (Ahmad, 2008; Aryee, et. al, 1999; & Kara, et. al, 2021). The perception of workload may be either objective or subjective (Turkigku & Cansoy, 2020). Maintaining the balance between domains occurs constantly. For a principal to be effective for both themselves, staff, and students, the factors of stress related to the profession and the ability to maintain appropriate boundaries in each domain must be addressed (Arar, 2018; Turkoglu & Cansoy, 2020).

However, work and family domains can be incompatible resulting from different norms and requirements. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) described three types of work-family conflict: time based, strain based, and behavior based. In time-based conflict an individual is unable to meet the needs of his or her roles with adequate time to spare. Time distribution cannot be balanced between work and family roles. Time based conflicts occur when the duties of one role are discordant with the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Strain based conflicts result from fatigue, anxiety, and tension as motivators for work factors in which the role assumed hinders family responsibilities (Netemeyer et.al., 1996). Behavior based conflicts occur when a pattern of behavior is required for a certain domain and is incompatible with the other domain. For example, a father serving in the military who imposes staunch discipline on his children (Palmer et al., 2012).

Work-family conflict theory could give insight on how individuals manage these possibly incompatible domains by segmentation, spillover or coping resources. This theory represents the central construct in studies regarding work-family balance (Colombo & Ghislieri, 2008; Pollock

& Hauseman, 2018; Turkoglu, & Cansoy, 2020). Work-Family conflict theory aides in exploring possible antecedents and possible outcomes of problematic feelings, balancing family and professional roles causing work dissatisfaction, depression, and one of the possible determinants of absenteeism (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Colombo & Ghislieri, 2008; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Pearson & Keough. 2003). A principal's wellness can directly impact staff job satisfaction, culture and climate within a building, and desired community goals and objectives (Richardson, 2020).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the impact of Work-Family Conflict on the lived experiences of secondary assistant principals.

Research Questions

1. How is Work-Family Conflict portrayed by selected assistant principals?
2. What are the antecedents of Work-Family Conflict for selected assistant principals?
3. What is the relationship between Work-Family Conflict in school assistant principals and work satisfaction?
4. What is the relationship between Work-Family Conflict in school assistant principals and support systems?

Personality and Researcher's Bias

Growing up in impoverished southern Appalachia, work-family conflict was applied to Maslow's Hierarchy of needs. Food, shelter, employment were all priorities earned through employment above any type of emotional wellness or self-satisfaction at home. Though at one

time booming in the chemical industry, the Kanawha Valley area of West Virginia, where I was raised, is now void of commerce. Huge corporations such as Monsanto, Dupont, and Carbide have shut down and moved operations overseas. When these major employers left the area the job market plummeted and unemployment in my home state soared. I witnessed the extremes of work-family conflict first-hand on company picket lines as the union workers lined the town streets. I saw examples when the teachers who worked in their classrooms all day giving of themselves to their students only to go clock in at the 24-hour grocer to stock shelves on the night shift.

Many middle-class families in West Virginia were faced with foreclosure, first time poverty, and mounting debt. Leaving the state was an option for those with opportunities afforded through college education. The opioid crisis hit an all-time high in West Virginia during my time as a school administrator. A large population of our parents were addicts. My teachers were experiencing firsts in areas of trauma informed teaching. For example, long term effects of drug addicted babies in the secondary classroom. At the time of this research, a federal jury is trying big pharmaceutical companies in a suit involving drug distributors: AmerisourceBergen, Cardinal Health and McKesson. Email exchanges evidence West Virginians were mocked through monikers such as: the Beverly PILLbillies, redneck heroin tweakers, and

OxyCottonville. Through a shared culture depression Appalachians remain resolute to work hard even at the expense of work-family balance. On Monday December 20, 2021, celebrity singer, Bette Midler tweeted:

What #JoeManchin, who represents a population smaller than Brooklyn, has done to the rest of America, who wants to move forward, not backward, like his state is horrible,” she tweeted.

“He sold us out. He wants us all to be just like his state West Virginia. Poor, illiterate and strung out” (@BetteMidler, December 20, 2021)

Ms. Midler’s incendiary commentary is an example of stereotypes against the working class. This rhetoric only intensifies persons not seeking help for the consequences of work-family conflict such as physical or mental needs.

Personally, I experienced work-family conflict pushing past a childhood laced with alcoholism and poverty. Resilience kept my eye on goals such as college and a career in teaching. Perseverance and a passion for education helped solidify long term goals. As applied in Work-Family Conflict theory, I often felt emotional spillover from my job, caring for children, then an elderly parent. The consequence of this spillover was often at the sake of my own mental and physical wellbeing. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, I have experienced immense work family conflict as I attempt to balance the new normal of leading a school, worries regarding my own family’s health and safety, and the barrage of tasks expected of me as an assistant principal in a large 6A Oklahoma high school. As implied in this research. I believe in the need to support the assistant school principals in social, emotional, as well as professional capacity to in turn secure well rounded healthy employees. Helping assistant principals find a balance between work and home ensures quality leaders in our school systems.

Research Design

From a constructivist epistemological perspective, I wanted to detail the experiences of secondary public-school assistant principals and how they perceive Work-Family conflict as explored through the qualitative research design: portraiture. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the impact of Work-Family conflict on the lived experiences of secondary

assistant school principals. Portraiture helped to frame a description of the analysis and research design by combining the principles of art and science. Portraiture permitted the researcher to work from “inside” the setting. Through this method, the writer is omnipresent and creates a rhythmic pace (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis describe the methodology in this manner:

Portraiture is a method of qualitative research that blurs boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life. Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experiences of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions- their authority, knowledge, and wisdom. (p. xv)

Coined “human archaeology,” portraiture delves deep into inquiry (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997 p. 15). A key feature of this methodology is the relationship between researcher and participant. Much like a synchronized dance, researcher and participant Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) describe this as shared dialogue. As the aim for this study will be to expose work-family conflict in public school principals, portraiture gives permission for my voice as the researcher to serve as witness. The portraiture approach is comprised of five features: context, voice relationship emergent themes, and the aesthetic whole. These elements are described as follows:

1. *Context* is the setting. Context is used to position persons and actions in time and space so that they may be understood. Describing the context allows the reader to make text- to-self connections between the participant’s life story and their own. Through context, the researcher first describes the physical setting. Then, often the historical context or “origins and evolutions of the organization and the values that shape its

structure and purpose” are added (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997 p. 52). I will convey the setting through my rich description each participant’s work environment.

2. *Voice* is heard through the story as the researcher frames inquiry with questions, data, and the stories highlighted. Both the voice of the researcher and the participant are intertwined. Each a crucial portion of the narrative. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997 states, “voice as interpretation determines language, frames and selects images, modulates articulation, and balances separate parts into a cohesive aesthetic whole” (pg. 113). Through my interview with each participant, I will be dedicated on describing his or her lived experience as authentically as possible.

3. *Relationships* are necessary in this methodology and crucial for deconstructing the power structures that often exist between researcher and participant. It is this connection, the tether between writer and subject, which sets portraiture apart from traditional research. In this method, the researcher invests great time establishing a rapport with their participant. I will be diligent in my efforts to build rapport with each participant, so they feel I have a vested interest in their safety, trust, and most importantly their story.

4. *Emergent themes* grow out of the processes of data collection and analysis. These themes may emerge from voice, documents, observations, shared descriptions, and the relationship between researcher and participant. Once the themes surface, they are used to construct the portrait. I will compile all data to look for patterns of emergent themes to create an individual portrait of each participant.

5. *An aesthetic whole* is the result of the researcher combining all data into a cohesive framework to write a complete portrait of their participant. There are four features of the aesthetic whole: conception, structure, form, and cohesion. Conception is

the overarching support of the participant's story. It supplies structure for the narrative. The structure is the stability of the portrait. Reflected as headers in the paper, it supports how each portrait is described and built upon from the researcher's data. Form captures the essence of the "emotion and movement" (page 254) of the portrait (LawrenceLightfoot & Davis, 1997). Cohesion is the fusion of the three other features to provide logic and order to the writing. Allowing each participant to add to the portraits the images of their choosing will create the overarching understanding of the role work-family conflict plays in their lives as assistant principals.

When each element of portraiture is blended a narrative emerges that provides the reader with an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for everyone involved" by listening to and reflecting on the stories heard (Merriam, 1998). Using naturalistic inquiry and artifacts the use of portraiture to investigate teachers' experiences informs and offers insight into teachers' expectations of how to fulfill the needs of their students when affected by their own compassion fatigue. Every portrait will transform into a detailed account of the teachers' real-life experiences, showing a deep understanding of self.

The researcher listens for a narrative as the participants focus on their living experiences through portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). Since the participants and the researcher will both participate in the telling and understanding of the narrative, portraiture becomes an effective technique. In the early 1980s, Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot created portraiture as a means of exploring the relationship between art and science through an interpretive lens. Through subjectivity and an artist-like impression of the subject's life, portraiture is applied to reflect the participants' lived experiences in a social, historical, and cultural context (Lawrence-Lightfoot,

1997). Portraiture allows for the use of a variety of interactive approaches, including definition (Creswell, 2003), to fully develop and understand the complexity of the participants' true account of each lived moment.

Methodological Procedures

Setting/Context

My interest in this study began 7 years ago when I moved from rural West Virginia to Oklahoma and experienced a large 6A school through the lens of a curriculum principal. It was quickly apparent to me that fatigue and exhaustion were commonplace among school administrators. Leaders in the role of assistant principals were especially fatigued as their duties range from site facilities management to teacher evaluation all while balancing lives at home. During the 2018 teacher walk out, I was struggling to help classified staff find supports to stay financially afloat, educating students and families on how to tap into the free breakfast and lunch opportunities while schools were closed, and driving back and forth from Tulsa to the state Capitol in Oklahoma City each day. As a result of this experience, I made it my goal to one day study the role of work-family conflict among those in my profession, and specifically those sharing my job title at large schools.

I chose school settings located across Oklahoma. Each school was a public high school housing grades 9-12 on the high school campus. As sanctioned by the Oklahoma Department of Education, I used participants employed by 6A high schools. Each school had a site principal and assistant principals.

Participant Selection

School sites and interview participants were selected using purposeful sampling. Patton (2015) explained that purposeful sampling requires choosing information rich cases. Therefore, I

chose school assistant principals with whom held vibrant stories within their classrooms. For this study, principals from diverse secondary sites were selected at the end of summer going into a new school year after the COVID-19 global pandemic. When posed the question, “how many?” regarding the number of participants in a study, Merriam (2009) said there is no answer. I chose to interview and examine the classrooms of five very different school administrators.

First, the president of a state school administrator’s organization pushed my research opportunity out via the organization’s email listserv. This organization has currently over 2,000 members. However, as my research sought input from secondary school administrators, he sent to his specific listserv of 890 members who fall in the secondary principal association for the state which is quoted below as:

Good afternoon! This week is National Assistant Principal Week, and no amount of thanks does justice for the sacrifice, courage and commitment that you exhibit while serving your school community. With those thoughts in mind, I want to make you aware of valuable research that Ellen Vannoy, assistant principal at Jenks High School & Doctoral Candidate at Oklahoma State University, is doing. She is seeking input while targeting Secondary Assistant Principals and Work-Family Conflict. If you would be interested in participating in providing feedback, please complete the google form below (survey should take less than 5 minutes) and Mrs. Vannoy can follow-up with you: <https://forms.gle/ggYIZM3MCfLNsc5q8>

Your input would not only help her research but also provide real-life feedback for organizations like OASSP as we seek to serve the unique needs of Assistant Principals like you. Thank you for all you do and wishing you the best!

Sincerely,

Within two hours from this correspondence, I had 48 secondary assistant principals complete the form. This showed me there was a great need for the research. The google form helped depict the prerequisites needed for participation in my study. Participants had to be a current assistant principal at a secondary (grades 7-12 site), work in a school considered 6A classification by Oklahoma OSAA, have 3 or more years' experience in the role, have children at home or be the sole financial provider for an aging parent, and live in a dual income home with a spouse or partner.

The google forms culled the original 48 down to eight viable participants. From the eight participants two felt they could not make the time commitment to the study, and one never returned my correspondence. Finally, five active participants remained in the study.

Participants ranged from a veteran teacher, now administrator with over 20 years in suburban school systems, to a novice administrator with three years' experience in leadership. Principals' backgrounds represented a range of disciplines taught prior to entering administration. Every participant had been a teacher first through either a traditional teaching certificate or alternative certification. Each principal had a significant other at home in a dual earner household. Participants had children at home or are the sole care person for an elderly parent. Each site was chosen because of its varied location, socio-economic, ethnic, and varied academic achievements.

Data Collection

According to Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997), a portraitist begins by listening and observing. During this time, the researcher allows themselves to be open and receptive to all

stimuli. This “quiet watchfulness” helps to process the data and make sense of what has been witnessed (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). For this research I collected data through observations, interviews, and document analysis. Data was collected in a real-world setting in which the participants lived experiences unfolded in front of myself as the portraitist. Sarah Lawrence-

Lightfoot describes the researcher as the “instrument of inquiry” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997 p. 86). It is by way of the portraitist’s lens that data is collected through my insight and perspective. I was able to find a few studies specifically focusing on work-family conflict among school leaders. However, the literature is extremely narrow from a qualitative lens specifically focusing on specific examples from the trenches of public-school leaders and the impact that stress has on the different domains of their lives.

Survey

There are many various sorts of instruments to be used to gather data, but I chose to utilize Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000) work-family conflict scale, which is extensively used, highly valid, and trustworthy as a starting point to determine where my participants are in terms of stress in both work and home domains. Hennessy (2005) examined the factor structure, reliability, and validity estimated for the scale. Sampling 159 working mothers, the results of this study showed evidence of satisfactory estimates of both internal and external validity. The exploratory analysis in Hennessy’s research suggests that work- family conflict self-efficacy may mediate the relationship between Work-Family Conflict and outcomes such as work and family satisfaction and/ or work stress. Hennessy suggests the Work-Family Conflict Scale may be used to better understand the role self-efficacy plays in the relationship between conflicts and negative outcomes.

Matthews et. al (2010) developed research to further validate the Work-Family Conflict Scale citing other scales do not match the measure developed by Carlson et al. (2000) in terms of theoretical representativeness or psychometric support. In 2015, Haslam et al. also explored the validation of the Work-Family Conflict Scale utilized to measure Work-Family conflict in parents with young children. The results of the analysis showed that both subscales have strong internal consistency, construct validity, concurrent validity, and predictive validity. The findings show that the WAFCS is a good short assessment tool for evaluating work-family conflict in parents.

The survey is a cross-sectional survey in which data was collected from a sample of Oklahoma school principals at a single point in time to acquire a good representative of the attitudes of a larger population of school principals. The survey data was examined using descriptive and inferential statistics to better understand the levels of work-family conflict experienced by participants, as well as any demographic correlations. Though this tool was useful to help sort and narrow down which principals to study further, it was only the beginning of my research. I chose qualitative research because research is scarce on the true lived experience of a site school principal. This survey was followed with observations and interviews.

Observations

I collected observational data during this research. This study involved observations of each participant in his or her work setting. I conducted one on one interviews after two observations from each school setting. Each observation occurred in participants' school sites. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) assert observations provide some background or specific situations, behaviors, or other details that might be utilized as reference points in subsequent interviews.

Portraiture has an underlying philosophy and process that allows the 'painting' of actual individuals in real circumstances. It's a difficult methodology in which observation may help decipher the meaning of personal stories and events surrounding participants. I used observations to make note of the routine and unconscious within the life of my participants.

Interviews

“Qualitative interview let us see that which is not ordinarily on view and examine that which is often looked at but seldom seen” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012 p.xv). Interviewing is important to help the researcher present how the world is viewed through the eyes of their participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative interviews yield rich descriptions, depth, and project a humanistic perspective to quantitative results (Reilly-Chammat, 2008). The nuances and subtleties uncovered through qualitative interviews could not be unearthed through only quantitative research.

I implemented a semi structured interview with each participant. Each of these interviews assisted in understanding in understand the role work-family conflict plays in the lives of administrators. Through these informal conversations the role of balance between work and home plays in their lives emerged. Interview protocol was established prior to meeting with each participant (Creswell, 2013). As established in portraiture, I leaned in on empathy to ensure I developed an understanding of the participant’s perspective and feelings (Lawrence- Lightfoot, 1997). Empathy played a crucial role for me to gain a deeper understanding of how my participants are living in the profession of education.

Interviews were conducted with the goal of 5-7 assistant principals After 2 observations per participant, I conducted a face-to-face interview with each assistant principal. Each interview

was conducted via one-on-one and in person at each participant's school setting. To elicit thorough opinions and comments, open-ended questions were used. While conducting interviews, notes were kept on the interviewees' nonverbal questions as well as the atmosphere in which the interview would take place. Following each session with the participant, each interview was transcribed as promptly as feasible, and a field diary was kept capturing details relating to my observations throughout the interviews. Throughout the research process, I kept a detailed notebook to document my own thoughts, feelings, experiences, and views. Using a digital recorder, all interviews were recorded with participant's permission. Interviews and this study benefitted from listening to participants' own perspectives and perceptions. Coding was implemented to track emerging themes. Understanding the limitations for gathering data through the interview process, on the other hand, are the biases that may develop due to the presence of the interviewer.

