WHY CAN’T WE HAVE IT ALL? THE CONFLICT BETWEEN
THE PRINCIPALSHIP AND MOTHERHOOD

Jacqueline S. Jordan

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in
Educational Leadership

Chapel Hill
2012

Approved by:

______________________________
Dr. Catherine Marshall

______________________________
Dr. Fenwick English

______________________________
Dr. James Veitch
ABSTRACT

JACQUELINE S. JORDAN: Why Can’t We Have It All? The Conflict Between the Principalship and Motherhood
(Under the direction of Dr. Catherine Marshall)

Being a principal in today’s high-stakes environment is a highly demanding job. Much has been written about the stress principals now face in responding to the increased demands and pressures associated with the role. Districts nationwide continue to go to great lengths to find administrators of the highest caliber capable of meeting these increasing demands. As a growing number of women assume the principalship at a younger age, a unique set of challenges has emerged. Finding partners and starting a family is difficult, as female principals typically work long hours and expend tremendous energy to succeed. For principals who are married with children, the challenges are also great. Competing demands and divided priorities often create consequences that are rarely discussed. Support from colleagues, supervisors, and family proved to be essential in for study participants in combating these consequences. Setting personal boundaries and realizing that work should not be the only aspect of one’s life also proved essential for women who were able to “have it all.” Policymakers should address women’s career challenges, since feminist leadership skills have been proven to create the conditions for successful schools, and the number of women in the principalship is growing nationwide.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this paper to the two most important women in my life, my mother, Liz, and my grandmother, Ruth. To Mom, thank you for all that you sacrificed as a young single mother, caring for me while working up to three jobs at a time to make ends meet. I love you more than you will ever know. To Mamaw, thank you for your friendship, your wisdom, and your listening ear. You have always been there for me. To you both, thank you for your sincere belief, all my life, that I could do anything I wanted to do and be anything I wanted to be, and the encouragement to live a life of purpose.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I must thank my advisor, Dr. Catherine Marshall, who coincidentally was my very first professor in graduate school. Since that time she has challenged me, inspired me, nurtured me, and supported me in my growth as a thinker. Through her courses she has helped me make meaning of the questions in my heart and to answer them in theory and research. For always pushing me a little harder, I am forever changed and deeply grateful.

To Dr. Fenwick English, I want to express my appreciation, for changing the way I view education. The threat to public education and consequently to social justice is surprisingly missing from popular discourse. I am grateful to Dr. English for opening my eyes.

To Dr. Larry Savage, I have to give huge thanks. He has been my go-to person throughout this process. Every grad student needs someone along for the ride who shares the highs and lows. I am thankful for his sense of humor, carpooling, and being a Saturday work partner. Our ongoing competition for whose paper ended up being longer added comic relief when things got bleak. Larry, I think I’ve got you this time with appendices.

I want to deeply thank the participants of the study for their willingness to give their time and tell their stories. Their honesty moved me. I hope the knowledge that their story
might support future generations of women and help them “have it all” brings them great pride.

I could not have completed this project without the inspiration I receive each day from the amazing people at my school. The students, the parents, and especially my colleagues fill my life with love. Though I have not had the opportunity to be a mother yet, they have been my family.

Finally, I have to deeply thank my boyfriend, Matthew. Bringing me warm cookies, taking the dog for a walk for me, listening to passages, and sharing in my enthusiasm for this topic, he has exemplified the word “support.” I’m looking forward to much more dancing, more sleeping in, and a lot more spontaneity now that this “chapter” of our life is over.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.</th>
<th>INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................. 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Questions ............................................................................................. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Study Overview ..................................................................................................... 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>REVIEW OF LITERATURE .......................................................................................... 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Problem .......................................................................................................... 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feminist Leadership ............................................................................................ 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY ........................................................................... 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qualitative Methodology ...................................................................................... 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data Collection ..................................................................................................... 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>DATA ANALYSIS: Breaking the Silence .................................................................. 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Themes .................................................................................................................. 67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making It Work .................................................................................................... 93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>CONCLUSION: Creating A New Story ...................................................................... 120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implications .......................................................................................................... 123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limitations and Areas for Future Research ...................................................... 124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>......................................................................................................................... 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>......................................................................................................................... 149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Across the country, district and state leaders face the growing challenge of finding qualified administrators to lead schools in the role of principal. As large numbers of principals retire, fewer educators seem to be looking to take their place at a time when they are much needed. Multiple factors are coming together all at once that make the need for principals critical. Student populations across the nation are soaring, and many current principals are at or near retirement age, creating numerous open seats for school-system leaders to fill. With high-stakes accountability placing increasingly lofty demands on public schools through sanctions imposed by No Child Left Behind, finding good leaders to do the hard work of running schools successfully has become priority number one. The growing shortage of principals has been documented and some research has been aimed at trying to uncover the cause of this dilemma. As Fenwick (2000) noted, while more principals are reaching retirement age, fewer teachers want to take on these vacancies. It appears that those leaving the job are not helping with the recruiting process. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) conducts a comprehensive study of the principalship every 10 years. In the most recent survey, from 2008, a principal reported, “I love my job, but I would not recommend being a principal to anyone” (Protheroe, 2008). Though open-
ended questions typically garner a very low percentage of responses, researchers deemed this topic an important area of concern due to the high rate of elaboration by respondents; principals were quick to explain why they would not recommend the job to potential administrative candidates. When those who have had the job discourage potential candidates from considering the role, recruiting efforts are difficult. An opportunity exists to find out why these principals are not recommending this job.

To successfully recruit, we must understand the factors that make the job unattractive and seek to address those factors. Due to the lack of success in addressing the shortage, perhaps it is time to look more deeply. Some studies have examined teacher leaders who could have made the leap to the principalship, but chose instead to remain in the classroom. Like the NAESP report, negative perceptions of the role were among the factors influencing those decisions—but the demands of time and family also played a role in their decision to stay out of administration (Howley, Andrianaivo & Perry, 2005; Loder, 2005; Williamsom & Hudson, 2003; Wynn, 2005; Zigler, 2007).

At a growing rate since the Reagan years, elected officials have expressed less confidence in current school leadership and demonstrated support for alternatives to public schools such as charter schools, vouchers, and endorsement of businessmen and women to assume roles of educational leadership (Blum-Smith, 2010; Dantley, 2005; Mehta, 2008; Owens & Valesky, 2007; Ravitch, 2010). Solutions offered by public school critics, such as standardized curricula, test preparation instruction, and high-stakes accountability, have had a disproportionately negative impact on minority and impoverished groups and reduced the amount of creative and questioning discourse among the learners we are educating. Opportunities for divergent points of view and inclusive communities where all voices are
heard are stifled as teachers find themselves forced to teach to the test (Emery, 2004; Noddings, 1994). No Child Left Behind has returned our public schools to segregation, both by classifying students by race and ethnicity and by driving a wedge among those who are successful and those who need assistance.