Throughout the interview, my goal was to create a narrative in which the study may throw light on the numerous difficulties that each principal faces in both their professional and personal lives. Interviews ranged from 30-40 minutes during the regular school day while being completely understanding of the business of a "typical" workday.

Interview Questions

Merriam (2009) remarked, "that in which interview questions are worded is a crucial consideration in extracting the type of information desired (p.95). I used an interview guide that included a list of the questions that will be discussed during the interview. I was able to stay consistent with each participant thanks to the guide. Follow up questions were asked when appropriate.

Interview Questions

1. Think back on your most stressful day at work. Please describe that day and why was it particularly taxing?
2. What is a strength of yours a colleague would describe in you?
3. What problems do you face in balancing work life and home life?
4. What resonates with you at the end of the day?
5. How do you cope with the demands of your job?
6. What supports do you have at work?
7. What supports do you have at home?
8. Do you have your work email accessible on your cell phone?
9. How many times a day do you think about home while at work?
10. How many times while at home do you think about work?
11. If I think of additional questions in the future, may I contact you?

Aesthetic Whole

The complete aspects of the text are a critical factor in the transmission and determination of meaning in portraiture. “Because the subject being described is embodied in the descriptive writing, readers must attend to the aesthetic features of the narrative” (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997 p. 28). Attitudes, feelings, colors, tempo, and ambiance are all components of the subject that are rarely mentioned in traditional research. In the implementation of portraiture methodology, as in the development of a work of visual art, the depiction beyond basic representation into the domain of expression is vital for the experience as well as the

interpretation. The emergent themes may be a “backdrop or their shared context” (Lightfoot & David, 1997 p. 29).

The researcher takes on the role of artist in portraiture. A responsibility is to internally evaluate the portrait's subject by looking for coherence in what is seen and learned. As a result, I tried to construct a picture of each participant with rich written details. I utilized the portraiture method to express message by incorporating aesthetic elements. One way to accomplish this was to ask each participant to provide me with pictures they feel represent Work- Family conflict as it is evident to them. For example, a participant could choose to snap a picture with her cell phone as her toddler cries for her as she leaves for work for the second time that day to supervise a ballgame in the evening. Or maybe a participant chooses to collect their memes they see their staff circulating on social media mocking administrators for lack of support. These visual images may be images the participants take with their phones and send me. However, they may choose to use memes such as the pictures with themes of education abundant on the multiple platforms of social media. I discussed with each participant why they chose the image after our interview. Within each portrait written I incorporated the images they chose as examples of aesthetic production. Participants chose as many images as “speaks to them” regarding Work-Family conflict.

The researcher in portraiture must juggle several types of data while uncovering and giving coherence through emergent themes balanced around the work's center. It was my goal to use the visual examples provided by the participants themselves to aid in providing such a detailed rich description of each participant and his or her lived experience as both an assistant principal and valuable family member.

Data Analysis

According to Mertler and Charles (2005), analysis aids in four areas: describe the data clearly; identify what is typical or atypical among the data, bring to light differences, relationships, and other patterns evident in the data, and answer research questions. This study was a sample of an entire population of assistant principals throughout education. The information gleaned from research can be utilized to analyze the data and come up with findings. Assigning pseudonyms, protecting data acquired, and assuring accurate interpretations of data collected was also part of the data analysis and interpretation ethics (Creswell, 2015).

Pseudonyms were assigned to all study participants to safeguard the confidentiality of the school district, school site, and participants. The information acquired during the data collecting phase was kept safe in my possession or in my home office. Storage for the audio and video recordings of interview was stored on my personal device using a passworded efolder. Member checks and staff talks were used to accurately interpret the meanings of the artifacts and data.

Coding

According to Saldana (2016), a code in qualitative research often is a word or phrase that symbolizes a summative piece of language or visual data. The act of coding allows the researcher to wear an “analytic lens” (p.6). Through the methodology of portraiture, coding was crucial to capture important caveats, idiosyncrasies, themes, and similarities emerging in my study. I coded both during and after data collection as an analytic tactic.

Throughout my time with participants, I coded using the In Vivo method when I gleaned a quote from one of them that stood out to me as important or directly related to a research question. This method of coding is applicable to action research. It served the purpose of

capturing the lived experiences of the assistant principals in their own words. I followed Saldana's recommendation that In Vivo coding can be one of the sole coding methods in the first cycle of coding via the use of portraiture methodology. I used emotion coding throughout the participant interviews as it was appropriate for my exploration of their intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences. I used emotion coding utilizing words that can describe human emotion at the top of my notes. Finally, I employed both narrative and eclectic coding to jot down first impressions as well as an interpretive tool. Portraiture is a highly exploratory process. Therefore, narrative coding was appropriate for exploring the human conditions of my participants. These codes were kept on my notepad and saved to my drive. Both the notepad and drive are passworded separately to ensure security.

I used the transcription service, Temi to transcribe each interview. I then listened to the interviews again and reviewed the transcriptions. After the coding process I was able to identify similarities, frequencies, and patterns throughout my research. This process helped me recognize emerging themes and resulted in findings in my study.

Trustworthiness of Findings

In a qualitative case study, Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer the following four criteria to determine the reliability of findings: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The authors agree that a qualitative study has a responsibility, based on its paradigm, to respect the participants' different realities and to honor and safeguard them from any negative impactful research (Erlandson et al., 1993). Empathetic regard is important in the study of school leaders. Lawrence-Lightfoot & Tisdell (1997) discuss the act of listening and answering to develop an understanding of the participant's perspective. Through portraiture, an

openness to memories or the interpretation form memories are integral to developing the portrait. As a researcher I held space to pay witness to the participants perspective, ideas, emotions, and pain.

Ethical Considerations

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) discuss the researcher's ethical issues and moral duty when conducting a portraiture study. Portraitists have an ethical responsibility to tell their subjects' story accurately and respectfully. Furthermore, there is trepidation about the researcher's ability to build relationships, engage in rich dialogue, and leave an impression, only to leave in haste. This warning did cause me to pause as I certainly built a rapport with my participants and may know them in a professional capacity.

Credibility

The following strategies, based on the recommendations of Lincoln and Guba (1985), were used to assure credibility in this case study: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, member checks, purposeful sampling, and triangulation. At each school site, I substantiated prolonged engagement by engaging with both the participant and setting. As a result, I gained confidence, established rapport, and gathered reliable data from each participant. Persistent observation allowed me collect in-depth data and gain a better understanding of the school's culture and the participant's contributions, trials, and stresses at his or her site. Because I have an extremely close relationship with some members of my doctoral cohort, I asked fellow students to help with peer debriefing. Member checks were used as I provided participants copies of their interview transcripts for them to verify accuracy and ensure trust was established. To

clarify any answers, I plan to send follow up emails. Information from numerous assistant principals, observational data, the survey, and visits to various school sites was used to triangulate the results. Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis (1997) explains triangulation as the method in which the researcher employs their many strategies and tools to find points of convergence. I sifted through data to draw out emergent themes. These themes are crucial as there is literature exploring work-family conflict among school staff through a quantitative lens. However, a qualitative approach is vital to truly explore and expose the lived experiences of assistant principals working in the trenches of education.

Transferability

The capacity of the study's findings to be applied in another situation is known as transferability. To ensure transferability I wrote with rich, thick description. Thick description refers to a very descriptive, detailed presentation of the environment and conclusions of a study used as a method to ensure transferability.” Thick description of the sending context so that someone potential receiving context may assess the similarity between them... and the study” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.125).

Dependability and Confirmability

The ability of a study to be replicated or repeated is referred to as dependability. The degree to which the findings are congruent with someone else's interpretation of the data is referred to as confirmability. All my documentation, notes, transcripts, taped interviews, and observations were easily available to meet these needs. My research strategy was totally transparent, with any changes made as the study advances being noted.

Limitations

This qualitative study will rely on each participants' capacity to answer the questions with honesty and integrity. The survey may be perceived as too personally invasive. Assistant principals may fear their true answers will impact them professionally. Moreover, some may feel trepidations answering questions about their home lives. The study was limited to only assistant principals in the state of Oklahoma. Finally, there was little literature regarding the impact of work-family conflict on assistant principals. Therefore, it was difficult to expound on the difference of the role of the assistant site leader in terms of work-family conflict. My presence will be both a benefit and a liability (Creswell, 2014). My presence at school sites may detract from the "normalcy" of the school day. As my research explored the work-family conflict of secondary assistant principals, the results may not be generalizable to all school leaders.

Summary

The methodology that was employed in this investigation is discussed in Chapter III. This chapter discussed my function as a researcher as well as any potential biases that may arise because of my personal history and experiences as an assistant principal. The findings' credibility and trustworthiness were defined and assessed.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Portraits Of Participants

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the impact of Work-Family conflict on the lived experiences of secondary assistant school principals. Included were schools across Oklahoma to determine if geographic, environmental, or demographic factors were influential on the stress of participants in the role of assistant principal. Employing the theoretical model of Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), levels of time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based conflict were explored.

The initial email was sent requesting participation. Within three hours, 20 individuals responded. Clearly the topic was of interest. Forty-six individuals ultimately answered the screening survey. From that number, five were purposefully selected on the basis of gender, location, and years in administration in order to paint the most diverse picture possible. Rooted in this theory of Work-Family conflict, the portraits of five remarkable school leaders are presented in this chapter. The portraits are the result of interviews, observations, and self-scored Work-Family Conflict Scale of each administrator. The professional makeup of the participants included two Middle School Assistant principals and four high school assistant principals all of which are within big 6A Oklahoma school districts. Participants were also asked to provide a

meme, picture, etc. of a visual representation of how they feel regarding Work-Family conflict (appendix C).

Each assistant principal was asked the same basic questions in their initial interview including background questions, questions pertaining to stress, and questions relating to work-life balance (for a complete list of these questions, please refer to Chapter III). The goal in presenting these portraits was to allow each participant's authentic voice to be heard. As a result, the italicized words of the participants are presented as they were spoken by the participant. To safeguard the anonymity of the participants' identities, their school districts were given pseudonyms.

The Work-Family Conflict Scale served as a starting point for my conversations with participants. As this study is rooted in how participants construct meaning in both their work and home environments, the scale provided an anchor to help participants acclimate into place of comfort between myself and them as participant. Interview questions with each participant were utilized as a guideline. Though I did not do any analysis with the Work-Family Conflict Scales as it was not the purpose of the study, portions of the participants' scales are represented and embedded in their portraits. The scales served as descriptive statistical information helping to create a more detailed portrait of each participant. Conversations may have included follow-up inquiries or anecdotal accounts supplied by the participants when required and natural. This gave the questions a more natural sense, and the participants didn't feel constrained by them.

In this chapter, findings from narrative qualitative inquiry, rooted in the method of portraiture, are presented to summarize, and discuss the implications of the study's four research questions. The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of Work-Family Conflict on assistant principals. Through an inquiry approach, portraiture guided the gathering and analysis of data searching for the assistant principals' individual truths. Through the application of

portraiture in giving form and structure to the participants' experiences, a connection emerged between participants, reader, and myself as the researcher, through the art of narration. From this narrative connection the highlights and challenges from which assistant principals practice the balance of work and home is portrayed. As discussed by Ladson-Billings (2005), a trusting and whole relationship was developed between the participants and the researcher in creating each portrait, depicting authenticity and a truthful representation of the importance of connection, and understanding of oneself.

The five main dimensions of portraiture, namely: context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and aesthetic whole were my focus while gathering rich data. As the portraits open, the context was detailed to provide a lens into the known characteristics of the participant's school district. The context shifts to furnish a peek into the physical environments of the participant. As the senses encompass the sights and sounds of people, landscape, architecture, and decor of each school and its surroundings, this depiction of the physical environment provides insight into the climate and culture that affected the participants' experiences. From the context, the aesthetic whole slowly evolved as the portrait came into fruition. In creating the portrait, analysis of the dimensions of portraiture included listening for repetitive statements, themes, and metaphors while acknowledging institutional and cultural rituals, while observing and listening for the symbols and patterns that emerged throughout interviews, observations, and analysis of surveys. This chapter begins with the portrait of Jana, followed by the portraits of Lacey, Clifton, Rick, and finally Karri.

As the participants' lived experiences were studied in relation to the study's research questions, each portrait evolved. After an understanding of the context, the portraits continue with an emphasis on understanding the role work-family conflict plays in the lives of school

assistant principal. Through artifacts chosen by the participants themselves, each portrait birthed its own aesthetic. As the portraits developed, the focus turned to the voice of the participants and their antecedents of Work-Family conflict. Connecting emergent themes, the portraits painted a landscape to identify the role Work-Family conflict plays in work satisfaction. Finally, the portraits concluded with the exploration of the role support systems play in the lived experiences of assistant principals.

Portrait of Jana J

Jana J's school district is a suburb of one of the major cities in Oklahoma. This district prides itself on athletics, the number of students that head to ivy league universities each year, and tradition. Once rural farmland, the district has grown exponentially. Within the 38 squaremile school district much is zoned in the actual city limits. However, Jana surmises "the voice of the district stems from the suburbs- even though a huge portion of the population lives within the actual city limits." Predominant occupations of the people residing in the district include professional, semi-professional, managerial, proprietary, and sales. Frequently the district graduates the greatest number of National Merit Scholarship winners in the state.

Known for tradition, the district employees themselves are often persons who graduated from this district. Staff introductions, communications to the public, and recognition occurs using language to depict those who are from and still reside in the district. Special senior class pictures are taken to acknowledge which students have been with the district since kindergarten. It is the culture of the community to identify as a lifetime member of this school district, often the verbiage even is used as "legacy" or how many generations back a family has been active in the district.

As of late, with a huge influx of Asian families this pride of tradition has been met with a bit of backlash. Many now see the community as permanents versus “others.” This innuendo creates a feeling of racial tension as the population that was once almost completely Caucasian is a mix of several ethnicities. Section 8 low-income housing has sprung up in the district with a very large “affordable housing units” being built in the heart of the district.

Jana, the daughter of a doctor in the area, has been an employee in the district for over twenty years. First, she was a math teacher. Then, she moved into administration. Jana explained she entered school administration in the same school in which she was a teacher. Thus, she began evaluating the same teachers that were her teaching partners. “One day I walked out as a math teacher, and I walked back in as one of the bosses. It was a very difficult transition. I didn’t think of that before.” (Interview, April 2022). Meeting the first time at a local restaurant so she could leave and go supervise a girls’ softball game, Jana described her lived experiences fairly openly. With some follow up questions, the conversation flowed very easily between me as the researcher and she the participant.

Jana explained she has always been a visible member of the school team. “I was the popular math teacher. All the kids wanted my class. Then I moved to administration and that feeling of being popular didn’t follow me into my office.” We chatted about the perception of her coworkers. “I hate to admit I worry what they think. But I do. I was in a certain clique as a classroom teacher. As an admin you are truly alone on an island.” (Interview, April 2022). Seemingly sullen, Jana looks across the restaurant where we met. The restaurant is located down the street from her school site. Every time the door opens behind me Jana looks up nervously. She’s given 3 polite nods or a hello to persons she must know or recognize in the twenty minutes we’ve been seated in the booth. I asked her if there are many parents of students here in the

restaurant and she chuckled and said, “oh of course. We may be a huge district but parents or not. That doesn’t matter. Everyone in here knows each other in some way or another.”

Jana seems very conscious of what the members of community’s perception of not only school administration. But, of the role they serve in the community. “Trust me. I know my glasses of wine are being counted. Even if that isn’t spoken out loud. I also know my role is to represent the best district in the state in everything I do.” I posed the question if that role ever weighs heavily on her. Jana took the Work-Family Conflict Scale, and her answers were very consistent and straight forward. She rated herself as Strongly Agree on the indicator: *I am able to negotiate and accomplish what is expected of me at work and in my family.*

Jana mentioned the complexity in transition from educator to administrator again when I asked about her most difficult day. “During the first year as an assistant principal I had a student vaping blatantly in front of the school. He was skipping class and smoking where everyone could see him. I knew this young man well and approached him. He flipped. He started screaming and saying, ‘I don’t fucking care what you say. So, what if I’m smoking?’ I was shocked. In that moment I also knew I had no one to call. I *was* the person you call.” Jana went on to explain that day was particularly taxing because teachers were abuzz with the district’s recent decision to cut a teaching position at their site for the upcoming school year. “I felt the weight of being on the other team. Ya know? I was team admin and for almost two decades I had not only been team teacher. I was the captain of that team with those same people.” Jana continued that the student was one she knew well. Jana had him in class when she was a teacher, her own children knew him. “I walked up to Jack assuming he would be open and respectful toward. me. Instantly I knew Jack craved bucking authority; and I was authority. That night my kids told me, “Yeah kids

at the high school heard about what happened with Jack. They said you were a bitch” (Interview, April 2022).

Encouraging Jana to juxtapose this most stressful day with a very typical one she says,” there are no typical days. Every single day is up in the air. Just when you think you know what you’re going to do... something changes. An emergency. Something.” Jana smiles to herself and says,” and in some sick way. It’s why I love it too. I’m never bored. I definitely don’t work in a cubicle inputting data all day.”

“Is it ever hard to balance parenting school age kids while being a school administrator of that same age group? Especially since you mentioned your kids attend school in your same district.” Jana looks around thoughtfully and then proceeds with “my kids have heard it all. From the typical “your mom is a bitch” statements to “I love your mom so much! She’s like my second mom!” Jana continues explaining that she has four children of her own; and they each have a range of personal experiences with her role as assistant principal. As an administrator Jana has two older daughters in college, one daughter at the high school, and her youngest son is at the middle school. Jana recognizes with four children they are each going to internalize her role as an educational leader differently.

“The truth, I think when you’re an administrator with your own kids- there’s almost a jealousy you combat (long pause). I’ve missed plenty of ballgames and events because of my job.” Jana explained that though her job often works out perfectly around her kids’ schedules, it is sometimes impossible to balance it all. “For example, one of my daughters loved the arts. She was never a star. But ya know the type. She worked on the sets. Did the makeup. She loved being part of the big productions at the high school. Once when I couldn’t attend a show because I had to travel across the state for a middle school baseball game, I remember her saying, ‘Oh of

course you do. We know all those kids.” Jana said her daughter often used sarcasm to cope with the frustrations of having a mom as a school administrator. “Reflecting on it- I think my kids are jealous I am forced to give so many kids attention over them. Even in the most mundane trivial of events. I think my kids wish I was a spectator. There for them. Not supervising as a school leader all the time.” I asked Jana to explain the difficulties her supervising responsibilities caused her own children. “When your own kids are in your district. That Work-Family conflict you are discussing occurs when you least expect it.” Jana went on to explain a situation involving her daughter at the high school.

My daughter was recently dress coded for her shorts. In the grand scheme of things, who cares, right? Well, the teacher asked her, what would your mom say? Then her principal called me, and I just felt like there was a level of greater disappointment because I am expected to discipline students for dress code violations. Here I feel like a crap assistant principal because I’m getting a call about such a low-level discipline issue- for my own child. Then, I feel crappier as a mom because I’m her MOM. At home my husband is like, really? So-and-so called you over shorts. I felt like the innuendo was I had a less than perfect dynamic with other leaders across the district because we were still discussing Lululemon shorts that evening. Again, the major issues- drugs or violence on campus...you go into action. It’s the small daily nags that get ya.

I asked Jana what strengths of hers her colleagues would say she possessed? “Oh, I bring the WOO.” Jana is referencing a social intelligence theme meaning “Winning Others Over.” It means a person who has the ability to inspire and motivate others. This concept stems from Don Clifton’s book, *Strengths Based Leadership*. Jana explained her district rolled out a book study for all site and district administration. “So, it was one more box to check. But my colleagues all

said they thought of me when they read the part about WOO. So, I think they'd say I am positive and try and bring others to positivity."

I asked what problems Jana faced balancing work life and home life. If that positivity bleeds into her personal life. Looking down at her plate and heavily sighing Jana dives into a subject I can tell is very personal. She shifts a bit before telling me she and her husband faced a "blip" in their marriage a few years ago. "We just weren't connected. I was going one way. My husband was going in the other." Jana continued to speak about a time when her husband told her he wanted a divorce. She said though the toughest time of her life- it also shined a light on issues she needed to work on to improve her marriage. "I was on auto pilot. So was he. We were just going in opposite directions." Jana discussed that in her first years as an assistant principal she was supervising ball games, and events for the fine arts. Her own four children were all school aged at the time and in all their events. Thus, her husband felt as if he was not a priority. "I didn't have great time management skills or boundaries. I've come a long way with that." When I asked for an example Jana described she makes it a point to only attend events in which she is assigned for supervision. "You have to lean in on your team and trust. I used to worry so much about what others thought if I wasn't at the big game or event." It is important to note Jana's Work-Family Conflict scale indicates she has not only a solid grasp on work-family life balance; but the scale indicates she rarely feels the stress of one over the other.

Jana continues that COVID also forced the issue of balance. "It's easy to think an assistant principal sat at home and did nothing while we were on lock down and kids weren't in school." Jana explained that her district pivoted from face-to-face learning to distance learning due to the pandemic 3 separate times between March of 2020 and April of 2022. It was communicated to assistant principals across the district a mere 2 hours before all staff they would

be working from home. “We were told to take our devices home and anything we would need as we would not be permitted back into the building. I went from the feeling that the school was my second home to my key card not working to permit me in the facilities. That is a mind funk I know people outside of education wouldn’t understand.”

Jana explains that her “worlds collided” when she was at home due to the pandemic and then managing her own kids’ and their online schooling. “All of a sudden I was running a school from my kitchen counter and teaching 3 different grades simultaneously.” In this district each administrator was tasked with being available for “zoom office hours” during the typical school day. Jana articulated the stress of hearing the needs of her students when she felt like she couldn’t do much to help.

“I literally know the local 411 agency operators by name. So, I would be at my kitchen table working (my husband was also working virtually) and I’d be fielding emails, calls, and texts from teachers or parents about a student with no food, or internet access. So here I was a virtual call center trying to organize the electric staying on for a student all while putting to the side the fact my own family was also stressed to the max in this global crisis.”

Because of the large number of English Language Learners in her district Jana discussed the strain she felt during the pandemic to help her ELL students meet basic needs. “So assistant admins were sitting in front of their computers for 10 hours a day and then we’d be helping our own kids, cooking dinner, homework, internet connectivity, and household chores all in the same space. I don’t know how I survived.” During the pandemic this district pivoted two additional times to distance learning. The second time was for three weeks due to staff shortages as a direct result of the virus.

“I’ve always been relational with staff. During the pandemic I had this weight of knowing whose spouses had been laid off work, who was petrified of getting sick. We had a staff member’s husband die of Covid. I can’t even replay the drama of vaccine versus anti-vaxxers in the district.” Jana continued about the constant worry about her staff’s well-being. I asked if she felt like the district did anything purposeful regarding staff well-being. “hmmmm. I mean, I don’t think they purposely DON’T do it. I think the onus of responsibility on staff wellness falls to site leadership.”

Jana said what resonates with her at the end of the day are all the things “still up in the air.” She continues that at the end of the day what resonates is “my job is never done. I can never check all the boxes because there’s ten more items.” I followed up asking if Jana could give me real-life examples of never-ending needs. “Oh just today... absenteeism is a big one. Of course, I need to chase the chronically absent students. Of course, I need to call home, do home visits, issue discipline as per policy. That is every day. Never ending. Of course, driving home, I think about all the things I should have gotten to or need to do for tomorrow.”

When I inquired about how Jana copes with the demands of her job, she tells me she does believe her family is very active. “I ski and I love the beach. I live for that one-week family vacation. All the stress. I cope knowing I will eventually get to my hobbies. Even if for only seven short days.” Jana also chides, “I mentioned the wine, right?” She is relaxed. Her body language tells me she’s comfortable with me and we converse easily back and forth. “I cope knowing I have a great team in then trenches with me.”

I smile and tell Jana that leads into my next question about supports she has at work. “Laughter. My team can shut the door and just roll laughing. Because if you can’t laugh- you’ll breakdown. Not cry. Breakdown.” We talked about that word “breakdown.” Jana tells me that

when a parent is berating you or you are dealing with something so very heart-wrenching like homelessness having a team “hold you when you feel like you cannot stand” is the reason she stays at her school site. “I want to work beside not only people who support me. But teammates who can find the joy day after day.” I asked her what a daily joy and Jana would be replies with a huge grin, “The dudes on my team would say lunch mac and cheese in the cafeteria. GROSS!”

We continue our chat and Jana tells me she feels very supported at home as many of her family members are in education. “My sisters and my aunts are either all teachers or retired counselors.” Jana tells me this network of family members are her “go to people” in her personal life. I followed up asking if she thought having family members who understood her work stress better because they related to educational issues made a difference in how she was able to cope. “Hmmm I’m sure it does. It’s nice to know some of my family members can relate to what is heavy on my heart.”

Jana tells me she does have her work email accessible on her phone, “ugh. Yes. I know I shouldn’t.” I asked her how many times she thinks about work when she is at home and she says, “well I couldn’t tell you a number. I can’t quantify it for you. But I would say if there were something going on at work – like a student ran away... very frequently.” Jana says she doesn’t think about home as often but that could be “because my kids are older. I don’t have to fret about day care anymore.”

During my observation at Jana’s school, it is more than obvious she is a relational leader as she previously stated. When I entered the beautiful facility it’s obvious Jana is known throughout the school as someone with high energy. When I walked in the office the administrative assistant greeted me with, “she’s running around here somewhere.” I was led to

her office where two girls were obviously finishing up reporting something to Jana. “I loathe social media. Most of what I do is because of things that happened off my campus.” Jana’s office is warm and welcoming. Pictures of both her home and work family are framed around the spacious office. There are binders and papers on her desk. But the space is not messy. Her office has an inviting appeal to it. There are many references to the district mascot on the walls and desk. It appears Jana is in the middle of a work project. When I ask what she’s working on she replies, “oh lord. Handbook changes are due to the district. Oh, and textbook adoption.” Jana eyerolls and shoves a large blue binder to the side of the desk. I notice she starts to sit in her office chair and then seems to have a thought run through her head and moves over to the desktop computer, fires off an email without sitting down, and then says, “well we better get down there.”

I went with Jana to lunch duty. I counted four different adults and numerous students stop Jana to tell her information from “remember I need a sub for tomorrow afternoon” to “... I want to talk to you about my math teacher.” In the cafeteria Jana’s presence seemed to be a norm and expectation in the school climate. One student said “Oh I was waiting for you. Listen, did you remember to talk to Mr. _____ about my detention?” Jana seemed pulled in many different directions. However, she appeared to be used to the constant barrage of dialogue from both adults and students. Her radio, clipped to her right hip, buzzes with conversation. Jana has seamlessly answered certain prompts or ignored others apparently not involving her no less than 5x since we entered the cafeteria. I noticed since my arrival Jana has not seemed to have the opportunity to sit for more than a few minutes at a time or be in one constant area to gather her thoughts or complete a task for that matter.

I observed her coworkers come up to Jana with ease. Her role is that of a conversational leader. Many needed to tell her something. I heard phrases such as “remember, one more thing, and oh I wanted you to be aware.” Jana takes it all in stride. She seems to rolodex every need and keep moving through the day. When we got back to the office Jana was talking and clicking on her keyboard at the same time. I noticed she hadn’t eaten, and I inquired what her own lunch hour looks like most days. “Lunch hour? Oh, I don’t know any assistant principal who actually eats. I mean, maybe some leftovers standing up.” Jana and I spoke about the weeks she felt more organized than others. She concluded when she takes the time to meal prep and organize for the upcoming week things feel less chaotic for her at work and home. “I always try to make meals for the upcoming week. If not, we’re eating take out or I’m standing over the stove at 9PM.” I asked if cooking for her family caused stress for her. “Hmmm I never thought of it as a stressor. But yeah. I guess it does. Like it I forget to lay meat out to thaw. I know that evening is shot because I’m scrounging for something to cook for 6 people.” Jana explained further the meals are solely on her unless maybe her husband picks up something from a drive through on his way home from work.

I sent three emails requesting a visual representation of Jana’s thoughts on work-family conflict. On August 31, 2022, the day after my third request for her image Jana emails me this picture with the caption: This is an example of what I should be doing versus what I’m actually doing. Through email we decide to chat via a quick phone call so she can explain her image to me. Jana says she took a picture of her desk to show me all of the crucial tasks she is trying to complete at the start of the year. She is working on state reporting (Oklahoma 10-Day Report), assigning case load teachers to students with IEPs (Individualized Education Plans) and making sure classes are balanced in size. What she is actually spending time on is what Jana tells me is

the “mundane.” She continues through our phone conversation to explain parents are outraged students at the secondary level are being disciplined for dress code violations. The image of the female student was posted by that female student’s parents onto a social media platform. From there, parents went to a local news channel and the story of “a gender bias dress code” hit the local news. Moreover, parents have contacted lawyers and the district now faces a lawsuit for possible harassment, violation of Title IX, and some parents are speaking out against the dress code as a violation of the state’s House Bill 1775 under the bill’s prohibition #3 “an individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of his or her race or sex. Jana chides, “so I made this paired this pic for you to show what should matter; but what I’m forced to spend my time chasing.”

Jana explained further the district called two emergency site principal meetings due to the parent outrage over the issue. “Those meetings don’t include me since I’m an assistant principal. But guess who is the one who must make the decision to issue discipline consequence for such things then face the backlash from parents?” Jana further explained all of the paperwork on the image was just a sampling of all the tasks she must complete. “of course, what you can’t see in the pic is my daughter called me during all of this crestfallen she was dropped from her favorite sorority house. It’s rush. Could I talk to my college freshman as she was heartbroken? No. I had duty in the parking lot.”

Figure 2

Participant Created Image



Portrait of Lacey M

Lacey M's school district houses 16 sites feeding into one large 6A high school. There are over 13,000 students in the district Pre-K through 12th grade and over 1600 district employees. Lacey is an 8th year assistant principal at one of the three middle schools. Currently her school has 1,227 students and Lacey shares the role of discipline principal with one other assistant principal.

The school district is situated close enough away from the Oklahoma City area in which persons may commute; and nestled far enough to maintain a suburban feel. Experiencing exponential growth, hundreds of new builds are going up each quarter worrying many staff and community members of the impact such instant growth will have on the school system. Considered a working-class community, the district is diverse racially. The leading employers in the area are the Air Force base less than 35 miles from the city limits, main Catholic hospital and its subsidiaries, and the school system itself. Lacey tells me they have added two new teachers in the last year due to growing class sizes. However, both teachers were emergency certified as they could not find a certified candidate in the core subjects of Math and English.

Lacey explained that her middle school housed the larger Hispanic portion of students in the district. Within their boundaries are two trailer parks and several subsidized apartments complexes. The other two middle schools do not have the same amount of lower socio-economic housing. Lacey scored herself mostly 2 or 3s (neutral) range on almost every question of the Work-Family Conflict Scale. These scores were a bit surprising as Lacey articulated throughout the interview what could be considered “big rock items” in which she was facing at work such as disadvantaged students, teacher shortage, and very lofty student behavior issues. It leads me to wonder if Lacey viewed the scale as a potential “pitfall” or “professional gotcha” and did not answer as her authentic self.

Lacey described her lived experiences eloquently, confidently, and as if she herself were interviewing for a job. Outlining her most stressful day she again stated, “stress comes when I have failed to empower teachers to handle situations themselves.” Lacey continued to say as a

“Transformational leader it is my responsibility to help teachers realize they are capable of making sound decisions.” (Interview, May 2022). As a researcher I recognized quickly Lacey

was very concerned with appearing weak in her leadership. Just as the literature stated, this assistant principal was very likely surface acting to portray her perception of my desired answers. I inquired about a typical day versus her most stressful. “A typical day is me arriving at work before staff and students and organizing what I need to prepare for that day.” I ask Lacey how many days out of a week those plans go awry? “I try to stick to my schedule. But there are always unexpected interruptions. I would say those are plentiful.”

When asked how others would describe her Lacey immediately lists terminology synonymous with education. She begins to spout words off such as: team-builder, conversational leader, student-centered, and truth seeker. “My colleagues know I would drop everything to help.

I strive to create a culture of inclusivity.” (Interview, May 2022). During the interview I notice Lacey is sitting extremely straight, rigid almost. I attempt to make our interview less uncomfortable for her and tell her about my own journey in education. I tell Lacey I have three children and am close to entering the season of “empty-nesting.” Lacey immediately tells me she has children but their schedules mostly “coincide.”

“I don’t really define anything as a problem” Lacey states when I ask what problems she faces balancing her work and home life. I ask if she can think of any difficulties, she has with either part of her life bleeding into the other. “Oh no. I keep a detailed planner. My boss frequently mentions my attention to detail as an asset.” I asked what “throws” that schedule off suggesting maybe a sick child or event at work that keeps you from being late for parent pick up. Lacey shifted in her seat a bit. Looking down she says, “I am intentional in planning out my days, so those things don’t happen. But when they do occur, I make sure I handle them with calmness.” It is apparent to me Lacey is very closed off. She is now sitting arms crossed. It is as

if the question regarding emergencies with her children put a wall between her and me as the researcher. I then probed a bit further and asked if she has ever had to leave work for her young children. “My youngest had a stomach bug once at preschool. I was doing scheduled teacher observations. I am always respectful to my staff. I stay on that schedule. Having to pick my son up through me off.” Lacey admitting to even a stressful moment is a bit of a breakthrough for me. During the entire interview Lacey has projected as if she were interviewing for a new administrative position.

As a follow up question, I asked Lacey if she would consider herself a rule follower. “Of course. Order prevents chaos. I know I’m rigid. I like things in order.” Lacey comes across to me as very scared to be wrong. I asked about her relationship with the site principal, her director supervisor. “He’s great. He appreciates my attention to detail. I have worked incredibly hard. Continuing to strive to dive deeper with Lacey, I asked her future goals in education. The answer was canned, almost practiced, and immediate. “My plan is to move into district administration. A superintendency is my ultimate goal.” With a slight pause Lacey adds, “I’m aware I’ll need to start at a smaller district as a supe- of course.”