These stressors and disincentives affect school leaders. In the midst of these daunting circumstances, we find an alarming rate of principal vacancies. According to the most recent NAESP study (Protheroe, 2008), it is “imperative that universities and education organizations focus their efforts on recruiting, training and mentoring aspiring principals.” We need bright, creative principals. We need leaders who can garner support from lawmakers and the public. We need leaders who envision schools as vehicles for social justice in order to create a better community for all. Policymakers and educational leaders must find ways to attract and support a diverse and inspired cadre of principals.

**Research Questions and Focus on Women**

The purpose of this study was to examine the potential dilemmas of the principal role even more discreetly, with an emphasis on the gender-specific circumstances of motherhood.

As administrators have become older, nearing retirement age, another demographic change has been an increase in women principals. Again, the most recent NAESP study (Protheroe, 2008) found the number of women in the role of principalship has increased over the years. Simultaneously, scholars have looked at ways women have overcome barriers to leadership positions, what support they have utilized to succeed in those roles, and how their subsequent opportunities for leadership in roles such as superintendencies have differed from their male counterparts (Blackmore, 1989; Blount, 1998; Marshall, 2006; Marshall & Mitchell, 1991; Shakeshaft, 1989). Gender-specific examination of the principalship and the
challenges women face once in the role is appropriate, given the increase in female principals as well as the dominance of women in the field of education who may be considering the principalship. Michael Cash, Data Analyst with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, reports similar findings in North Carolina, which currently has 2,051 principals (M. Cash, personal communication, June 2, 2011). Of these, 1,189 are women and 862 are men. In the district where this study was conducted, 96 of the 161 principals were women and 65 were men.

The most recent NAESP data (Protheroe, 2008) also show that nationally, women enter the role later than men—on average at age 42—reducing the number of years women will serve in the role before reaching retirement age. This has important implications for policymakers and educational leaders who seek to find ways to address the increasing shortage of school principals. Current North Carolina data (Cash, personal communication, June 2, 2011) show men outnumbering women until age 37, at which point women outnumber men. Of all principals in North Carolina 36 years of age and under, only 70 are female and 116 are male. Among principals age 37 and above, women outnumber men at every age until age 69. Women resume equal numbers with men at age 70, where they remain until age 77 (at which point there is only one principal, a male). These facts suggest potential issues for qualified female candidates under age 42 that are ripe for exploration. In particular, dilemmas related to motherhood and principalship conflict offer important insights on this increasing shortage. This study will contribute to the existing literature on the work and motherhood conflict, which is summarized in Chapter 2, by exploring the unique strains felt by women seeking to balance work and family demands (Murphy, Duxbury & Higgins, 2006; van Daalen, Willemsen, & Sanders, 2006), the evidence showing a greater percentage
of women’s time devoted to housework and parenting, even though more women are now working outside of the home (Murphy, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2006), the influence of work and family on depression and anxiety (Zamarripa, Wampold, & Gregory, 2003), and the expectations women feel from others to fulfill their roles at home in conjunction with their work demands. My study explores some of these same issues, but will also examine how these issues influence a woman’s path toward the principalship and her experience as a principal.

To gain these insights, I studied female principals to explore the following questions:

1. What are the ways women view being both a mother and a principal?
2. Do women perceive restrainers, barriers and challenges as they imagine doing both?
3. What patterns of emotions occur in women who are principals and not mothers?
4. What events occur, if any, in women’s career paths that influence their decision to pursue motherhood or not?
5. What shifts or changes do these women identify as plausible solutions for the work/family conflict?
6. How might these changes help women “have it all?”
7. How do women principals view their particular strengths and abilities that stem from being female? From being a mother?

Understanding more fully the potential barriers to recruitment and retention of younger female principals has the potential to do more than alleviate the shortage of principals. The literature review in Chapter 2 demonstrates the potential benefits to be gained
when leadership of our schools is more diverse and less dominated by the hegemonic elite. The literature reviewed concerns nondominant forms of leadership, with an emphasis on female leadership models. Literature on the consequences of continuing to adhere to hegemonic models of leadership is also reviewed. These studies illustrate the benefits of recruiting and retention efforts that support nondominant leadership. Finally, the literature review helps to frame questions about family-friendly organizations and careers.

Overview of the Methodology

Motherhood is a central component of womanhood. For many women, finding a way to negotiate a successful intersection of motherhood with the principalship could greatly reduce the principal shortage. In order to understand these issues, I interviewed female principals at varying stages of their careers as principals—both those who have chosen motherhood and those who have not. In constructing the interview questions, I reviewed questions from related studies (Bradbury & Gunter, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Loder, 2005; Marshall, 2006; Smith, 2011; Tillman, 2003). Themes and commonalities were used to create a conceptual framework to explore the issue in greater depth. I also used what Marshall (2007) refers to as a “dilemma analysis,” to explore how respondents felt about the choices they had made related to career and motherhood. My sample included female principals with children and female principals without children.

The site for the study was my own school district. While there were many potential hazards of convenience sampling, which are explored in Chapter 3, the benefits were the existing relationships with and having access to many female administrators who could speak to the research questions. The qualitative approach allowed me to let the stories of the women shape the conceptual framework. The open-ended nature of the interviews ensured
that when a reflective change in direction was needed I was free to do so, in order to capture the experiences of the women and put a face on the issues being studied. Techniques and strategies used to overcome and offset the hazards of performing the research as an insider were considered and are discussed more fully in Chapter 3 (Patton, 2002; Voloder, 2008).

Limitations

While dilemma analysis can give an actual account of the issue of the motherhood/principalship role conflict, there are potential pitfalls associated with this method. According to Marshall (2007), its use requires the researcher to capture information that is often complex and difficult to interpret or compare to other data. Additionally, the generalizability of the study is somewhat limited, since the sampling was limited to one district. However, it is my hope that by using a small sample, my investigation could be deeper and my understanding of participants’ experiences more authentic than that afforded by alternative methods that only describe behaviors without getting at the essence of participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2007).

Importance of the Study

The educational leadership role was established by men and for men (Marshall, 2008; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). In recent decades, acceptance of women in roles of school leadership has led to an increase in the number of women principals. Their success in those roles, combined with the need for alternative models of school leadership to fulfill an increasingly complex set of duties, makes it imperative that, when examining issues of recruitment and retention of principals, we consider gender. Traditional structures for and beliefs about schooling evolved within the constraints of hegemonic realities, without consideration or voice given to the needs of those who were not White, male, or affluent. As women continue
to emerge as viable candidates for school leadership, their needs and experiences must be included within the discourse in order to be considered by policymakers. Without this, recruitment and retention efforts will continue to lack the relevance necessary to succeed.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to review relevant literature and construct a conceptual framework for use in analyzing participant interviews and observations. I will begin by examining research related to principal shortages and role conflict, which has been identified by researchers as one possible reason for the shortage. The socialized expectations of women and the conflicts they face as a result of those expectations will also be examined. Next, I will review literature related to the effectiveness of females in the principalship, summarizing various models of nondominant school leadership methods. The review will include evidence that these methods are effective at meeting the increasing demands of school leaders. I will then review literature related to the possible reasons for resistance to greater use of nondominant models of leadership. I will include the history of public schooling in America—where, for the most part, leadership has been dominated by hegemonic values that serve to reify the power of elites and where nondominant leadership models, such as leadership for social justice, have experienced only sporadic popularity. Among the values not included among these models are those of women, and female principals specifically. Finally, I will discuss what is needed to provide a voice for female leaders in education, which would include the career choices women face when considering the roles of
motherhood and the principalship. By adding the voices of the women to the discourse, policymakers and educational leaders can better understand what is needed to recruit and retain principals from a large, qualified pool of potential leaders.