The next interview question asks what resonates with you at the end of the day? Lacey once again responds not only quickly; but as if she’s practiced her answers. “At the end of each day I want my work to matter. I want to give agency to my staff and students so they can meet their own level of success.” There is a stall in the interview at this point. I am still struggling to pull more conversation and dialogue from Lacey.

Each question is answered as if she is checking a box, ready for the next task. I led into the next question asking general follow up questions about her administrative team. “My team is great. We each are over our assigned areas. For example, I am over 8th grade math.” Lacey

explains the roles of the administrative team. She is the only female on the admin team for her site. There is one building principal and three assistant principals. She is the youngest and has the least administrative experience. I asked her if gender role ever come into play on her team. “Well, if I’m being honest. I think the guys look to me to automatically be the relational one. You know, like because I’m the female administrator I must be the nurturing one.” Lacey continued discussing that being the female on the admin team and the youngest she often feels she must prove her worth to not only her team, but to teachers and parents. “I think as a female leader I must model I am strong.”

When I asked her how she copes with the stressors of work she flips right back into the clipped, almost perfect answers. “I make sure I read and reflect so I may cope with any stress I face professionally.” Lacey tells me she tries to eat very healthy, and she makes sure to consistently get good night’s sleep. I push a bit more by asking, “yes but do you wait until you’re home and cry in the shower? Do you go to yoga? Anything specific?” Lacey again tells me “I just make sure to leave work at work and that’s how I cope best.”

Lacey mentions her husband a few times. When I asked her about supports at home, she tells me her husband is supportive of her career. They met in college, and he knew she would work outside the home. I asked about gender roles in her home. “We are very traditional I suppose. I cook and clean. I am in charge of the kid’s needs.” Lacey said she does have her work email accessible to her phone and she checks it a “few times an evening or weekend. I can’t say I count.” Lacey claims she doesn’t think of home too often while at work save when “one of her children are ill.” Lacey mentioned during the Covid pandemic was difficult because her young children’s private schools stayed closed longer than her public high school. Lacey explained her district offered the option to work at home. So, each day she had to put her work at home request

in the system and then wait for it to be approved. “That was taxing. My boys are very young and were both trying to use our home computer and iPad while I worked remotely.” Lacey chatted about how Covid was especially difficult in her district because they were unable to get enough hot spots to students who did not have a staple internet connection in their homes. “I was to continue with teacher observations and evals watching them remotely. How do you gauge engagement when only 3 of their students show for their zoom class? It’s not the teacher’s fault.”

Regarding support in place at work Lacey tells me her team is efficient. She goes on to explain they are kind and watch out for one another. However, “I don’t think my team members consciously seek to make relationships part of the school culture.” When I asked her to expound on that she says, “you know. We each have surface deep relationships with each other. We’re colleagues. Not friends. No one is bringing each other a casserole if there’s an issue at your home.”

I asked if the district supports her in any way. “Oh. Well, nothing that isn’t required.” I asked if the district promoted any type of teacher wellness program. Something specific for administrators? Lacey said she had never heard of anything the district pushed to staff. When I inquired if there was any type of employee assistance program available Lacey remarks, “oh. I’m sure at HR they’d know. It’s not something I would have a clue.”

Lacey answers she does have her work email on her phone and checks it frequently in the evening often answering parents or students’ questions. “I think about work often while at home. Probably more than thinking about home while at work.” Lacey tells me her husband has never expressed frustration with her while dealing with work from home. “Except Covid. That was completely weird for everyone I think.”

I met with Lacey to observe her at school during the morning and afternoon hours of her workday. As soon as I parked it was obvious the school ran like a tight ship. Everything from visitor parking to how to sign in the office was a well-defined process. I meet Lacey as she is bringing a hot lunch from the cafeteria to a student in a conference room. Lacey is not frazzled; but it is obvious this task was not one she had on her radar for the day. “Ohhhh one more thing ya know. We had a situation and I’m making sure a student gets lunch.”

Lacey emails me the image she chose to represent her Work-Family Conflict with this as the subject line of the email: Here you go! I have so many plans for my evenings and weekends but then.... My body says NOPE! LOL!

Figure 3

Participant Created Image

Me at work: I can't wait to get home
and be super productive

Me when I get home:



Portrait of Clifford

When I sat down with Clifford, “Cliff” as he asked to be called, I admit he comes across and the very stereotypical Midwestern public-school administrator. He is a former ball player, and coach. His background content area is history; and he worked as the high school football coach for years before becoming a school administrator. Clifford was raised and lives within his school’s boundaries. “Oh, everyone knows me here because well- I’ve never been anywhere else.” Cliff explains even though the district is large, because he has always lived and worked in the district he is known by name.

We discussed whether being known by everyone in a large district is good or bad professionally. In what I quickly realize is his jovial self, Cliff replies, “well that depends if I need out of a speeding ticket or not.” Cliff opened about being a fixture in the community means everyone from staff to neighbors think that makes your availability constantly “on.” Cliff tells the story of his wife in labor and (pre smart phone) having to tell someone on the phone, “Ok.

I’m sorry. I will in take care of this when I can. We are leaving for the hospital NOW.” Cliff is full of anecdotal stories, and I can tell uses these tales to pepper any situation to make the person he is with comfortable.

Cliff scored his Work-Family Conflict Scale quickly, and without pause. He, like Lacey, scored himself almost straight 3s on every section. However, in the last section he chuckles and says while scoring, “Work-Family Balance. Is there such a thing?” On the last section Cliff marked 4 straight down the page. This score indicates “Agree” on statements such as: I do a good job meeting the role and expectations that my supervisors and family have for me.” Cliff

never stops to ponder a statement or score. He flies through the scale with ease and looks up when finished. He is at much ease answering my questions as he is scoring himself on the scale.

As we sat and chatted, he was at first interrupted by a student. The student earned a discipline infraction for tardiness. Taking the pass from the student Cliff tells the boy, “Once I as caught on the back 40 with my buddies. Now, do you know that’s where the McDonalds is now? Ok anyway my daddy knew I was skipping before I got home!” He laughs and tell the student “I’m sure Miss _____ is frustrated because this is now a habit. You’ll serve the detention son. Now go on. Thank you.” After the door shuts behind the young man Cliff immediately launches back into our interview. He never misses a beat in our rhythm. He once again makes me feel like I have his complete attention.

When I ask about his most stressful day at work Cliff has a story. He tells me about a student committing grand larceny (car theft) on campus. As he continues with explaining the incident it becomes apparent this discipline issue dealt with the school discipline policy, criminal charges, and most important potential school safety. “The victim was a tribal member. That adds so many more layers to an issue because you must follow more steps.” Cliff says from the time he was made aware of the incident to the time he got home was over 8 hours. “And you find yourself telling the same story over and over. I talked with the police, then our SRO (school resource officer), then more cops came so I had to retell, texts from staff, the email that went out to the community. Funny – I was more exhausted over all the communication than I was over chasing the dang kid across the lot... and I’m old and a big guy!” Cliff circled back to the issue of school safety. He expresses that he is very frustrated because he wanted to lock the campus down. “I was predicting the student would try to come back on campus; and he did. Our district level over safety didn’t want to lock the campus down. I wanted to simply do a lock out. I was

stressed because I didn't have any real guidance. Nope. I still think about what could have happened." Cliff's humorous lighthearted façade drops momentarily.

I know exactly what he is thinking because my mind immediately raced there too. "How did your days look after the recent shooting in Uvalde, Texas?" Cliff looked at me and said, "it probably looked normal to anyone else. My nights were worse." It was if the air sucked out of the room. Cliff's laughter and feel-good nature replaced with complete seriousness. He continued, "thinking about those babies haunt my dreams. I am trying not to judge what I would or would not have done."

Following up I ask Cliff how this particularly stressing day compares to a typical day for him. "Ha. That was just Tuesday!" Cliff again has a rhythm to his stories. Cliff speaks with a cadence. He seems to always be in control of his emotions and the story. "...really, that was highly stressful because of what could have happened. But every day is something. A typical day I'm still putting out a thousand fires. This one was just a bonfire." I move on asking Cliff what strength's his colleagues would say he possesses. "I am pretty calm in stressful situations. I'm a team-player." I can glimpse a spark of the Cliff I initially met starting to reemerge after such a sobering topic. "I try and check my ego at the door" he continues as he rolling chair is moving side to side. I am unsure if Cliff realizes he is doing that. After the very tense moment remembering the children and teachers slain in the Uvalde, Texas

Cliff has been rocking his chair left to right in a rhythmic soothing motion. "I am not trying to win. I just want to do what is best for the team. I am a collaborator." Suddenly, Cliff seems to have shifted back into the consummate professional. He is being asked his strengths and he is checking off a litany of characteristic check points: life-long learner, collaborator, and

student focused. “I am like a utility or a Swiss Army knife. I have a lil skill for a whole lot of needs. “He continues a bit with his list and then pauses and says with a great sigh, “I don’t know. Really, I guess they would say I show up.”

Our conversation shifted again when speaking directly about the problems Cliff faces balancing work and home. “I always try and take on a little too much.” Cliff explains he completes all the tasks and duties for his job but then “I take on so many other things and perform at a level I just... get burned out.” Cliff rubs his beard in deep thought adding thoughtfully, “this sounds terrible. But the example I can think of is my son’s 5th grade youth football league. I coach. I do it for my son. That’s what good dads do right? I played on this league. It feeds into our school’s team. But I don’t love it. I am exhausted from adding one more thing.” Cliff appears almost relieved to admit that. He breathes a heavy sigh of relief and says, “I feel guilty because all fathers love getting the chance to coach their kids. Right now, it’s just one more thing.” Reflecting more on the idea of balance Cliff says, “I struggle from going to A to B to C to D to all the way to Z and back to D again.” Cliff went on to discuss how if he were very honest with himself, he isn’t often burned out by his work responsibilities. However, he tells me home responsibilities start to feel like a burden. “I have always liked mowing yards. It’s relaxing to me. I have a little side gig. Really because I like the head space. Now, I’m down to 11 yards because ... I dunno. Not the same joy, I guess. It feels like work.” Cliff has readjusted his chair twice now. He also explains he’s the caretaker for his aging mother. “We are blessed with the ability to have in-home care. You know someone to go check on her. But I still cut her grass. It’s like I’m the head of two households. I am the man of two homes all the time.”

It appears he is pondering next comments carefully. Cliff once again breathes out like he is about to share with me something only I am privy to hearing, “sometimes I just wanna go have a beer. I’m not an alcoholic mind you. I don’t need ten. But sometimes balancing work and home is heavy and yeah – I’m a dude. I want a cold one.”

When we began discussing what resonates with Cliff at the end of each day. I notice Cliff continues to play with his chair. He’s adjusting and readjusting the height of his seat. Cliff says, “that stuff. Like the stolen car. That kinda stuff resonates with me. Really, it’s what could have happened those sticks.” Cliff moves on to say that he feels he does a “pretty good job” not allowing the stresses of his job keep him awake at night. However, he mentions he often keeps those thoughts to himself, and he does not tell his spouse “All the crazy” details of his day at work. Cliff says, “I’m too mentally exhausted to relive it sometimes.”

When I inquired about how Cliff copes with the mental exhaustion and the demands of his job he quips, “remember the cold ones I mentioned before?” Cliff has a definite positive demeanor. He seems to accept the work stress is simply part of the job. He continues that he copes by relaxing at home. “I try and veg out in front of the tv. I like to watch sports. Of course, there’s always something around there to do too. So, I’m not sure I cope or just keep moving.”

Laughter was the first word Cliff mentions when asking about support at work. “My team can laugh. You know, it’s the best medicine.” To follow up I asked if there was a specific work teammate he leans toward. “No one in particular. We each know when one of us is struggling and jump in to help. I have a great team.” Cliff tells me supports at home are equally as supportive. “My wife is a nurse. So, she’s not bringing work home in the same way I am. She’s not bringing her device home and clicking away.” When I asked if his wife was ever bothered by him working on his device for his job while at home Cliff states, “I plead the fifth.”

Cliff tells me he does have work email attached to his personal cell phone and checks it regularly while at home. “Oh, I admit I think about work while I’m at home more than 3 times during the evening. When I’m at work I think about home. But I don’t feel haste or rushed.” We continued chatting about work and home balance. He told me “I guess on the days I’m on sick kid duty I am a little more stressed. You know, one is puking out the door. So, it’s your turn to call in sick to work.” He goes further saying on those days he feels as if he is missing out on what is happening at work. “If I miss work for a personal reason, I feel like I’m dropping the ball. In some sick way I feel like I have FOMO (fear of missing out).”

Cliff’s school happens to be a rival school of my own. When I meet with him near the student parking lot as he jokes and says, “crossing enemy lines, huh?” I arrive in the morning so high school students are heading to grab breakfast, to class, and what appears to be before school club meetings. “Oh, we get into a groove. They all know what they SHOULD be doing. It’s not even 8:30 and I’ve confiscated two vapes.” We discuss the on-going issue of students and vaping. “Such a stupid time sucker I deal with all day” he describes. We discuss the paperwork associated with tobacco and drug violations. “Oh, course there should be discipline. No question there. But I don’t think teachers and others who want for my time realize the amount of time I spent on such paperwork.” In the state of Oklahoma many schools opt to issue tickets to students through the ABLE commission (Alcoholic Beverage Laws Enforcement Commission). “We stopped doing it. I don’t even know if we’re technically allowed to stop.” I ask how much time he spends on such paperwork. “Oh, my two morning vapes. I’ll spend at least 30 minutes chasing everything I need to do. Let alone calls home and follow up with teachers about their in-school suspension. If one of the students is in SPED... Lord help me.”

We walk across campus toward his office. Cliff is obviously very comfortable in his role. Students speak and say hello to him. It is apparent he is a fixture here on campus. Cliff tells me as we walk that it's "funny you're here today. My son had donuts with dad today. Of course, I went. But I thought you'd want to know how much it actually stressed me out. I left the house knowing I had to be in two places at once." As we walk, we are interrupted at least 3 times by either students or staff speaking to Cliff about what I guessed was discipline, meetings, or just general chit chat. The radio on his hip also crackled with chatter several times as we walked. But though I can tell he had an ear on the radio conversation he did not react. Cliff's assistant appears to have taped pink "to Return" phone messages on his door frame. Cliff pauses at the door; but he leaves the paper there saying to me, "she'll give me until the end of the day to get to those. If not, I'll be in the doghouse." Cliff has an obvious good rapport with the office staff including his assistant. "(sighs) they are the real leaders around here. If I forget a name. She remembers it."

Cliff's desk has a few Yeti-type thermal coffee tumblers, a half empty water bottle, and a large gas station Styrofoam cup all around his desk with a slew of papers, binders, and writing utensils. On a shelf there's a picture of his family along with several School mascot décor items.

Cliff's office is a mess; but he just moves stacks of papers to the side and begins writing something on a yellow legal pad. "We have several positions unfilled here at the beginning of the year. I have a full-time sub in two core classes. And paras. I can't keep them. Why would they stay? They make more at the Casino up the road than here." Cliff explains he is over Special Education, and the hiring of the paraprofessionals is very stressful. "Parents are upset because of course they quality individuals working with their children with special needs. Hell- I want that too. But if I had the applications, I'd pull em' right?" Cliff lets out a long sigh. He logs on to a personnel website and tells me as of this morning, "I still have zero applicants for my full-time

positions. I check this thing 3 times a day. I guess I'm just hoping one will pop up." Cliff and I have a quick conversation about the Oklahoma teacher shortage before his radio comes to life and he says, "I'm going to have to cover this class. You're welcome to join me."

Cliff and I walk back across the campus to a classroom where at least 20 students are waiting outside the door. They're rowdy, loud, but all seem to know exactly who he is and there is obvious respect there. Cliff holds the door open greeting students as they pile through the doorway. As I enter the room he says to me, "well, looks like I won't be finishing any teacher observations today." Cliff is referencing the Teacher Leader Effectiveness (TLE) evaluation model. I ask Cliff if he tries to stick to a schedule and does he set appointments to observe his teachers? "(laughing) lol. I try. Each year I tell myself it's my goal to stay on top of it. Each year I'm running to get them finished in time. My teachers all laugh about it. I'm always having to cancel because things like this come up each day."

I notice Cliff is leaning his head on the door as the students pile in the class. However, he is jovial and speaking to each student as they enter the class. The rapport with the student body is most certainly a priority to Cliff and it is apparent the students feel this connection to him. As I leave out the same doors I entered, the administrative assistants are each busied with the work in front of them. But they each stop and smile and wave as I hold up my visitor tag sticker as my indication, I am exiting the campus. They are friendly as one shouts out, "I'm sorry he got stuck in a classroom again. Typical Wednesday around here!"