The Problem

The NAESP conducts a national study (Protheroe, 2009) every 10 years in order to track changes in the principalship. Since 1928, the study has examined factors such as the total number of principals, their average salary, the length of their work day, their concerns, etc. The most recent study, in 2008, found the number of female principals had increased: 61% of all elementary school principals were female, up from 42% in 1998 and its lowest point, in 1978, of 18%. Additionally, the 2008 survey found that the average age of the female principal was 51 and the average age of the male principal was 49. The average age reported when principals were able to retire was 59; three fifths of the respondents said they intended to retire at that age. Given the large number of principals reaching retirement age, consideration of how to recruit new candidates to fulfill their positions is a high priority. The most recent statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics reports that in 2007-08, 76% of public school teachers were female, and 52% had a master’s degree or higher (http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=28). Because the number of female principals is increasing and the majority of viable candidates for the role currently in the system are female, examining recruitment and retention issues through a feminist lens is appropriate.

Current Literature on the Shortage…Hints to the Tough Choices for Women

Job Complexity and Long Hours

As described in Chapter 1, many principals are nearing retirement age and fewer educators are seeking the position of principal (Fenwick, 2000). Researchers and
policymakers worldwide want to understand the factors that contribute to this shortage in order to support their recruitment and retention efforts. Those currently serving as principals also worry about the system’s ability to find applicants willing to take the job. As Kruger, van Eck, and Vermeulen (2005) point out, the “shortage of school leaders, mainly caused by the growing complexity together with the decline in the attractiveness of the job, is steadily growing in recent years” (p. 241). One such effort to capture the experiences of principals is the NAESP survey, which is conducted every 10 years. Part of the study utilizes open-ended questions to capture relevant factors influencing job satisfaction. In the most recent study (Protheroe, 2008), two thirds of the responding principals expressed concerns about being able to find qualified candidates to fill principal vacancies. The reasons cited were:

- Salary levels
- Long hours
- Increasing work responsibilities
- Work-related stress

The survey found that from 1998 to 2008, the number of hours worked during a week increased from 54 to 56. In 1988, principals reported working only 50 hours a week (Proteroe, 2009). Given the increased time demands, principals reported a fear that fewer people would find the role attractive. Similarly, principals worried that their colleagues who were close to retirement age, were likely to do so, and in some cases to do so early. This problem exists not only in the United States, but is also a concern for schools worldwide seeking to attract a quality pool of principals. Kruger, van Eck, and Vermeulen (2005) studied principals in the Netherlands to examine why some principals retire early. Their work serves as further evidence that not only is it hard to find people willing to be principals, but
there is also the threat that those in the position may wish to leave: Their results showed that 70% of the principals studied had considered leaving their positions.

Credentialed, but Not Interested

Other work has attempted to capture contributing factors to the principal shortage. Hudson and Williamson (2003) followed a cohort of students pursuing graduate degrees in educational administration. The researchers found that while many of the graduates quickly obtained positions, several decided not to pursue a position, despite having attained the credentials to do so. For those who took positions quickly, their enthusiasm quickly waned and they considered leaving the profession. Like the NAESP study (Protheroe, 2008), Hudson and Williamson’s multiyear study of potential educational leaders identified many factors that influenced participants’ career choices. The demands of the job, the relationship between work and family, and the work-family interface were common themes. As more districts face a shortage of principals, understanding these conflicts more fully becomes a greater priority.

Too Much Personal Sacrifice

Marshall and Hooley (2006) also found evidence of the impact role conflict can have on lives of administrators. They used the stories of assistant principals to highlight the challenges people encounter in that role, with the goal of providing more support for successful recruitment and retention of assistant principals. They examined how individuals learn about the role of assistant principal and educators’ views on the desirability of the position. According to the authors,

Personal and family considerations affect career decision-making. Educators who observe the long hours, the heavy responsibility, and the strain on the family life of administrators may say, “No way, not for me!” Some conclude that the job demands too much personal sacrifice. (p. 35)
Others felt the job was incompatible with the socialized roles of women; as Marshall and Hooley noted, “Some have spouses who will resent the time away from family” (p. 35). While their study provides a closer look at job challenges specific to the assistant principalship, it does not go further to examine restrainers and sacrifices exclusive to women in the role. As the number of female principals increases, the relevance of this issue increases.

Little Validation if at All

Brubaker and Coble’s *Staying on Track: An Educational Leader’s Guide to Preventing Derailment and Ensuring Personal and Organizational Success* (2007), which examines why educational leaders get derailed, deals with women’s issues in one terse sentence: “A women may leave an administrative position to have a baby and decide not to return as an assistant principal or principal, according to one respondent” (p. 38). While the book offers ways to prepare today’s teacher leaders to become tomorrow’s principals and superintendents, its strategies for success do not address the role dilemmas related to motherhood. Instead, the strategies are designed to navigate difficulties that occur in the role of principal or superintendent with regard to employees, stakeholders, and political climate. To truly address the derailment of female administrators, a deeper examination is necessary. The acknowledgement, albeit minimal, by Brubaker and Coble of the conflict between motherhood and the principalship serves as evidence that even in the hegemonic mainstream, researchers recognize that women face difficult choices that impact their careers. This study focuses on this conflict by exploring its complexity rather than by oversimplifying it.
Teachers Say “No, Thank You”

More recently, Howley, Andrianaivo, and Perry (2005) studied teachers to understand why they would choose not to pursue educational administration, despite representing a logical group from which to recruit new principals. The authors found that in general, teachers view the disincentives associated with the principalship as more potent than the incentives. Teachers with fewer years of experience and those who valued career advancement and had pursued administrative licensure seemed to be the most likely pool of potential applicants. Study findings revealed evidence of continued gender bias; the authors recommend that districts make special efforts to ensure that qualified females are considered for positions as school leaders, but note that that may not be enough. While younger applicants with more years of service to offer before retirement could help mitigate the impending shortage of administrators, study findings also revealed that “teachers generally view the disincentives associated with the principalship as more salient than the incentives” (p. 773). The purpose of my study was to understand this imbalance.

Dual Roles

Some scholars have paid special attention to women’s careers. Loder (2005) notes the existing research on administrator shortages and points out the lack of literature on the work/family conflict. According to Loder, “from a policy perspective, there is an urgent need for more employer supported child-care and elder care, flexible scheduling and family leave policies” (p. 741). She studied 31 female administrators and found that the women’s struggles to balance their roles as caretakers and administrators differed depending on their age. Women who were born after the civil rights and women’s movements confronted the same dilemma described in Hochschild’s (1989) The Second Shift, in which women’s
work/family conflicts were intense: Though the time they spent at work had increased, expectations for their performance at home had not changed. According to Bialeschki, Kelly, and Raymond (1996),

The institutions of work, family and community have not caught up with the present reality of women in the paid work force. The dual responsibilities of work and family are not supported by institutions that support women either in the home or the workplace (p. 177).

In addition, leave policies did not allow the women studied to adequately attend to family demands. According to Loder (2005), existing studies have failed to consider how changes since the civil rights and women’s movements have differentially affected the balance of work life and family life for women who were born before and after that era. She sought to understand the work/family conflicts that emerge as women consider transitioning into the principalship and what strategies the women use to overcome them. She also examined how the strategies differed by generation and race. Loder’s work, while illustrating that women face conflicts that influence their career paths, does not delve deeply into the conflicts and choices specifically related to motherhood and the principalship.

Reframing, Recruitment, and Retention

Like Loder (2005), Bialeschki, Kelly, and Raymond (1996) and Shakeshaft (1989) attempted to reconsider organizational behavior in order to include the experiences of women in the discourse on educational leadership. Because the existing theories had been based on male samples and male experiences, they were deemed irrelevant to women’s experiences. One of Shakeshaft’s findings was that women are often mistakenly assumed to lack the motivation or aspiration to become a principal. According to Shakeshaft, it is the reality of a world that expects women to continue to fulfill their full share of the family responsibilities even if they have also assumed a full-time position as an administrator. She cites a study
conducted in Michigan (Fisher, 1978) in which 359 female teachers were surveyed about moving into administration. Only 34% believed that an individual could have a successful marriage and a successful job as a school administrator at the same time. Shakeshaft points out that not wanting to take on two jobs at the same time (full-time parenthood and administration) is not due to a lack of aspiration, but rather to the limits of the human body and lack of time.

Staying on Track

Smith (2011) also studied female educators, exploring their beliefs about agency and its effect on career paths—i.e. how subjects perceived their capacity to exert power over decisions about their lives and careers. She identified two types of perceptions with regard to agency. For some women, their perceptions of their careers were grounded in a belief that they possessed a great deal of agency, and that they were in charge of their career choices—that although having children affect their decisions regarding career advancement, they still perceived this to be a manifestation of their own personal agency, rather than being externally defined. Smith found that these women planned and initiated their career moves. Their personal values and aspirations informed their career choices. As Smith points out, her study takes us beyond traditional discussions, which primarily concern external barriers to women’s pursuit of leadership roles, to explore the internal controls that can impact their career choices. My study builds on Smith’s work to include examination of the nuances of motherhood and a woman’s agency and how these factors influence career choices, thereby contributing to the current discourse on the principalship and women’s experiences in that role.
In a study similar to mine, Bradbury and Gunter (2006) conducted life history interviews to reveal the intersection of women in England who are both headteachers (principals) and mothers. Inspired by Bradbury’s own experience as a primary (elementary) headteacher and mother of a young child, the researchers sought to explore more fully the reality of fulfilling those two roles and the lack of guidance from policymakers and educational leaders about how to balance the roles and expectations of professional and parent. The study revealed that there are complementary factors as well as competing factors when one is a headteacher and a mother, revealing the interplay between agency and structure as women negotiate both roles. The women in the study experienced divided priorities and were often faced with conflicts when balancing their priorities as mother and as headteacher. The researchers also explored how the success of women performing the role of headteacher was in some ways enhanced by the fact that they were mothers, due in part to some of the stereotypical beliefs about caregiving being naturally suited to women. This reinforced socialized beliefs about women. According to the researchers, “The data supported the view that motherhood and headship are experienced within a strong sociohistorical framework and as such perpetuate the power structures around social expectations” (p. 494). Ironically, while the position of the headship provided women with status not found in motherhood, the fact that they were mothers seemed to enhance their status as headteachers.

Bradbury and Gunther (2006) also showed how the roles were contradictory, as mothers felt pulled from their own families at times in order to attend to the needs of their schools. One of the participants stated that headteachers who are mothers have a lot to prove
and feel as if others expect them to fail. There was a common feeling of guilt stemming from societal expectations that they should be there for their children—a dilemma, they noted, that was not experienced by their husbands. The women described not feeling encouraged by society to attempt balancing the roles of headteacher and mother. The researchers point out that for some women, the same “child-first” stance that led to their success as headteachers was at times absent when their families were put on hold due to pressure to manage schools that were in trouble. In one case, a headteacher’s son had developed anorexia that she failed to notice, she felt, as a result of her long work hours. The researchers concluded that the women were existing as both mother and headteacher rather than switching back and forth between their separate roles. “The women do not have two separate ways of being and doing in the world but are in constant discussion, conflict and negotiation about being and doing motherhood and headship” (p. 496). The women identified themselves both as mothers and as headteachers; their identity was incomplete if one of the roles was absent. The authors found, however, that these two simultaneous roles often were at odds. The difficulty in maintaining both roles stemmed from external expectations, which the women themselves often shared.

These come very much from the social context within which women are located, and the expectations of motherhood remain problematic. In this sense, while they are able to position the self within both fields of parent and professional simultaneously and draw on capital resources to do this, they are well aware of how they are being positioned by others (p. 501).

Examining the complementary and contradicting factors of motherhood and educational leadership is one aspect of the conceptual framework used to analyze the interviews collected in this study. The expectations felt by women who considered these roles also contributed to the conceptual framework used to analyze their career choices.
Looking Back

The literature above illustrates that conflicts do arise and career choices are impacted by the shared roles of work and family. A review of women throughout the history of public education in America may offer some insight as to the persistence of these conflicts, even as women’s access to leadership positions has increased. Women have always faced challenges when their work and family roles intersect. In the beginning days of public schooling, teachers were unwed; a woman with her own family was thought to be unable to devote her full attention to other people’s children. For women in the 1970s, most districts required that they leave their teaching positions by their sixth month of pregnancy. Some laws would not allow a woman to return to work until her child was one or two years old. These laws were challenged in the Supreme Court, after which women were able to both work and have a family. Though women’s rights increased, systems and structures to support the intersection of those roles were not forthcoming. The absence of discourse related to the unique needs of women have hampered attempts by lawmakers and educational leaders to address the shortage of principals. In the next section I review the historically marginalized position of women and the tradition of silence surrounding the rights and privileges of nondominant groups within education.