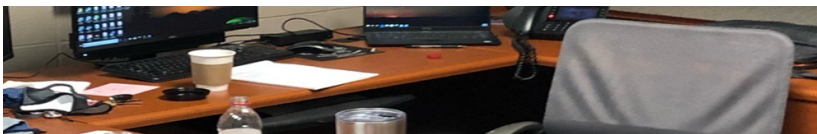
It took two separate reminders via email to receive Cliff's images. Each time I sent a reminder I explained his image to me could be in any form he chose. When I did the email subject line read: My apologies it took so long. The body of the email read: I've been so busy. I apologize it took so long. Essentially, here is my A-C with life right now. Cliff sent me a collage

of three images. The first, is his desk at work. During my observation I noticed how many devices Cliff seems to use simultaneously. These are depicted in the top image. The middle image is of the small landscaping business Cliff owns that began as an outlet for stress relief. The bottom image depicts his son's midget league football team at practice that occurs each weekday until roughly 7:30 PM.

I replied “thank you greatly” to Cliff and added the image to his portrait. The images reflect the larger-than-life character I was fortunate to spend some time with during this research. Cliff is such positive representative of school leadership in Oklahoma. Born and raised in the district in which he works, he shows up each day to support both his teachers and students. The images he chose represent this very stereotypical “manly man” struggling to find balance in a very demanding job and his home life with family.

Figure 4

Participant Created Image



Portrait of Rick M

Completely across the state of Oklahoma is a large school district that looks like the all-American Midwest school. Rick's school district serves over 4,000 students. Historically, voters have passed the last 3 bonds and those bonds have helped renovate every school building in the district with plans to extend renovations to every athletic facility. This school district is one of the few districts able to claim membership to the Governor's STEM Communities.

Rick is an assistant principal at the largest middle school in the district. This is his 4th year as an assistant principal. However, it is his second year at this site. "I shifted to this site for several reasons. It was a bit closer to home. I knew they really needed someone to step in because of a serious of difficulties." The middle school leadership team is comprised of one head principal and two assistant principals. Being the original district middle school out of now three, the site has experienced exponential growth due economic growth in the area pre-pandemic and a previous housing market boom. "We literally couldn't fit any more bodies in this building. So now there are three middle schools."

As we sit to chat the first thing, I notice is Rick is not just nervous. It is almost as if he's jumping out of his skin. He checks his office door twice. He checks his phone. Rick then tells me, "Let me just make sure I don't have any new emails before we get started." My initial thought is Rick is nervous to speak to me in general. Thus, I remind him there will be anonymity in my writing. Rick lets out a long breath and says, "oh I know. There's just so much to unpack with this job." Rick is physically struggling within the first minutes of meeting. He is sweating and obviously something weighs heavily on his mind. Rick's Work-Family Scale is scored with pained effort. He seems jittery and uncomfortable while completing his self-scores. What stands

out are the areas in which he scores a 5 for Strongly Agree. Each score of 5 are areas such as: Work keeps me from family activities more than I would like. He also scored a 5 on: I am often too frazzled from work to participate in family responsibilities. The scale only provides evidences in Rick's case how much he is struggling with his Work-Family Conflict.

I ask Rick to think back to his most stressful day at work. Without pause he says, "can I choose today? May I tell you today is my most stressful day at work?" Our meeting is obviously the end to some type of taxing event. I ask if we need to reschedule our interview. "No." He pauses for a long while. "Truth. Let's do it now. I am the only admin here and it is probably best." Rick tells me that there was a series of discipline incidents today. "I just can't win." When I probe a bit deeper Rick launches into retelling more about his day. Rick is so stressed because there was a fight among students today, the cafeteria looked horrible with trash after lunches, and the male restroom was vandalized. What is at the root of Rick's anxiety is he feels no support from his direct supervisor.

"It's so bad. I took this job because the district office wanted an internal move and someone with some experience. I moved here in the middle of the Pandemic." Rick says he stays in a "constant state" of anxiety because he feels as if he has such a strained relationship with his boss. I ask about his typical day and he muses, "I dunno. They're all pretty much the same. Me running around trying my best to do the right thing. In a typical day I feel beaten down by the end of the day versus noon."

I go into the next question hopeful Rick may begin to feel some positives about himself. I ask what strengths his colleagues see in him. He tells me he thinks teachers know "I'm there for them. I support what they do each day." Rick tells me teachers at his school feel they have no voice. But "I think they would say my strength is I am an ally. I listen."

We continue discussing any problems Rick faces balancing his work and home life. Rick begins taking long slow breaths. “Well, I am struggling in that department. Actually, because of me struggling I have very very recently started counseling.” I immediately praise Rick for taking action steps for his own wellness. “My wife pushed it. I just can’t keep this up. If I can’t make this work, I’m looking at giving up and leaving education.” We chat more on specifics. Rick tells me more often than not he comes home so stressed and fatigued it was impacting his home life.

“I come home and have every intention of helping with our small kids. But. I’m exhausted. Or in a foul mood.” I ask if he perceives his wife to be having a difficult time supporting him. “She... well. Yes.” Rick begins to tear up. He tells me he has been to one session with a counselor, and he will be continuing “for his marriage.”

I ask what resonates with Rick at the end of the day. “That’s hard. Right now, what resonates is I where I should be? This site. This career.” Following up with this statement I ask if Rick sleeps well at night? “Oh no. Not at all. I probably should consider sleep meds but that scares me.” Rick checks his computer again after this statement. I ask Rick if there is anything he does to cope with the demands of his job. He seems to have difficulty thinking of something. I ask if he exercise or has any particular hobbies or interests. “Hmmm my family attends church. I guess that helps. I don’t really have a particular hobby or stress reliever.” Rick tells me his kids are not at “little league” age yet. So, “we aren’t running around for play dates or sports now.”

I ask Rick if there are any supports for him at work. He tells me there is one counselor he is able to “talk shop with.” Rick explains his admin team is not close. “We are professionals. But I don’t consider them my supports.” Rick tells me at his last school the administrative team were very close. “I guess I thought I’d walk in here and it would be the same.” Rick says part of his struggle is communication is an issue among the administrators. “So, I deal with that all while

dealing with typical workday stuff.” Rick shakes his head as if there is more, he wants to say; but he doesn’t continue.

When we discuss his supports at home, he tears up again. With eyes glistening he says his wife is his number one support. Rick continues to say he knows his work life strain has caused a huge strain on the relationship between he and his wife. “It’s hard to be a happy couple when one partner is always miserable. I know it.” Rick adds his mother is a definite source of support for him. “My mom works at a university. She understands the stress I face dealing with difficult leadership. “I can call my mom. We were never particularly close. But this has bonded us.”

When I get to the next interview question regarding access to work email on his cell phone it is obvious the question hits a nerve with Rick. Almost hissing through clenched teeth Rick replies, “This is where much of my stress comes from. I check my email and texts almost obsessively. Even on the weekends. If I receive an email or text, I feel this expectation to take care of it ASAP... above all else. Above my family.” Rick confides he is grappling with a site principal who will contact the assistant principals during non-working hours. I asked if this was ever a conversation he has initiated with his direct supervisor. His response was blunt, “hell no.”

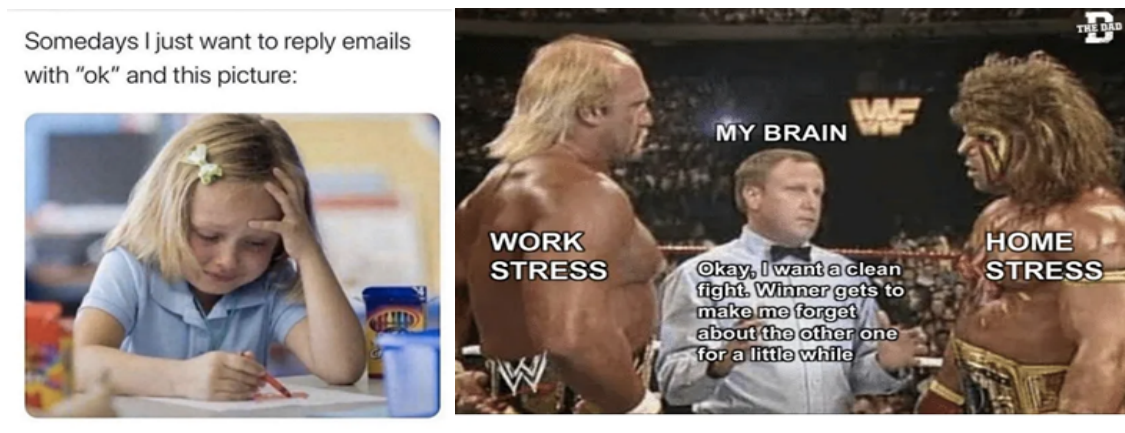
Rick and I discuss how many times he thinks about home while at work. “Truth. Not much. This sounds awful. I know my wife has it under control. Now thinking about work while at home? Constant. Yup. Constantly.” Rick tells me he needs to go and seems tense. I know he is working a girls’ softball scrimmage later so I tell him I will see him at my observation several weeks away. Rick tells me goodbye. I can tell he wants to add something. He mentions he knows I previously worked for one of the assistant superintendents of his district. It was years ago when I had first moved to Oklahoma in different district than Rick’s. “Listen, I know we both know (name). I know you wouldn’t be unprofessional. But I don’t care if you tell him how badly I am

struggling...” I leave Rick after our interview completely torn as a researcher. Was Rick’s sole motivation to participate in this study because he thought I may be able to help him obtain district level support?

Through the process of scheduling my observations I asked each participant their “drink order” so I could bring them a soft drink or coffee of their choice when arriving at their school sites. Immediately Rick seemed worried. “I don’t think my principal would like that.” I replied most certainly I would check in appropriately through the office and would show both my own district ID and proof of my IRB and work at Oklahoma State. “No. let’s do your observation during my morning duty.” So, I scheduled with Rick to observe him outside during his morning duty.

Figure 5

Participant Created Image



Portrait of Karri G

Karri’s district is considered an urban school in the heart of Oklahoma City. Serving over 34,000 students K-12, this district claims multi-cultural experiences throughout each site. At the

secondary level, the district houses 8 high schools, 4 alternative schools and 6 charter schools located within 135.5 square miles in the center of Oklahoma. The district employs nearly 6,100 staff members who serve a student population which is comprised of 2% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2% Native American, 6% Multiracial, 14% Caucasian, 22% African American, 54% Hispanic individuals. Additionally, the district takes pride in the statistic that 16,500 of students are bilingual and 13,000 are English Language Learners. The students and their families represent many different languages; top two being English with 59% and Spanish with 39%. Special education programs across the district to serve the 16% of the population with disabilities or special needs. The district is a Title One district meaning every student eats free breakfast and lunch every day. However, Karri shared the eight different high school sites are quite segregated. Each of the eight high schools seem to house one ethnicity disproportionately to the other.

My initial interview with Karri occurred at a state level Summer Leadership Convention. Using the *Whova* phone app I was able to send private messages to any of my participants who were also in attendance. Karri and I met downstairs of the conference center. She was prompt, youthful, and eager to speak to me. Karri can be instantly described as athletic, with a very calming demeanor. Karri tells me in college she thought she would be anything “but a teacher.” But a series of events led her to take an education class and she discovered how much she loved working with students.

By simply skimming Karri’s answers to her Work-Family-Conflict Scale it is obvious she gave thoughtful answers. Each section has been highlighted and or annotated in some way as if she was marking her learning for better understanding. Karri seemed very eager to begin with the scale; and asked me questions regarding its origin and if I took the scale. Karri was very prompt

in completing her scale and scheduling our meetings. She tells me she is also pursuing her doctoral degree and would like to help any way she can as a participant.

Immediately it was apparent Karri was very open to speaking about her work and life balance. Though thoughtful in answering questions, Karri is willing to be vulnerable with little prompting from me. When asked about her most stressful day at work she launched into retelling when a custodian mixed cleaning chemicals and the result made the local news. An entire class of students and teachers began experiencing symptoms similar chemical pneumonia. “Because of some crazy circumstances, I was one of two administrators in the building. At first, I thought, ohhh they’re being dramatic. They smell bleach. Then I realized my most grounded teacher was vomiting in the hall trashcan.” Karri continued to describe what she phrased as a “public relations nightmare.” Karri was simply shaking her head when she recounted eleven ambulances outside the school transporting students and staff to the local hospitals while she could hear the phones “ringing off the hook and parents at the counters screaming.” Karri continued that of all days the district leadership team were all together out of town at their leadership retreat. “I went through the motions. Kids and Staff safety first. Trying to calm parents. Answer questions as I could. But when I went home all that rang in my head was parents telling me I was liable and such a piece of shit. It rattles you. Even if no one sees it.” Karri is such an easy conversationalist. But as she retold this stressful event it was apparent the memory conjured unease for her. Karri was twisting her fingers and her body language completely shifted discussing how many parents were screaming at her as she tried to remain calm.

I inquire about the opposite of this day. What is a typical day like for Karrie? She laughs easily and says, “well those days there aren’t every emergency vehicle and news crew at my

front door.” But she proceeds in her jovial manner, “typically I deal with kids, teachers, and families. Every day is different. But those three elements are at the core of each of my days.”

Karrie says her colleagues would describe her as “all in.” Being with her I can see that. She is animated and passionate. “I think my colleagues would definitely say I care- and (pausing) when I commit to something I am all in. All in for kids. All in for teachers.” Karrie tells me her colleagues would probably name her “efficient.” We talk about being organized and a little “OCD.” With a small laugh Karrie tells me she admits “I like things clean. Organized. I’m a detail person.”

We chat easily back and forth, and Karrie tells me a few of the problems facing her balance between work and home life. “I have a young son. So, my answer is the obvious. What to do when he’s sick and I must stay home.” Karrie says she is immensely fortunate both sets of grandparents can help with her son in emergencies like this. But as we chat further Karrie is quite open about the stress working with an entirely low socio- economic school creates for her. “Our families hate school. It was hard for them. Now, they are dealing with school for their own kids.” Karrie tells me each day she is working through student behaviors, complaints from parents, required teacher evaluations, and then comes home and is “utterly exhausted.” This aligns with her Work-Family-Conflict scale as Karrie answered strongly agree to prompts such as: I am often so emotionally drained when I get home from work it prevents me from contributing to my family. She also answered strongly agree to: *Due to all the pressures at work, sometimes when I come home, I am too stressed to do the things I enjoy.*

Karrie initiates the conversation about her personal journey through therapy. “Oh, post Covid and all the stress. I got a therapist and it’s been great.” I tell Karrie I am pleasantly shocked at her willingness to speak openly about her journey in therapy. “Listen. It saved me. I

have no shame in telling you that.” She explains her reasoning for the initial session was to help her learn how to compartmentalize and prioritize what stress mattered and what to “let go.” I asked Karrie if she could give me some examples of prioritizing those stressors. “Oh yeah. I still fret and worry about the teacher who posted something kinda negative on social media. Or the kid who got in a fight that day. But I know to deal with my own son’s needs first then move on to the next. Therapy helped me realize some people just want to vent. Not for me to resolve anything. Learning to tell myself that has helped.

As a runner, Karrie tells me is her way of coping with any stress. “Running has been by constant for me. Combined with talking through things with my therapist it’s how I cope. Karrie’s posture is straight, assured. When I arrived for my observation Karrie was initially sitting at her desk digging for snacks in a cooler bag. Carrots. Hummus. Celery. Water bottle. It is apparent Karrie makes her physical and mental health a priority in her life. We talk casually about this subject. Karrie tells me “To get my mind right, my body needs to be right too.” Karrie runs each morning before work. I ask if she wears headphones when she runs. “Oh yes. Sometimes it’s rock music. Sometimes a podcast. I have to run every morning. It’s how I begin my day.”

Karrie tells me at work she has great teachers to support her. “Our school is tough. Our issues go beyond poverty. Our kids have learning gaps, our families’ major traumas.” She speaks highly of the staff. She says she thinks there is “great trust” among her teachers and herself. ON the WFC scale Karrie answered agree to the prompt: *My coworkers and members of my family would say that I am meeting their expectations.* At home Karrie praises her husband as her greatest support. “Without him I couldn’t do this.” Karrie is very honest telling me her husband

was very supportive of her decision to begin therapy. ‘I’m blessed my husband and I have both sets of parents too.’”

Karrie tells me she does have her work email on her phone. “Oh, I check it when I’m at home for sure. Probably more than I should.” Karrie and I talk about how much time she thinks about home while at work. “I think about work more at home. But I actually do well balance them both.” She answers disagree to the prompts on the WFC Scale such as: *I have to miss work activities due to the amount of time I spend on family responsibilities.* Karrie says she feels sated with her work and home life because she is reflective enough to know what she needs. This is reflected on her WFC scale as she answered strongly agree to: *I am able to negotiate and accomplish what is expected of me at work and in my family.*

Walking into Karrie’s school I notice first the two police cars in the front of the building. Several adults and students are walking in and out of the building freely without any type of locked doors. The building is a huge structure. Easily taking up three city blocks the architecture reminds me so much of the historical buildings of the east coast. The lawn is maintained. There is no trash. When I enter the building the school day man is humming while mopping the floor.

When I am led to where Karrie is in the hallway near the cafeteria, I tell Karrie how gorgeous I think the building is with its original 1928 wood and original structure. Karrie immediately responds, “No you don’t. I’m praying for a bond to pass so we can tear her down!” We discuss the issues in depth. Apparently only the skeleton of the building is original. The floors and all of the electrical and plumbing have been” pieced together again and again to keep her afloat.” Karrie tells me there are so many leaks in the classrooms they are constantly in fear black mold will shut the school down completely. I ask if members of the community have

voiced a stance on the possibility of demolishing this building for a new build? “Oh sure. The ones who think of our high school pre integration!” I’m shocked and we discuss the small population of community members who view the school history as all Caucasian, middle class, urban public school. This high school is the opposite of that. “Yes. I work to combat that attitude more than you’d think. I mean- look around. Most do not look like me.” Karrie is referencing she is blond and Caucasian. Most of the students surrounding us at lunch are Hispanic. I ask Karrie if her staff reflects the diversity of the student population. “We have some minority representation on staff. Not what I would like.”

During my time with Karrie there was obviously an incident earlier. I notice each assistant were with students obviously to separate each kid from one another. Karrie looks incredibly tired, and it is not noon yet. I gently ask how her morning has been and she chuckles, “eventful.” Before my arrival to observe Karrie there was a fight amongst students. The mother of one student made a claim their student had been bullied with no support from school administration. “Ahhhh it’s a Friday around here.” I ask Karrie if she must work an event after school and she says, “yup. A scrimmage. I’m sure I’ll be dealing with more of this than the game.” Karrie is saying there will most likely be residual student issues from the morning fight. She will probably have to deal with more discipline later that night.

I ask if Karrie got her run in this morning, “oh yes. My day started at 5am with my morning run and I will probably get home after 11 tonight.” Karrie tells me football is not hugely popular at her school because most of her Hispanic students love soccer. The school team almost made playoffs last year which would have made school history. She appears to be a tad sad the team missed that opportunity. “They needed to feel some success.” We chat about access for her students. Because the school is in such a low socio-economic area, student participation in school

athletics is often much lower than other schools in the district. Karrie tells me “Unlike the movies” just keeping a school program afloat one season at a time is a struggle “It isn’t just getting your students a uniform to play.” Karrie discusses the stress of helping students maintain eligibility, the high mobility of her student body, and the pressure she feels to “mirror” the higher performing schools in the area.

I asked to hear more about that work stressor. Karrie tells me she feels the pressure “from many angles” for her school to perform. The examples she gives range from “proving many wrong” and her students performing well on state tests such as the mandated ACT to being hopeful an athletic team performs well to shed some positive light on her school, so the community experiences a sense of pride. I ask Karrie if she feels these examples are on her shoulders to bear and she tells me “Not mine alone. But I am responsible.”

I end my time with Karrie asking for her to send me any visual representation of her work home balance. Examples I give include: an excerpt from something she is reading, a meme, a picture she takes with her cell phone. I just want her to send me an aesthetic representation of how she feels about balancing work and home. I explain I want this to be something she can send me via email that would “sum up” our talks and time together. The next day Karrie sends me this meme via email with one sentence: This is me in a meme!

Figure 6

Participant Created Image



The humorous picture captures Karrie well. She is driven; but also has a light easy-going humor about her.

One Final Portrait

The year I embarked in interviews with my participants marked my 26th year in public education. Looking back on over two decades in the profession I can remember each of the major benchmarks. I was in my final placement of student teaching when the mass killings in Columbine occurred. My teacher college did not prepare me for assailant drills or the public fear of trench coats that ensued post mass shooting. When the shooting in Sandy Hook happened, I was a new administrator to my rural school district. Within a week of the shootings, families of that tiny community were told they had to buzz into one door to enter the school that served as an epicenter of activity in that town. With school-age children of my own at home I remember being torn between work and home. My research for my dissertation spanned the COVID-19 pandemic in which my school district shut down two times. Once under CDC orders and the next

time due to lack of staffing. Each time we pivoted to a new learning environment I was given less than 24 hours' notice. In the late spring semester of 2022, the mass shooting in Uvalde, Texas occurred, and my district created a new director of safety hiring a retired military specialist with a background in terrorist negotiations. Right after this national event I entered a classroom in which a student was yielding a large kitchen knife toward classmates. First one on the scene, I cleared the room and began working to calm the student. I will never forget reaching in my pocket and texting my own son, a student at my school, "I love you. I'm fine. Listen to whatever instructions you hear." My own children just know. They know events happen at school and I am in the middle. At home all I could think was what if that student had been in the class with my own child. These milestones in education impacted my role as an educator and assistant principal. I view work stress as a norm. My boundaries of how much stress and strain I absorb before asking for help are undoubtedly skewed. I have missed my own children's parent teacher conferences, back to school celebrations, and performances as during the same time I was "administrator on duty."

One month before my I entered my 15th year as an assistant principal the superintendent of my school district called me while I was out of the country on my one-week family vacation. She asked me to consider a new position as Director of Teaching and Learning at the district office. "I'm sorry to bother you on your vacation. But I'd like you to consider accepting the position." In truth, I felt immediate anxiety and pressure receiving a call from the superintendent while on my scheduled vacation on actual non-contract time. I did not apply for the position offered to me; and had a sinking feeling if I turned it down, I would never advance in my district if I desired. Every fall Friday night for 26 years I have worked a football game in the capacity of coach or administrator. My eldest son once said, "our mom has never missed any of our games."

She just had her back to the field watching students the entire time.” That comment resonated with me as I texted my superintendent my decision from a chaise lounge on the beach when I was supposed to be “not thinking about work.”

Each district administrator has an assignment of the first day back for students. This year, my first in the role of district level administrator, I was assigned to report to our middle school at the beginning of the school day. This was also the first day my own daughter was entering our freshman academy. Choosing to change districts to be at the same school as her brother and myself, she was experiencing her first day as a high school student knowing no one besides her big brother. I was assigned to drive a van picking up elementary-high school kids who for one reason or the other were on wrong bus, stop, etc. My daughter suddenly froze and said, “Mom. You can’t leave I’m scared. I don’t know what I’m doing or where I am going.” In that same time frame my new boss said, “Vannoy transportation is waiting, Go get your white fleet van.” I looked at my daughter told her she would be fine, and I walked away from her to go drive other people’s scared, lost, vulnerable kids. The irony of this very example aligning with my research was not lost on me. As I shuttled students from all ages across our large district the realization of how my own kids’ must perceive elements of my profession. Have my own children ever felt I put the needs of other kids before their own? I finished the district administrators’ team meeting after my last shuttle run and left the office around 6:30PM. When I finally walked into my own door at 7PM I asked my daughter how her very first day at her new school was and she replied, “Eh. Ok. I already told dad.”

Figure 7

Researcher-prepared



Each portrait developed as the participants' lived experiences were investigated in relation to the research questions. After understanding the context, the portraits continue with a focus on the relationship of time, strain, and behavior-based conflicts as related to research questions. Interview questions (#8, 9, and 10): Do you have your work email accessible on your cell phone, how many times a day do you think about home while at work, and how many times do you think about work while at home are related to time-based conflicts focus on time conflict. Interview questions (#3, 4, 6 and 7): What problems do you face in balancing work life and home life, what resonates with you at the end of the day, what supports do you have at work, and what supports do you have at home, focus on strain based conflict. Interview questions (#1, 2 and 5) Think back on your most stressful day at work. Please describe that day and why it was particularly taxing, what is a strength of yours a colleague would describe in you, and how do you cope with the demands of your job are all focused on behavior-based conflict. The portraits emerge as each participant gives life to their experiences through their own words. Their voices are amplified through their interpretation of the balance between of work and home via their chosen images. This aesthetic whole creates a visual of emergent themes spanning each portrait.

I examined the lived experiences of five assistant principals “in the trenches” of the job each day. This journey into my research began with the intention of exploring how these assistants balance work and life by illuminating their struggles, celebrations, insights, responsibilities, work satisfaction, and even their sense of peace. By using methods of portraiture, my goal was to give an undeniable voice to their experiences. I charged myself with providing an opportunity for the reader to glimpse into the multifaceted role of an assistant principal and the impact on their home lives.

Findings

The use of portraiture allows the experiences of each participant to inform and provide insight into the role of school leadership and the daily ebb and flow of balancing Work-Family Conflict. The portraits are the synthesis of the data collection methods of the WFC Conflict scale, interviews, and observation. Analyzing data across participants allows me to see common findings and themes. The findings will be presented per research question.

RQ 1: How is Work-Family Conflict portrayed by selected assistant principals?

Assistant Principals Surface Act

Grounded in the work of Greenhaus and Buetell, Dr. Dawn Carlson developed the Work-Family Conflict Scale with Baylor University. The scale was administered as my first interaction with each participant. Of the five participants only two used a (5) strongly agree rating for any indicator. Both participants were female. Jana and Karri's rating of a (5) strongly agreed were used in the scale's categories of: Work-to-Family Enrichment, Family-to-Work Enrichment, and Work-Family Balance. Each rating of (5) given by either Jana or Karri showed they felt work as an instrument to skills at home. For example, *my involvement in work helps me gain knowledge and this helps me to be a better family member*. Whereas both male participants scored those areas significantly lower rating scoring it a 2 and 3.

My first interaction with Lacey was the first indication my participants may have reservations being completely vulnerable. This limitation is apparent in moments of interviews wherein participants were focused on if they were struggling balancing work or home in any way. Jana's answers were as if she were on a pageant stage or an interview for the "next" job.

Lacey is aware her public versus private personas are vastly different. Clifford, in the role of coach dad, was honest about the “role playing” he did out of sheer expectations. This management of observable expressions is the exact definition of surface acting.

It appears that this is the case to some degree with each participant and their answering of the scale. The instrument is adequate. However, just as found in literature such as Silbaugh (2018), school principals surface act thus modifying their expressions based on what they perceive to be desired from the larger organization around them.

Two Distinct Roles

As the portraitist I understand with each participant there is a level of equity and access different than other professions. Each assistant principal in this study is highly educated, they have healthcare, fundamentally they know how to obtain a therapist if needed. But this research reveals each participant perceives they must choose between mind, body, and spirit. The participants reveal they view work and home as two separate entities. Participants are not focused on work and home simultaneously.

RQ #2: What are the antecedents of Work-Family Conflict for selected assistant principals?

Alternatively Certified versus Teacher Education Program

A few key findings emerge regarding the educational background of each of the participants. Jana, Lacey, and Richard each graduated through a traditional teacher preparation program from a four-year university. Karri and Cliff entered education after working careers outside of education. Karri and Clifford both inferred having a mentor in their professional life

in some way. It is unknown if these mentors were formally assigned to them or not by the district. But a promising finding is that assistant principals with mentors balance their work and home lives better than their counterparts without the experience with a professional mentor.

Middle School versus High School

Of the five participants, two are assistant principals at the middle school level (7th and 8th grade) and three are at the high school level (9th-12th grades). The portraits demonstrate stress is present at each grade level for secondary leadership. Similar patterns were observed in both the Middle and High School assistant principals. Both early secondary and high school assistant principals discussed similar stressors between work and home. However, high school principals spoke additionally regarding student transcripts and the stress of working through dropout rates and credit recovery issues. High school participants deemed this topic as highly stressful, and specifically a high school concern as such statistics were reported to the state, local media, and community.

Gender Roles

In reviewing the data from each participant's Work-Family Conflict scale reveals that there may be a distinct difference in gender roles and Work-Family conflict among assistant principals. An important question associated with the female versus male Work-Family Conflict scale ratings could be: Are female assistant principals holding space for "mom guilt?" For example, each of the three female participants rated their Work-Family Conflict higher in terms of thinking about home while at work.

Two female participants mentioned daycare for their young children. However, each of the three female participants mentioned some form of domestic duty: childcare, cooking, or household chore. One male mentioned yard work- but in the vein it once served as an outlet for stress relief for him. This is on par with the literature that suggests males will experience Work-Family conflict due to the demands of the job. But females will experience a greater degree of work-family conflict because they place simultaneous priority on both work and family roles.

However, both male participants alluded to feeling some guilt about their work life interfering with home. Both men inferred they felt pressure to be the “head of household in some way.” For Cliff that role means he must be everything from coach to authority figure. In my conversations with the male participants, it became apparent the perception of “blowing off steam” compared to the female participants was vastly different. Cliff made several jests about having a beer with his friends, stopping for a “beer or two” on the way home. Rick’s body language when we chatted about wanting to “go have a drink” after work suggested that not only did Rick crave that opportunity, in his personal life it would not be problematic to act on that desire for comradery.

Lacey was the only female participant who directly stated purposely carving out time for herself for mental health. She spoke of her connection to running stating she “had to run for sanity.” The other women simply discussed the juggling act between work and home duties and responsibilities. Overall, these findings are in accordance with recent popular literature reporting female leaders or principals of color may be under more stress than usual. This could be indicative of microaggressions, biases, double standards, or just a fundamental lack of support for these assistant principals.

While men are more likely to run secondary schools, women still make up most principals in elementary schools (Nittle, 20220). I can speculate from the female participants that being a woman in secondary school leadership can be challenging because being the minority may be isolating, and women need to be extremely careful about how they lead. Jana is more than aware of the role public perception plays in her district. Jana speaking into how her job impacts her own children when decisions are made. She mentioned, “I told my girls upfront the principal’s kids are never homecoming attendants.” At this stage of understanding, I believe female assistant principals struggle internally with the need to nurture their own children whilst feeling the pressure to fill the role of “boss” at their school sites.

Age of Children at Home

Each participant had children at home. However, the ages of the children are an important finding in the understanding of the Work-Family Conflict of assistant principals in this stage of life. It is worth noting each participant mentioned something regarding their children during the interviews or observation. Those with daycare age children commented on the strain leaving work had when a child became sick or needed picked up from day care unexpectedly.

Participants with older children did mention a form of potential strain with their children. But it was in the context of emotional support for them in some way. For example, Jana knew she brushed her daughter’s phone call off regarding her rush week. However, she never circled back to it in speaking with me. Moreover, she did not articulate a plan to make time or space for her daughter to discuss feelings of rejection. Jana moved right on to the next work need because that was her cycle and pattern as I observed.

School Location

When engaging with each participant, school location was not a topic of focus. None of the participants spent much time on the subject. Nevertheless, I believe it is well justified to consider assistant principals of more urban secondary schools may experience a greater degree of work-family conflict than their rural or suburban counterparts based on the stories of my participants. Student to administrator ratio of larger schools hints that assistant principals are often forced to focus solely on student discipline and behaviors versus instructional leadership. Teacher observation documentation and evaluations are often completed during non-work hours. These same individuals also spend nights and weekends on campus or other school sites supervising athletic and school activity events. Also, many assistant principals are charged with entering work orders such as maintenance and technology. Events such as water leaks, construction projects, etc. are at times under the assistant principals per view. Assistant principals are often in charge of orchestrating general operations of a school in addition to their responsibilities to student, families, and staff. This additional role of site project manager often calls for multiple meetings or committees taking time from their duties with students and teachers. In turn, these projects can bleed into their personal time as well.

RQ #3 What is the relationship between Work-Family Conflict in school assistant principals and work satisfaction?

Vulnerability as Synonym for Weakness

All five participants apologized at some point in either their interviews or during my time observing at their school sites. From apologizing for showing emotion to apologizing I witnessed

a student facing school discipline during an observation, the participants felt the need to vocalize they were sorry for a very real candid emotion. Or it appears they felt the need to express apology, meaning responsibility, for what can be considered a typical day in an educational setting. Tim Walker, (2019) from the National Education Association stated, “school staff are like case workers now.” Each participant mentioned handling a situation that would shock any outside of education.

COVID-19 Pandemic

Each of the five participants directly mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic in some way during their interviews. Popular literature discusses how much more brazen people have become post pandemic. It’s important to highlight the fact assistant principals are witnessing this in their students, staff, and members of the community.

Jana mentioned that COVID forced assistant principals to balance extreme duties from instruction to helping families meet basic needs. This may raise concerns about the responsibilities assigned to assistant principals which may be addressed through principal to student ratios or the number of wraps around support services available to students and families.

Lacey recalled the difficulty of being on distant learning trying to help her students with access and equity issues. A similar conclusion was reached by Sharri when she commented she felt the need to be “everyone’s savior” during COVID. It is notable that each of the three female participants made a reference of the Pandemic and being pulled in opposite directions between work and home.

When Rick referenced the Pandemic when mentioning his shift to a new school site. He said his job before COVID and after looks drastically different. It is generally now accepted

school after the pandemic has not the same. Rick says, “my job is so different after COVID.”

This is important because there is a need to study the impact COVID has had on all elements of educational leadership.

This study revealed examples of assistant principals who made space for hobbies or exercise have a better balance of Work-Family conflict. Teachers who are aware of their need for a positive outlet for their stress handle the stressors in both work and home domains.

RQ #4: What is the relationship between Work-Family Conflict in assistant school principals and support systems?

School Sites and Support

Each participant who spoke about having a strong supportive work team remained very upbeat and conversational about both work and home life. Those who did not have a strong sense of comradery with their site team felt alienated and lonely regarding Work-Family Conflict. Those who commented on laughter and fun also exhibited a better balance between work and home.

District Support

District support is important. Participants who feel their emotional investments they are making in their jobs are validated may be more centered and feel a better sense of wellness. To guarantee that children have access to excellent educational opportunities, schools must have principals who are operating at peak efficiency. Participants were more concerned with a strong support from site leadership.