Women’s Place in Education . . . Historically at the Margin

According to Wynn (2003), women in education have a long history of existing at the margins: “Men have traditionally held superintendencies, principalships and other positions of power, while women have served predominantly as teachers” (p. 14). Schools led by men have promoted and protected their values and the dominant beliefs of elite men, leaving the needs of women and other minority groups unaddressed. School leadership for social justice
ensures inclusion and values diversity and fairness for all regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, economic social class, sexual orientation, religion, or disability (Shoho, Merchant, & Lugg, 2005). While there have been brief times throughout the history of public education during which social justice issues have gained favor, the influence of the dominant culture has quickly returned.

Gardner (1993) notes that since the beginning of public education, there has been debate over how and why it should happen. At times, social justice has been popular, such as efforts by the Protestant Progressives in the late 1800s, after the Depression, and during the Civil Rights and Women’s Movements of the 1960s and early 1970s (Shoho, Merchant, & Lugg, 2005; Tyack & Cuban, 1993). Education was seen as a vehicle to overcome the disparate experiences of the poor, and these periods were characterized by humanitarian acts. Early Progressive efforts were even supported by Pope Leo XIII, who explained that helping your fellow man would be “to the advantage of all” (Shoho, Merchant, & Lugg, 2005). For previously marginalized groups, this meant new opportunities were made available to them and their lives improved. Teaching methods embraced during these times included group learning, teacher-created materials, integrated curricula, vocational training, and a focus on the relevancy of learning to real life (Owens & Valesky, 2007).

The popularity of social-justice values has been short-lived and sporadic in American education. First, early Americans, while agreeing with the ideals of public schools, were hesitant to support the taxation needed to fund them. Then, in the early twentieth century, schools became the scapegoat for the injustices in society, an accusation that would be made again and again. According to critics, the less competitive educational system—i.e. the more inclusive public schools—were “denigrating academic learning, lacking serious goals, and
undermining the traditions of liberal education” (Owens & Valesky, 2007). Critics warned that this would be the collapse of the American way of life. Further, they spoke out about the potential danger this method of education posed, threatening America’s standing as a leader among nations. Instead of social justice, pressure from critics led some progressives to embrace business efficiency tenets to regain their political advantage. Some of the reform strategies recommended were increased class size, increased work time for teachers, and eliminating courses such as the arts and foreign languages.

While men initially held positions as teachers in the early days of public education (Shakeshaft, 1989), women slowly made their way into the profession. In the early 1800s, women provided schooling to their own children and, in some cases, to other children in their community (Tyack & Hansot, 1990). This marked the beginning of women as teachers and of education for girls, as well as the growth of public schools around the country. Until that time, schools had exclusively been for affluent males who planned to attend university (Tharp, 1953). By the mid 1800s, boys and girls were attending public schools and more women were being hired to teach in those schools. As industry in America grew, more men found jobs that paid more than teaching. Educational leaders such as Catharine Beecher proclaimed teaching a natural fit for women, preparing them for their role as wife and mother (Shakeshaft, 1989). Despite being accepted as hirable, women were still positioned at the margins, and their posts were often in rural, lower-paying positions (Blount, 1998; Tyack & Hansot, 1990).

As critics found fault with Progressive schooling, calls for the establishment of the profession of school leadership began. By the beginning of the twentieth century, formal preparation programs, which were exclusively available to men, emerged. Until then, as
Brown (2005) points out, schooling had been “largely unbureaucratized and unprofessional” (p. 113). School boards were encouraged to hire educational leaders who were credentialed through university preparation programs. With limited access to those programs, this elite practice effectively excluded minority and female educators seeking leadership positions. There were few spaces for women in educational leadership programs, and the school boards who would hire those positions were largely composed of White businessmen (Shoho, Merchant, & Lugg, 2005). Women encountered professors who, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, openly expressed doubt that women should take up space in university programs (Marshall, 1979). Men held positions as principals and superintendents—though the teaching force was primarily female—and school leadership became hierarchical. At the start of the twentieth century, the dominance of males in leadership roles continued because “social stereotypes reinforced the assumptions that men are rational and objective and that women are governed by emotions and are prone to ‘petty’ concerns with interpersonal relationships and responsibilities” (Brown, 2005, p. 114).

This generally accepted philosophy marked the beginning of the bureaucratic organization of America’s public school system, in which nonminority figures were embraced as natural leaders and their andocentric values created the policies and structures within that system. Pierce (as cited in Brown, 2005) noted that by the turn of the century, the principalship had shifted from lead teacher to manager, shifting leadership values yet again. Heavily influenced by the work of Frederick Taylor, many programs promoted the use of scientific principles to run schools, similar to the use of such principles in American factories. This strengthened the argument for hierarchical leadership, leading to the separation of duties between teacher and administrator. The factory model reinforced the
belief that, like the manager and the factory worker, “the role of the principal should be separated from that of teaching” (Brown, 2005, p. 116). As the principal’s focus moved to administrative duties, due to the pressure to maintain schools that were effective and efficient, the principal’s role as instructional leader took a back seat. This again pushed women, with their orientation to instruction, to the margins.

Social justice values experienced a return to favor following the Depression. As Americans experienced dire economic conditions, some returned to Progressive ideals of earlier days, where middle-class Americans seeking to be “good Christians” got involved in tackling the social ills of the day (Shoho, Merchant, & Lugg, 2005). Expanded public school offerings, a ban on child labor, lunch and breakfast programs, and a focus on “child saving” were legacies of the influence of the Progressives at this time (Shoho, Merchant, & Lugg, 2005, p. 50). Unfortunately, these efforts were pushed aside again following World War II. The specter of Sputnik and America’s fears of communism led to a push for a less liberal approach to schooling children. Things shifted yet again during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, when equity became the focus of educational reform efforts.

Educational theorists such as Paulo Freire saw education as a tool that could help marginalized groups understand and transform their social and political worlds (Shoho, Merchant, & Lugg, 2005). However, by the 1980s Americans had returned to an educational paradigm that still dominates today, in which efficiency and standardization are embraced. The needs of minority groups and the willingness to embrace divergent methods of leadership are not included in this dominant discourse (Marshall, 1995; Dillard, 1995). Kohn (2011) describes the impact current school reform efforts have had on public schooling, including an absence of creativity or critical thinking, scripted teaching, and public
humiliation for noncompliance and rewards for obedience—especially for students who are poor and children of color. According to Kohn, this approach “lacks depth and relevance and the capacity to engage students” (p. 3).