Home and Personal Support

It seems obvious to indicate that home and personal support are necessary for the assistant principal to be able to successfully balance their home and work lives. Each participant seemed to be very aware of this needed support even to the point of getting therapy to better build relationships. It appears to be a dance; one in which each partner knows their 'steps' and understands how their 'steps' coordinate with their partners'. A sense of being in this together can moderate the stress and allow the dance to continue.

Unintended Consequence

When speaking to each participant, I noticed a lack of awareness to the point of oblivion about how balancing these two roles may be impacting physical health. For example, Cliff having energy drink cans and coffee cups across his office but not connecting he is tired at both home and work. Through each interview and observation, the participants were very aware of the role stress and balance play in their work lives. However, there were several indications they were not aware of the conflict work was inflicting on their home lives.

Figure 8 Combined Participant Aesthetic Whole

Researcher Prepared



Me at work: I can't wait to get home and be super productive

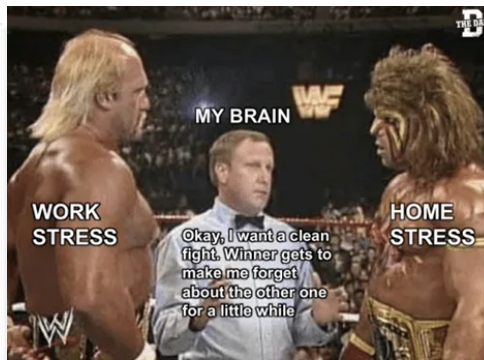
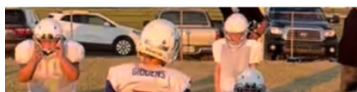
Me when I get home:



Me at work: I can't wait to get home and be super productive



Me when I get home:



Emerging Themes

High Pressure Volatile Environments

The role of the pandemic has played a huge role in the how assistant principals portray Work-Family conflict. The pandemic magnified an already volatile environment in which assistant principals know they are on a constant loop. But they are unsure how to stop.

The ability to work from home through virtual school perpetuated the blurred boundaries between work and home. Assistant principals were tasked with building virtual schools for their students, personnel issues, and securing basic needs for families all through their computers and devices while juggling their own needs. Enduring the pandemic and the final impact on psychological and physical outcomes remains unknown. Leading within ambiguity causes expectations for assistant principals to be in constant flux. This constant shifting reveals to assistant principals the need to slow down. But they are often fearful of slowing the pace.

Assistant principals wear stress as a badge of honor. Sometimes even to “one up” one another. This idea of busyness plays a role in their reality. There is a cycle in which school leaders are afraid not to be busy. How many sick and personal days do they have accumulated becomes evidence of that busyness. They feel constant pressure to do more, be more, and this directly impacts Work-Family Conflict.

Failure to Both Recognize and Embrace the Need for Support

Assistant principals recognize and embrace the need for support. However, are often resistant to the idea of supporting one another for fear of their own career advancement. If one

mentors or supports a colleague could that result in a misstep in the climb to the next rung on the career ladder?

Difficulty in Imaging a Different Way to Balance Work-Family Responsibilities

One theme is the need for assistant principals to have individuals who can serve as mentors to them. To be able to handle my responsibilities in a different way, I must first be able to see that it could be done differently or imagine that there is a different way. It was clear in the study that individuals who have taken the time for hobbies such as running and other outside activities are weathering the conflict better. If I don't see others handling the stress in healthy ways, it is difficult to do it myself. These theme of the need for support in terms of mentors and a new image of what it means to be an assistant principal was clear throughout the data collection and analysis. It caused me to think about the power of an example and being open and transparent about common struggles. In what ways could individuals share together to help build a culture of 'taking care of myself' while 'taking care of my job'?

It is also interesting to note that often my stress or busyness is seen as a badge of honor or even my identity. It seems as if the participants were actually afraid to slow down with the idea that if they did, others would pass them on the career ladder. There was evident a constant need to keep moving, to keep juggling and to keep compromising family life for the job. The need to appear to be strong and in control was evident as well. It was almost an identity marker to say I can handle anything and that nothing can break me. Is it possible that when assistant principals are not open about the challenges, they set an example of being tough and invincible? How does that impact others that they work with such as teachers and staff? Is it possible to be both strong in leadership and be human at the same time?

Conclusion

The functions and duties of the secondary assistant principal will keep evolving as high schools continue to meet the expanding requirements of their communities. The level of responsibilities at home will also increase.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Chapter V provides conclusions and implications based on findings which are given in chapter IV. The conclusions are presented per research questions. Implications are given for practice, research, and theory. This chapter will explain findings through the lens of the selected theoretical framework, discuss implications of this research study, and propose recommendations to further support assistant principals in the balance needed between the domains of work and home.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework comes through each portrait as the participants deal with their Work-Family Conflict and quotes from the participants are embedded into the portraits. The portraits of these participants demonstrate clearly the theoretical framework has coherence with the findings of this study and also suggests the wisdom of considering the framework in schools. The foundational piece of the theory is the interactions between two domains, often which have incongruent and competing demands for individuals. Work-Family Conflict theory illuminates interactions between work and family. Just as evidenced in each lived experience featured in the research, the participants were grappling with the behaviors and norms they must face with each of their roles in both work and home.

Work-Family Conflict theory assumes that there are only a finite number of resources that can be used. According to conflict theory, the effort, time, and focus required for one domain's success causes a deficiency in the other domain, resulting in conflict between the two domains. In other words, time and effort invested in pursuing a profession are resources that cannot be used to pursue a successful family life. This is apparent in the study when the female participants discussed juggling the role of mother and assistant principal even after the workday ends. Jana illuminated this idea when she stated, "When you are trying to balance your life and your kids' life, but also have the weight of the life of your students on your shoulders things can get overwhelming quickly." Greenhaus and Beutell alluded to this balance experienced in roles such as these and how when the balance is off, the individual may suffer higher levels of stress.

Additionally, each domain has its own norms and expectations that are exclusive to that domain and in contradiction with those of the other domain, which increases inter-role conflict. According to conflict theory, there is a dissonance between how the two spheres of life function. Work-related contentment will inevitably result in disappointment in another area (family). According to the theory, having a bad work-life balance is a result of a stressful environment. This is resonated through each of the five portraits.

Cliff's interview also highlighted the issue of gender roles. Cliff felt an unrealistic expectation to keep moving forward. He stated, "Men aren't supposed to struggle." He indicated that as a male administrator, he felt strongly the expectation of others to take the blows and carry on. He yearned for the limited concept of time, sharing that "we are not given time to process because it's assumed we will just continue to shoulder the load." This quote, in addition to the others by the participants, clearly show the framework has application to the experiences of these participants.

Rick discussed with great consternation that he was just starting on this crazy admin path, and “honestly, it’s harder and more mentally draining than any position I have ever been in.” He also shared trying to meet expectations of so many different people and feeling as if he was “screwing up at all turns, but I have no clue how to make it right.” He had reached out for support from his boss but his request was not warmly received or productive. He compared asking his boss for support similar to “asking for a kidney” and how he has decided to “try and struggle through and hope things change.”

Each of these causes of work-family conflict—inter-role conflict, role overload, and role ambiguity—contributes to the other. Work-family conflict is most obviously impacted by inter-role conflict. Since the conflict between the job role and the home role directly affects various important life connections, inter-role conflict is a serious worry for many employees.

Application of Theoretical Framework

Through utilizing the lens of the Work-Family Conflict theory, a deeper understanding of the data and themes for this research study can be gained. The following section applies the concepts of time based, strain based, and behavior-based conflict, which are part of the theoretical framework, to the research questions, findings and emerging themes.

RQ #1- How is Work-Family conflict portrayed by selected assistant principals?

Work-Family Conflict exists. It is very much a factor in the lived experiences of the assistant principals who participated in the study. The role of being an assistant principal in a post pandemic world is taxing. Assistant principals are not sure how to navigate it.

Participants “squashed” their authentic expressions to replace them with their perception of perceived “rules of school leadership.” The outcome of Lacey’s surface acting is she appears inauthentic, and this misalignment could reduce her well-being and result in both personal and professional distress. As explored in the theory, burdens can blur behavior patterns in multiple roles causing strained behaviors in multiple domains. This can cause feelings of hinderance and being limited on how to show emotions.

RQ #2 What are the antecedents of Work-Family Conflict for selected assistant principals?

The antecedents of Work-Family Conflict among assistant principals are not constant. These variables are ever changing. The idea that any professional can teach thus ultimately become an educational administrator exists. In time-based conflicts persons are unable to spare adequate time for all their roles across multiple domains. The theory indicates, conflict occurs because of not being able to be in two places at once. Workload is evidenced in each portrait. The theory discusses roles competing for time. The antecedents of Work-Family conflict are in constant flux.

RQ #3 What is the relationship between Work-Family Conflict in school assistant principals and work satisfaction?

Assistant principals with a healthy balance of work and family are more satisfied in their profession. Those who struggle greatly balancing their Work-Family conflict are actively considering a career change. Or are on the trajectory to burnout. Work- Family conflict theory leans in on the idea of spillover. The spillover often refers to the impact of satisfaction and the role the family domain plays on the work domain. As reflected through the portraits, the relationship between work and non-work activities can be either positive or negative. Within the

theory positive spillover refers to situations in which the satisfaction, energy, and sense of accomplishment felt in the work environment carries over into the family domain. Each portrait in which the assistant principal expresses a sense of support and accomplishment in the work domain, also discusses a strong sense of satisfaction at home. This inter-role conflict stems from the difficulty of trying to maintain a satisfying-home life when dissatisfaction from work interferes. Often portrayed as constant ambiguity, role satisfaction impacts work satisfaction.

RQ #4 What is the relationship between Work-Family Conflict in school assistant principals and support systems?

The effect that supports from other members of the leadership team has on a high school assistant principals has the potential to make a significant difference because current research suggests that workplace socialization and acceptance by teammates can help mitigate challenges in the workplace (Fuchs, 2021). Participants expressed gratitude to their team members for spending time together and engaging in moments of laughter and light-heartedness. They also expressed the desire to understanding one another, taking on job tasks for one another to promote parity of job distributions, and the practice of modeling good work-life balance.

Support from the school district was mentioned casually. However, participants did not focus on this support as crucial to their everyday tasks at work. Moreover, support from the site principal was considered crucial. Participant sought a strong relationship with site principals for such topics of student discipline and interaction with parents.

Participants articulated the need for home supports to be active listeners. They desire for these supports to have a willingness to share home responsibilities and tasks. Family and friends primarily support and encourage their work-life balance through their partner's flexibility, the

extended family's emotional support, and assistance with any duties at home. Home supports were valued to participants, so they felt validated and heard in their feelings of angst and stress at work.

Work-Family Conflict theory touches on the behavior patterns required for a role. Often these patterns are not interchangeable for each domain. Through the portraits it became apparent expressing the need for support in one domain may not translate in another domain and vice versa.

Implications

To Theory

There is a level of influence of the antecedents. They are not a constant value. Perhaps further work within the theory could begin to measure the power of this influence. The Work-Family Conflict theory provides antecedents impacts but what I see is these antecedents are not constant values. Would further development of the theory perhaps measure the level of the influence of these antecedents? There needs to be a quantifiable way to measure the impact of the antecedents. It is not clear if practicing assistant principals have knowledge of the theory.

Would the knowledge of the theories existence create perhaps a better understanding of the Work- Family conflict theory by practicing administrators could ease the conflict?

To Research

A longitudinal study following assistant principals over time might be helpful. Therefore, the possible reach of the study could be done to identify moderators to Work-Family conflict. The exploration of these factors potentially lessening the impacts of the antecedents.

Future research may explore the ages of the assistant principals and years' experience. Is there a generational piece that is being overlooked? Is there a generational bent on how individuals will balance Work-Family conflict?

Present findings confirm a study on both surface and deep acting among school administrators could be recommended regarding burnout. Further studies that survey the connections between subscales of burnout in relation to school leaders and their tendencies to surface act could be a beneficial avenue for further investigation. It may inform literature into the specific reasons for surface acting that result in potential burnout. It may also be beneficial to research whether the leadership style of school leaders has a moderating or mediating effect on the relationship between style of leaders and potential to surface act. Leadership styles such as transformational, charismatic, situational, or transactional may inform the literature on the frequency of surface acting.

The long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on leaders is unknown. Thus, there is a wealth of research to be done in this area particularly the impact of stress from the pandemic on school leadership. It is worth exploring how the pandemic exacerbated Work-Family Conflict and its influence in areas such as burnout, job satisfaction, and overall wellness among school leaders.

Home and work are intimately intertwined. It may be useful to examine home-to-work conflict. This recommendation may expand the knowledge of Work-Family conflict by examining, to what extent, pressure from home impact the decisions and motivations of school leaders.

To Practice

This research has the potential to provide space for school districts to create a nonthreatening, transparent environment for school leaders to allow school leaders opportunities focused on problem-solving in a setting conducive for sharing. It is recommended from this research districts focus on deep sustained mentorships that promote strict confidence where there is no consequence for honesty. School leaders may lessen the impact of Work-Family conflict through witnessing mentors who successfully self-regulate priorities at both at work and home. Fostering a good learning culture by listening to and empowering educators, involving leaders in collaborative professional learning, and being receptive to principals' site-level requirements are important district-level strategies for encouraging these practices.

Mentorship may be considered a promising aspect of future professional development on stress management for school leaders. This research recommends the mentoring of school leaders as an integral piece in ensuring leaders are equipped to balance work and home with tools of support. A robust mentorship program may inform new school leaders on best practices of stress management thwarting any idea they must work in isolation.

This study could influence site administrative teams toward a greater understanding of the difficulties faced by fellow team members and may aid current leadership teams in finding effective methods to support one another. Participants emphasized the importance of prompt communication and deliberation when making decisions as significant supports that might be offered by other members of the leadership team.

The lived experiences of the secondary assistant principals in this study reveal that while current literature describes the expanding tasks and responsibilities of the assistant principal a

more accurate portrayal of the position's requirements for those thinking about a career in school leadership is needed. Thus, possibly influencing future school leadership programs.

Personal Reflection

After almost two decades in Educational Leadership, I was truly not prepared for the impact this research would play on my own personal life. My time with participants went beyond listening to their words or observing the activities at their school sites. Using the method of portraiture allowed me to immerse into the cultural relationships these assistant principals have within the constructs of their work and home lives. I was often left mentally fatigued, frustrated, and at the same time struggling with the need to mentor or advise my participants.

Listening to participants say phrases such as “I’m fine” forced me to see how often I resorted to surface acting in my own career. I often coin educational leaders as “professional cutters.” This study solidified that term is correct. Each participant used surface acting as a coping mechanism in some way. I was not shocked the female participants juggled many different roles as both mothers and assistant principals. However, I was taken aback on how much the male participants seemed to be craving an outlet for their stress. It was obvious to me the men were yearning to “talk out their stress” with someone.

This research shows the need for school districts to create a safe space for their leaders to be open regarding their struggles and needs. If districts utilize wrap around services for students and families, the same is needed for staff. I realized through my research teacher retention can only be addressed if the leaders are supported mind, body, and soul. Framing this research with the theoretical framework of Greenhaus and Beutell helped me to ensure successfully portraying the inter-role conflict each participant faces. From my own experience in educational leadership,

I agree with the theory in its exploration of the pressures from both work and family domains are incompatible in some respect. A person's experience with Work-Family conflict waxes and wanes. As I witness with each of the five participants, some days with Work-Family conflict are better than others. As explained in the theory, a person is not aptly able to meet all the expectations and requests always coming from the multiple roles. The Work-Family Conflict theory examines the crucial dance between both work and family domains. As explored in each of these portraits, those domains often combat one another on who shall lead the dance. Thus, creating conflict.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1998) says, "portraits tell you about parts of yourself about which you are unaware, or to which you haven't attended." Portraiture is oriented toward an exploration of "goodness" as defined by the participants, instead of diagnosing or imposing pathologies as defined by the researcher (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1998, p. 9) The time I spent with these participants not only led exploration of the lived experiences of my selected assistant principals, but of my own experiences throughout my career. Throughout this study I was forced to reflect on my own guilt as a working mom, a wife, a school leader, and as a new practitioner struggling to find my place in the world of higher education and academia. I reflected on my own experience with decision fatigue and how I internalize my own stress. Through the lens of this study, I learned as much about my own leadership as I did each participant.

Summary

We have many challenges in education, learning loss, and a record number of teachers and leaders leaving profession. It is imperative we begin to recognize the tremendous stress, particularly assistant principals, are experiencing in today's schools. If we can begin to better

understand work family conflict, model healthy ways in which to maintain a balance, we will be better served in the future. The stakes are high to get it right. If we can better model work and family responsibilities, we can impact an entire generation of students better prepared to enter the workplace. It caused me to speculate if future administrators will be willing to continue the level of conflict? Will they be willing to sacrifice family relationships for the sake of the job? Could it be that failure to balance work family conflict has led to the teacher shortage, mental health crisis at all levels, and a generation of ill-equipped problem solvers?