Located at the margins, women in education have been vulnerable to the dominant systems and structures created by the hegemonic elite. In our education system, the needs of women attempting to build careers have not been included in the discourse. This section has described some of the formal ways women’s values, leadership models, and access has been limited. It has also shown how the popularity of the dominant ideology and tenets of the business model have continued to prevail in education. The traditional leadership model clearly has deep roots in education and seems destined to remain entrenched despite several periods during which social-justice issues gained energy and goals for education shifted in response. According to Sho ho, Merchant, and Lugg (2005), the position of school administrator was, from the very beginning, designed “to attract individuals who were willing to comply with a view of schooling that validated rather than challenged existing norms” (p. 55). Part of the role of the administrator was to reinforce the dominant values of those who had hired them. Although historically located at the margin, some females have managed to negotiate their lives in order to obtain leadership positions. Finding ways to support women in this negotiation could support recruiting and retention efforts of educational policymakers seeking to address the impending shortage of school administrators while also increasing the diversity of leadership models in our schools. The next section will describe nondominant leadership models and the advantages they offer.
The Lost Possibilities of Nondominant Leadership Models and Alternative Approaches

Terms such as “equity,” “equality,” “fairness” and “adequacy” are frequently used to describe the work of educators who embrace nondominant models of leadership (Shoho, Merchant, & Lugg, 2005). They lead with the hope that the outcomes will be freedom, opportunity, and justice for everyone through education. Nondominant leadership models are driven by social justice and provide a stark contrast to the scientific-management-flavored accountability and efficiency platforms so popular in contemporary education. According to Young and Lopez (2005), a nondominant leadership model “advocates action that results in a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities for those who have been marginalized” (p. 346). In this study, I consider alternative methods for school leadership and explore the changes these nondominant leadership methods might bring if implemented.

For lawmakers and educational leaders seeking qualified applicants to address the growing shortage of principals, women are a logical source for their recruitment efforts, since women are still the majority in the teaching profession. But leadership traits found in female leaders also point to the powerful possibilities an increase in women in positions of leadership could hold. With a greater number of women in the position, women may feel less pressure to conform to dominant models of leadership, such as Taylorism and Theory X, and be able to bring more cooperative and collaborative models into the discourse.

Feminist Leadership

As demonstrated above, from the early days of educational leadership, the positions of principal and superintendent, as well as that of school board member, have been dominated by White males. The leadership of schools has been guided by the values of these elites, and other models for leadership have suffered as a result. One such casualty has been
the alternative values offered by feminist leadership. Often silenced from the discourse, feminist leadership and women’s values provide powerful alternatives to traditional business- and factory-model methods for educational leadership, from structures for student learning to interactions with other educators. The strengths of feminist leadership described in this section contribute to the rationale for exploring in more depth the factors that influence a woman’s decision to pursue educational leadership. While not every female leader can be assumed to practice feminist leadership—and many male leaders have adopted feminist leadership method—for the purposes of this study I will discuss the possibilities of wider acceptance of nontraditional leadership methods as a result of increased inclusion of women in leadership positions.

According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), “reforms of schooling have ignored feminist insights and have failed to challenge male-dominated conceptions of educational purpose, of students, of teachers, of pedagogy, and of the profession of education” (p. 149). Embracing feminist leadership has the potential to move away from schools that reify existing social injustices and toward schools that embrace diverse ideas and support the development of inclusive communities. Marshall and Hooley argue that “Feminist and critical theories offer alternative lenses for examining schools and understanding how the social construction of gender—how confining constructions of masculinity and femininity and classifications according to race/ethnicity, class, and sexual preference limit human possibilities” (p. 150).

According to Shakeshaft (1989), “Women’s styles of administration offer contrast—sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically—to the ways men manage schools” (p. 166). As Shakeshaft said, some of the trademarks of feminist leadership include a nonhierarchical
approach to leadership, a focus on democratic ideals versus competition, school leaders with a strong curriculum focus, a focus on people and relationships, and finally, leadership values rooted in responsibility to and service of those being.

Shakeshaft (1989) described her findings related to women in educational leadership using the following categories: work environment, leadership, communication, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Related to work environment, Shakeshaft’s review of research found that female administrators interact more frequently than men with teachers, parents, and women and their interactions are different, including a less hierarchical manner of rapport such as use of first names and flexible agendas. She cited studies showing that women give more attention to individual differences among students and to the child’s social and emotional development; women followed a “students come first” philosophy. Additionally, Shakeshaft’s review of the research revealed that women are more knowledgeable about the curriculum. Finally, she found that women chose their positions in order to be of service to people, to use professional skills for creative management, and to work with motivated, highly qualified people.

In terms of decision-making styles, Shakeshaft’s (1989) review found that women use more democratic techniques, more cooperative planning strategies, and coalition building and were willing to step out of the hierarchical norm in order to involve others in the decision-making process (p. 187). Interestingly, a study of female superintendents (Pitner, cited in Shakeshaft, 1989) found that women interrupt less and use meetings with subordinates as a forum for considering possibilities. Even the language women use was found to demonstrate their slant toward participatory decision-making. This participatory style was found to increase the influence principals had in their schools and to enhance their power base.
Finally, women were found to be more reflective about the decisions they made and to be strategic when making decisions, leading them to be considered more effective planners by their staff.

Next, Shakeshaft (1989) examined conflict resolution and concluded that “Women will cool conflict out rather than heat it up” and that “Women see conflict as a negative state” (p. 190). Research on children’s play and the traditional role of women as mothers maintaining harmony were cited as potential causes for this difference in style between men and women and how they approach conflict.

Marshall and Hooley (2006) examined findings related to women’s leadership qualities and their potential for implementing alternative leadership models as well. They found:

• Women produce more positive interactions with community and staff.
• Women’s administrative styles tend to be more democratic, inclusive, and conflict-reducing.
• Female secondary principals engage in more cooperative planning.
• Female elementary principals observe teachers more frequently.
• Female superintendents tour the schools more.
• Female principals and superintendents spend more time in the classroom and in discussions with teachers about instruction and academic content (p. 160).

The authors go on to describe the alternative methods of leadership generated by “women’s ways,” including “facilitative, non-hierarchical leadership—power-with rather than power-over—and coalitions” (p. 150).
Grogan’s (1994) study of female principals and assistant principals also echoes familiar themes found in feminist leadership. According to Grogan, a revisioning of career models is needed that includes leadership throughout an organization, rather than relying on traditional linear models with traditional hierarchies. Grogan also found that “feminist and feminist postculturalist approaches to administration provide ways to value nurturing kinds of activities, decisions that are child-centered, the relational aspects of school communities working together and alternative perspectives” (p. 24). Grogan’s study of aspiring superintendents cited strengths in the following areas: people skills, relevant practice, with a focus on curriculum and instruction, and the capacity to bring alternative perspectives to problem-solving and decision-making. Other salient themes revealed in Grogan’s study included leadership traits such as caring; empathy; lateral relationships; the ability to create an environment in which ownership of ideas is encouraged, employees enhance each other, work combines the strengths of all the members, and leaders give credit to employees instead of taking it for themselves; the ability to embrace change; and the capacity for reflection (p. 26). Grogan’s work also identified the importance of relationships to female leaders. “If research into women’s lives and women’s ways has revealed nothing else, it has shown that women’s work has been valued for emphasis on preserving relationships and striving to provide a decent survival for all” (p. 7). Putting people first is a common theme found in analysis of nondominant leadership models.

Jill Blackmore has also extensively examined women in educational leadership, including the strengths women bring to the role and the ways in which they negotiate their own leadership within the dominance of a hegemonic system marked by bureaucracy. In a 1989 study, she found that even though female participants were working within bureaucratic
systems, they still found ways to negotiate their roles by establishing connections with people, between people and ideas, and between people and policies. As a result of these negotiations, gains within the respective systems were realized.

Operating within existing barriers and negotiating their own style of leadership, the women in Blackmore’s study (1989) established communities that were participatory democracies. As leaders of their communities, they felt a strong sense of responsibility to their constituencies. Blackmore found that her participants listened to those who they supervised, valuing their expertise. Importantly—although they clearly functioned in a bureaucratic system—the leaders strongly adhered to a notion of public service that rejected the typical hierarchical culture implicit in most “professional” realms. The women in Blackmore’s study felt a strong responsibility to not only serve their constituents but also to empower them. This is similar to Marshall and Hooley’s (2006) findings, that Black leaders have a strong commitment to their Black students and that there is a correlation between the numbers of Black teachers employed at schools with Black leaders. Blackmore described this as the “politics of care” versus an organization with dependence on subordination. These female leaders are leading in new ways, which open doors for nondominant ideas.

Feminist theorists offer the promise of alternative frameworks. Noddings (1992) has proposed that education might be different if female leadership replaced models grounded in dominant values.

If women had set the standards when schools were founded and curriculums were designed, what might our students be studying today? Perhaps school would be giving far more attention to family and developmental studies. A rigorous study of infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age would be coupled with a generous amount of supervised practice in care of the young and elderly. The maintenance of caring relationships might be a central topic (p. 67).
Noddings (1992) speaks of the dominance of efficiency and output and the silencing of other feminist values. “Family relationships, human relationships, are at the very heart of life, and yet they are considered peripheral to serious learning” (p. 67). An education developed as a result of feminist ideals versus the traditional dominant model would include dramatic differences, namely a strong influence on social justice. First, according to Noddings, education would include a focus on some of the lost values of citizenship. It would recognize our mutual dependence on and respect for each other as neighbors instead focusing exclusively on abstract law. Secondly, teaching would include a focus on social issues. Obviously, this would mean inclusion of matters of concern to women. Noddings further asserts that a shift in focus would include a move away from the aggressive, competitive “warrior model” to a focus on preventing war. She cites the organized work of women throughout history to prevent war. In contrast, images in our culture and curricula often glorify war. Noddings is not recommending that the traditionally male standards be lost, but that female traditions be included when developing curricula. Also, women’s influence on the topic of peace would have to include the end of violence by men toward women. She points out that our culture often uplifts models that are not anti-war. These views would be re-examined in a new educational paradigm.

Feminist leadership methods offer innovative ways to lead our schools. To embrace these methods would require a courageous move away from the limiting hegemonic norms that are firmly rooted in our schools and culture, but to do so would not only open doors for women, but also for multiple models of leadership needed to maintain the integrity of a true democracy. As Blackmore (1989) and Connell (1987) point out, “The cult of technical rationality and calculation has historically become closely associated with a particular form
of dominant masculinity during the 20th century which marginalizes and subordinates not only all forms of femininity, but other masculinities as well” (p. 131). As new ideas related to leadership are accepted, changes in our schools can truly work for the good of all instead of a privileged few. According to Grogan (1994), “Not only are feminist informed alternatives to leadership to be valued for their immediate effects of providing a better education, but feminist approaches to social change are necessary for the possibilities of a more equitable existence in this increasingly diverse society” (p. 33). This summary of the power female leadership has to impact our schools and the potential pool of administrators to be found among female educators strengthens the case for seeking to understand the unique role conflicts faced by women when making career and family choices.

The next section will examine the various forces that work to prevent wider acceptance and implementation of nondominant leadership models.

Stereotypes and Andocentric Biases

When considering the strengths found in feminist leadership models described above, it is important to understand how dominant models of leadership continue to persist so that we will be able to ultimately dismantle this hegemony and create an environment in which the needs of nondominant groups have a voice. As mentioned earlier, the first leaders of our schools reflected dominant values. “Most educational policymakers did not notice, much less seek to correct, gender inequalities” (Tyack, 1995, p. 22). Early governing systems in public education situated power in the hands of nonminority, wealthy, American-born males. These White leaders perpetuated dominant leadership models that served to protect their privileged status. Consequently, school leadership has long been thought to be primarily masculine work. Consideration of how uniquely feminine roles, such as motherhood, would be
assimilated in this context has been nonexistent. According to Grogan (1994), the current discourse “curtails the full participation of many women and some men, and especially women and men of color” and must be disrupted (p. 30). She goes on, “Returning to the idea of the deconstruction of opposites like superintendent/woman, or leader/woman, we must reject the concept of opposition and become open to the more fluid concept of superintendent or leader that includes the possibility of being both and neither of the terms as they are currently understood” (p. 30).

According to Brown (2005), “gender and race predict the types of activities in which school administrators engage, their career paths, and their ultimate accomplishments in the field” (p. 111). Minority leaders may feel that their chances of being selected for leadership positions are fewer due to their nondominant status, but additionally, they may not identify with leadership roles or methods that exist outside the hegemonic norm. Noddings (1992) describes the shared experiences of women: “Strong central tendencies affect women’s experience. Whether or not particular women became mothers or were involved in caregiving occupations, they all faced the expectation that a certain kind of work was appropriate for women” (p. 68). For some women, even the notion that leadership is an appropriate role moves away from what they know. These feelings stem from the cultural norms they have grown up with. Testing these limits can leave them feeling vulnerable and unconnected, and taking risks to move outside these norms are frequently not supported (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997). In order to combat these biases and fit in in a way that minimizes risks, some minority leaders learn to “walk the walk” and “talk the talk” of the dominant discourse. Shakeshaft (1989) agrees, contending that it is expected and necessary that women negotiate the world of White males to succeed.
Formal attempts have been made to mitigate the stereotypes and biases that put leadership roles out of the reach of minority educators, yet for true change to occur these attempts are not enough. Marshall and Hooley (2006) argue that policies such as affirmative action and the Equal Rights Amendment come from liberal feminism. Such laws assume that simply eliminating barriers and placing women in positions will change institutional and cultural values. For assistant principals and for leadership, this only means that women would have the opportunity to become like white male leaders (p. 150).

What is needed is an actual shift, one that can only come from a true revolution, from which entirely different ways to lead can emerge. We need what Kuhn (1996) refers to as a new paradigm, where alternative methods for leading change everything that is known about leadership. For this shift to occur, more must be revealed about the experiences of female leaders. My intention for this study is to contribute to that knowledge.