This methodology, portraiture, was so applicable to this setting and participants and served the study well. As I conclude this study, I have been given access to the very personal and poignant lives of five busy educators. I am struck by many powerful emotions as I connected with my participants; their tears, their laughter, their vulnerability, their feelings of being overwhelmed as well as many other emotions. I am left with two very strong emotions. One is the sense of honor and privilege I was granted by my participants to tell their stories unfiltered. The other emotion is one of loss and sadness for those who felt the need to play act rather than be honest. I also feel grief to think of the other 41 volunteers for my study from which I did not collect data. Five were able to tell their stories. What about the other 41? How will they come to peace with the challenges? Will they find ways in which to make sense of their family and workspaces? My heartfelt desire is that in some way somehow, they will. Our work and family lives are intertwined and can't be fully separated. The future of education is dependent upon well balanced administrators leading the way in their schools.

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APPENDICES



Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: 03/25/2022
Application Number: IRB-22-133
Proposal Title: Work Family Conflict and the Lived Experiences of Secondary Assistant Principals
Principal Investigator: Ellen Vannoy
Co-Investigator(s):
Faculty Adviser: Maryjo Self
Project Coordinator:
Research Assistant(s):

Processed as: Expedited
Expedited Category:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Approval Date: 03/25/2022

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

This study meets criteria in the Revised Common Rule, as well as, one or more of the circumstances for which continuing review is not required. As Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit a status report to the IRB triennially.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent, and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a status report to the IRB when requested
3. Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.
4. Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the OSU IRB and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
5. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Sincerely,

Oklahoma State University IRB



Regarding: Work-Family Scale Permission

To Whom it May Concern:

This document grants you permission to use any of the following scales that I have developed along with my colleagues for the purposes of research.

Work-Family Conflict
Work-Family Enrichment
Work-Family Balance
Work-Family Deviance – Putting Family First
Work-Family Boundary Management Tactics
Boundary Management Strain Transmitted to the Spouse
Organizational Support for Adoption

These scales can be used in research and need to be cited with the source document citation provided next to each of the scales below. If you intend to reproduce the instrument, please contact the copyright owner of the publisher of the article. If you need a copy of the original article for the scale beyond what is provided, please let me know.

If you desire to translate the scale to another language, please feel free to do so adapting for the language and culture of your target audience. If your research produces published results using one of the above-mentioned scales, I would appreciate an electronic copy of that research.

If you would like to use these for commercial purposes, please provide me with the details so that I might arrange use. If you have any question about my scales or my broader research program, please contact Dawn Carlson at Dawn_Carlson@baylor.edu.

Best Regards,

Dawn S. Carlson
Professor of Management
H.R. Gibson Chair of Organizational Development

HANKAMER SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT
Paul L. Foster Campus for Business and Innovation

One Bear Place #98013 · Waco, TX 76798 · 254-710-6201

Work-Family Conflict Scale

Source: Carlson, D. S., Kacmar, K. M., & Williams, L. J. (2000). Construction and initial validation of a multi-dimensional measure of work-family conflict. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 56 (2), 249-276. DOI: 10.1006/jvbe.1999.1713

Number of items: 18 (found in Table 2 on page 260) for two directions (work-to-family / family-to-work) with three types (time, behavior, strain) for each direction

Scale: 5-point Likert scale with anchors of strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1)

Scoring: Work-to-Family Conflict – combine the nine WFC items to create the scale in this direction. Average the nine items to create a score.

Family-to-Work Conflict- combine the nine FWC items to create the scale in this direction. Average the nine items to create a score.

WFC (Work-to-Family Conflict)

Instructions: Please think of how your work influences your family.

My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like.
The time I must devote to my job keeps me from participating equally in household responsibilities and activities.
I have to miss family activities due to the amount of time I must spend on work responsibilities.
When I get home from work, I am often too frazzled to participate in family activities/responsibilities.
I am often so emotionally drained when I get home from work that it prevents me from contributing to my family.
Due to all the pressures at work, sometimes when I come home I am too stressed to do the things I enjoy.
The problem-solving behaviors I use in my job are not effective in resolving problems at home.
Behavior that is effective and necessary for me at work would be counterproductive at home.
The behaviors I perform that make me effective at work do not help me to be a better parent and spouse.

FWC (Family-to-Work Conflict)

Instructions: Please think of how your family influences your work.

The time I spend on family responsibilities often interferes with my work responsibilities.

The time I spend with my family often causes me to not spend time in activities at work that could be helpful to my career.
I have to miss work activities due to the amount of time I must spend on family responsibilities.
Due to stress at home, I am often preoccupied with family matters at work.
Because I am often stressed from family responsibilities, I have a hard time concentrating on my work.
Tension and anxiety from my family life often weakens my ability to do my job.
The behaviors that work for me at home do not seem to be effective at work.
Behavior that is effective and necessary for me at home would be counterproductive at work.
The problem-solving behaviors that work for me at home do not seem to be as useful at work.

Work-Family Enrichment Scale

Source: Carlson, D. S., Kacmar, K. M., Wayne, J. H., & Grzywacz, J. G. (2006). Measuring the positive side of the work-family interface: Development and validation of a work-family enrichment scale. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 68, 131-164. DOI: 10.1016/j.jvb.2005.02.002

Number of items: 18 (found in Table 2 on page 144-145) for two directions (work to family/family to work) with three types for each direction

Scale: 5-point Likert scale with anchors of strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1)

Scoring:

Work-to-Family Enrichment – combine the first nine items to create the scale in this direction.

Average the nine items to create a score.

Family-to-Work Enrichment- combine the second nine items to create the scale in this direction.

Average the nine items to create a score.

Detailed instructions can be used or simple instructions shown below:

Instructions: To respond to the items that follow, mentally insert each item into the sentence where indicated. Then indicate your agreement with the entire statement using the scale provided below. Place your response in the blank in front of each item. Please note that in order for you to strongly agree (4 or 5) with an item you must agree with the full statement. Take for example the first statement: My involvement in my work helps me to understand different viewpoints and this helps me be a better family member.

To strongly agree, you would need to agree that (1) your work involvement helps you to understand different viewpoints AND (2) that these different viewpoints transfer to home making you a better family member.

Strongly Disagree 1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5 Strongly Agree

WFE (Work-to-Family Enrichment)

Instructions: Please think of how your work influences your family.

My involvement in work helps me to understand different viewpoints and this helps me be a better family member.
My involvement in work helps me to gain knowledge and this helps me be a better family member.
My involvement in work helps me acquire skills and this helps me be a better family member.
My involvement in work puts me in a good mood and this helps me be a better family member.
My involvement in work makes me feel happy and this helps me be a better family member.
My involvement in work makes me cheerful and this helps me be a better family member.
My involvement in work helps me feel personally fulfilled and this helps me be a better family member.
My involvement in work provides me with a sense of accomplishment and this helps me be a better family member.
My involvement in work provides me with a sense of success and this helps me be a better family member.

FWE (Family-to-Work Enrichment)

Instructions: For the family-to-work direction – Please think of how your family influences your work.

My involvement in my family helps me to gain knowledge and this helps me be a better worker
My involvement in my family helps me acquire skills and this helps me be a better worker.
My involvement in my family helps me expand my knowledge of new things and this helps me be a better worker.
My involvement in my family puts me in a good mood and this helps me be a better worker.
My involvement in my family makes me feel happy and this helps me be a better worker.
My involvement in my family makes me cheerful and this helps me be a better worker.
My involvement in my family requires me to avoid wasting time at work and this helps me be a better worker.
My involvement in my family encourages me to use my work time in a focused manner and this helps me be a better worker.
My involvement in my family causes me to be more focused at work and this helps me be a better worker.

Shortened Version of Scale: Kacmar, K. M., Crawford, W. S., Carlson, D. S., Ferguson, M., & Whitten, D. (2014). A short and valid measure of work-family enrichment. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 19 (1):32-45. DOI: 10.1037/a0035123

Please note in my experience the reliability of the shortened scales is often lower than the full scale and this approach does not allow you to break things out by dimension (capital, affective, etc.) or capture the full nature of the scale. However, I do appreciate that space is limited.

Work-Family Balance Scale

Source: Carlson, D. S., Grzywacz, J. G., & Zivnuska, S. (2009). Is work-family balance more than conflict and enrichment? *Human Relations*, 62(10), 1459-1486. DOI: 101177/0018726709336500

Number of items: 6 items (found in Appendix A on page 1483).

Scale: 5-point Likert scale with anchors of strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1)

Validation: This article validated and differentiated the scale from other balance scales. Wayne, J. H., Butts, M. M., Casper, W. J., & Allen, T. D. (2017). In search of balance: A conceptual and empirical integration of multiple meanings of work–family balance. *Personnel Psychology*, 70(1), 167-210.

Scoring: Average the six items to get a score for work-family balance. **Instructions:** Think about how you balance your work and family.

Work-Family Balance

I am able to negotiate and accomplish what is expected of me at work and in my family.
I do a good job of meeting the role expectations of critical people in my work and family life.
People who are close to me would say that I do a good job of balancing work and family.
I am able to accomplish the expectations that my supervisors and my family have for me.
My coworkers and members of my family would say that I am meeting their expectations.
It is clear to me, based on feedback from coworkers and family members, that I am accomplishing both my work and family responsibilities.

Work-Family Deviance Scale/Putting Family First (PFF)

Source: Ferguson, M., Carlson, D. S., & Kacmar, K. M. (2020). Putting families first as a boundary management tactic. Career Development International.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI01-2020-0021>

Number of items: 5 items

Scale: 5-point Likert scale of (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) occasionally, (5) often.

Scoring: Average the five items to create a scale of work-family deviance.

Instructions: Indicate how often you have engaged in the following behaviors.

Work-Family Deviance/Putting Family First Items:

I have chosen to attend to a family responsibility even though it required me to make up an excuse to get out of work.
--

I have come in late to work without permission because of a family issue.

I have taken care of family business at work while I am supposed to be working.

I have called in sick so I could spend time with my family.

I have left work early without permission to attend to a family matter.

Boundary Management Tactic Items

Source: Carlson, D. S., Ferguson, M., & Kacmar, K. M. (2016). Boundary management tactics: An examination of the alignment with preferences in the work and family domains. *Journal of Behavioral and Applied Management*. 51-70.

Number of items: 12 items in each direction can be used as three item subscales per title shown below.

Scale: 5-point Likert scale with anchors of strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) **Scoring:** Average the three items for each dimension to create a measure of specific boundary management tactic.

Instructions: Indicate your level of agreement with the following behaviors.

Keeping Family out of Work Work-family

Temporal

While at work, I try to manage blocks of time so that I can keep work separate from family.

While at work, I try to manage my time such that work time is work time, not family time.

While at work, I manage my time to keep family demands out of work. **Work-family**

Physical

When I'm physically at work, I try not to address family related issues so I can focus on work.

When I'm in the workplace, I leave family matters at home so I can focus on work.

When I walk in the door to work, I put away any family related thoughts and turn my focus to work.

Work-family Behavioral

While at work, I use technology to help facilitate keeping work responsibilities separate from family responsibilities.

While at work, I use technology to help keep family demands out of my work life.

While at work, I use technology to help limit dealing with family during work time.

Work-family Communicative

I communicate clearly to my family that I prefer not be distracted by family demands while I'm at work.

I have indicated to my family that I cannot deal with family matters during work hours unless it is a rare circumstance.

I set expectations with my family to not contact me at work unless it's an emergency.

Keeping Work out of Family Family-work

Temporal

While at home, I try to manage blocks of time so that I can keep family separate from work.

While at home, I try to manage my time such that family time is family time, not work time.

While at home, I manage my time to keep work demands out of family.

Family-work Physical

When I'm physically at home, I try not to address work related issues so I can focus on my family.

When I'm at home or with family, I leave work matters at work so that I can focus on my family.

When I walk in the door at home, I put away work related thoughts and turn my focus to family.

Family-work Behavioral

While at home, I use technology to help facilitate keeping family responsibilities separate from work responsibilities.

While at home, I use technology to help keep work demands out of my family life.

While at home, I use technology to help limit dealing with work during family time.

Family-work Communicative

I communicate clearly to my co-workers/supervisor that I prefer not be distracted by work demands while I'm at home.

I have indicated to my boss that I cannot work past the end of my normal workday unless it is a rare circumstance.

I set expectations with my co-workers/supervisor to not contact me at home unless it's an emergency.

Boundary Management: Strain Transmitted to the Spouse

Source: Carlson, D. S., Kacmar, K. M., Zivnuska, S., & Ferguson, M. (2015). Do the benefits of family-to-work transitions come at too great a cost? *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 20(2), 161-171. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038279> **Validation:** Provided in source article.

Number of items: 3 items (found on page 166)

Scale: 5-point Likert scale with anchors of strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1)

Scoring: Average the three items to create measure.

Instructions: Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

BMS Transmitted to Spouse

It annoys me when my spouse doesn't draw a line between work and family.
I get frustrated when my spouse blurs the boundaries between work and family time.
I find it aggravating when my spouse lets work take priority over family.

Organizational Support for Adoption (OSFA)

Source: Quade, M. J., Hackney, K. J., Carlson, D. S., & Hanlon, R. P. (2021). It takes a village: How organizational support for adoption positively affects employees and their families.

Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology. Online First

<http://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12358> **Validation:** Provided in source article.

Number of items: 4 items

Scale: 5-point Likert scale with anchors of strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1)

Scoring: Average the four items to create measure.

Instructions: Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

OSFA

The organization was supportive of employees who adopt a child.
The organization offered assistance to employees who adopt a child.
The organization allowed employees to make flexible work arrangements after the adoption of a child.
The organization offered paid leave to employees after the adoption of a child.

Scales in Progress – please contact for more information.

- Paternal perceived pregnancy discrimination (P3D)
- Work Concessions



Oklahoma State University, College of Education & Human Sciences; 306 Willard Hall Stillwater. OK 74078

[CONSENT/PARTICIPANT INFORMATION] FORM

Work-Family Conflict and the Lived Experiences of Secondary Assistant School Principals

Background Information

You are invited to be in a research study titled: Work-Family Conflict and the Lived Experiences of Assistant School Principals. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time. You can skip any questions that make you uncomfortable and can stop the interview/survey at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not have any negative impact with your school district.

This study is being conducted by: Ellen Vannoy, doctoral student Oklahoma State University, under the direction of Dr. Mary Jo Self.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

- Reply to ellen.vannoy@okstate.edu with interest and signed consent form
- Answer survey on work family conflict
- Commit to two school site observations
- Commit to one interview
- Send me photos of your choosing you think represents work family conflict

Participation in the study involves the following time commitment:

- Completion of survey 15- 20 minutes
- Two site observations 1-3 hours each observation
- One interview 30-45 minutes

Total time commitment = 7 hours maximum

Compensation

You will receive no payment for participating in this study.

Risks

There is a potential risk of breach of confidentiality which is minimized using pseudonyms.

Confidentiality

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code number/pseudonym. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

Because of the nature of the data, I cannot guarantee your data will be confidential and it may be possible that others will know what you have reported. The researchers will make every effort to ensure that information about you remains confidential but cannot guarantee total confidentiality. Your identity will not be revealed in any publications, presentations, or reports resulting from this research study. However, it may be possible for someone to recognize your particular story/situation/response. The research team works to ensure confidentiality to the degree permitted by technology. It is possible, although highly unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses because you are responding online. However, your participation in this online survey involves risks like a person's everyday use of the internet. If you have concerns, you should consult the survey provider policy at: <https://policies.google.com/terms?hl=en-GB>

I will collect your information through interviews email, paper copies. This data will be stored in both a locked drawer in my home office and using a cryptic folder on a password protected electronic device. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the code list linking names to study numbers will be destroyed. This is expected to occur no later December 2022. The audio recording will be transcribed. The recording will be deleted after the transcription is complete and verified. This process should take approximately 10 weeks. I will work to ensure confidentiality to the degree permitted by technology.

Contacts and Questions

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Oklahoma State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at (304) 415-3803, ellen.vannoy@okstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer or would simply like to speak with someone other than the research team about concerns regarding this study, please contact the IRB at (405) 744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have my questions answered. I consent to participate in the study.

Indicate Yes or No:

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study.

Yes No

I give consent for my identity to be revealed in written materials resulting from this study:

Yes No

I give consent for my data to be used in future research studies:

Yes No

I give consent to be contacted for follow-up in this study or future similar studies:

Yes No

:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

VITA

Ellen Vannoy

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Dissertation: WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF
SECONDARY ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS

Major Field: School Administration

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in School Administration at
Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December, 2022.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Education Leadership at
Salem International University, Salem, West Virginia in 2005.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in English Education at West
Virginia State University, Institute, West Virginia in 1999.

Experience:

Director of Teaching and Learning, Jenks Public School, Oklahoma July 2022-present
Assistant Principal, Jenks High School; Jenks, Oklahoma July 2017- June 2022
Curriculum Principal, Edmond North High School; Edmond, Oklahoma 2014-July
2017

Curriculum Principal, Point Pleasant Jr/Sr High; Point Pleasant, WV 2012-2014
Activities Coordinator/AD, George Washington Middle School, Eleanor, WV 2010-
2012

Professional Memberships:

Cooperative Council for Oklahoma School Administration (CCOSA) Oklahoma City,
OK 2014-present