Hidden, Silenced Barriers

While stay-at-home mothers were once commonplace, today many women struggle to balance the competing demands of career and home. Despite families where both male and female parents work full time, traditionally female duties still wait at the door when women arrive home after a long day at work. For women in education, the thought of advancing to positions of leadership can seem unrealistic, given the work they must also complete outside the hours of a teacher’s workday. When interviewing female administrators, Grogan (1994) concluded that women find it very difficult to negotiate the competing gendered discourses on partnering, mothering, and homemaking. The high work demands and “all-in” manner in which women devote themselves to their students, faculties, and parents can make the prospect of balancing the duties of mother and wife duties with those of a demanding career in administration so daunting as to be a subtle career barrier.
While policymakers have sought to address biased hiring practices in order to overcome discrimination against minority groups, some matters simply do not make it to the policy arena. The family demands of would-be administrators is one such matter. Our society views issues related to tasks such as caring for newborns as “women’s issues” that do not have a place in the current public and political discourse on educational policy. The needs of new mothers simply are rarely talked about. Marshall (2005) explain that when using a feminist critique of policies such as those related to support of working women, it becomes clear that “values and concerns traditionally associated with women are marginalized in the political arena and considered private concerns” (p. 80). For some women, waiting until their children are older and home demands subside is the solution. However, this coping strategy has drawbacks as well. Indeed, Grogan (1994) found that by the time some women are poised to advance in their careers, they have reached the end of their years of service. The silence around these issues ensures that they will continue to be seen as private choices and not policy issues. Silence may also result in a continuing decrease in the pool of nondominant leaders.

According to Marshall and Hooley (2006),

Personal and family considerations affect career decision-making. Educators who observe the long hours, the heavy responsibility, and the strain on the family life of administrators may say, ‘No way, not for me!’ Some have spouses who will resent the time away from family (p. 35).

The fact that many women feel confident in their ability to do the job, yet are deterred from pursuing the role due to competing home demands, offers another reason that dominant models of leadership continue to persist. Without nondominant leadership in our schools, the hegemonic structures that perpetuate stereotypical ideals about home duties as women’s work will no doubt continue, essentially perpetuating the dominance of men in roles of
leadership. Nondominant leadership models that embrace divergent methods of job construction and increased leave benefits for new mothers could lead to increased representation of women in the field as their home and work demands are able to be negotiated.

Some organizations have sought to increase their profitability through the implementation of family-friendly workplace environments. Secret and Sprang (2001) have identified the structural and dynamic components of workplace settings that impact the level of difficulty faced by workers attempting to manage role strain and conflict. Structural components are tangible and include benefits packages, leave policies, wages, and other constant conditions of work. Dynamic components, which are more subjective and therefore harder to identify include such nontangible factors as job autonomy and support networks. The authors caution that dynamic components can counter the impact of structural components. Excellent leave policies, for instance will be less likely to mitigate work/family strain if unsympathetic supervisors or a workplace culture are not supportive. Not surprisingly, the authors found that gender influences the effectiveness of friendly workplace components, as well as age and number of children. Secret and Sprang found that some of the organizational practices shown to decrease the level of strain felt by employees are alternative work arrangements, access to leave time allowances, being able to modify work arrangements, and childcare services. In fact, the researchers cite evidence that for every $1 spent to make these components available to employees, companies and organizations can realize $2 in cost savings. The authors hypothesize that employees who are able to modify their work arrangements, perceive their supervisors to be supportive of employees’ family
responsibilities, and have access to stress-management programs will experience less strain as they seek to balance the demands of work and family.

Secret and Sprang (2001) also found that role strain was associated more with being female; having more and younger children, less job autonomy, and less supervisor support; and lack of alternative work arrangements. Leave-time allowances were shown to directly affect the work-family outcomes measured by the study as well as the employee’s perception of supervisor support. The study reviewed the benefits associated with family-friendly policies, but also illustrated how important it is to focus on the less tangible aspects of work life as well in order to get the maximum benefit. This has implications for educational policymakers and district leaders seeking to recruit and retain principals. Allowing flexible work arrangements and job autonomy can help workers feel less stress. Promoting work environments that are supportive to employees’ family responsibilities can reduce role strain. Allowing principals greater access to their leave benefits can also serve to reduce the impact role conflict has on reducing the role’s attractiveness to potential applicants.

More research is needed to reveal the lived realities of administrators who are attempting to do both jobs well. Identifying the demands faced by these nondominant leaders through qualitative studies may offer insight into the reason fewer women still seek out administrative roles, even when fully capable of doing so. As Grogan (1994) points out, “By removing the researcher from position of authority or expert, advocates of qualitative research concentrate on producing new accounts of individuals’ lives that contribute to a more complete view of social situations” (p. 11). By interviewing women in these situations and allowing them to describe their experiences, researchers can collect nuanced stories that provide a fuller picture than by reporting only observers ideas about the role.
Pressure to Conform

Marshall and Mitchell (1991) examined beginning administrators navigating the political landscape of their new careers. They found that in order for administrators to be successful, they had to “adopt the shared understandings about what is right and proper in their policy environments. Their perceptions of expected behaviors, rituals, and feasible policy options are a perpetual screen that guides their behavior” (p. 397). This screen, referred to as “assumptive worlds,” directed the administrators to find solutions to problems that had limited risk. New administrators felt that in order to succeed it was crucial to know the rules, even the ones that were not written, and follow them. Administrators also felt it critical to understand the values of the school community where they worked and act in congruence with those values. Understanding that these values might shift depending on situational circumstances, administrators seeking success recognized the need to shift and adjust accordingly. It was clear that a lack of adherence to these guidelines would mean damage to or even interruption of their career goals. In short, the authors concluded that this survival practice by administrators “guarantees that conservative forces will prevail in school leadership” (p. 412).

Attempts to disrupt assumptive worlds are avoided by administrators who fear for their position (Marshall & Mitchell, 1991). For female leaders in education, this means accepting the status quo of minimal leave policies and limited alternatives for structuring the role. It also means that by accepting these conflicts, their needs as women are silenced.

Thus, assumptive-worlds rules may be contributing to women’s reticence to demand leave policies and benefits that would minimize conflicts related to career choices. Likewise, alternative arrangements such as job sharing and flex time might be more widely considered
if female administrators didn’t feel as if they must conform to existing policies and structures. Disrupting these assumptions could lead educational leaders and policy makers to uncover effective ways to meet the needs of their employees and help make recruiting and retention more meaningful and effective.

Research by White Men for White Men

Another contributing factor to the ongoing attachment to dominant leadership models lies in the history of educational research. By using a critical lens, one is able to see the ways in which nondominant models of leadership are excluded from popular discourse and therefore resist wide implementation. Shakeshaft (1989) explains that historically, studies about leadership “have only viewed women within a male framework and from a theoretical background formulated on male behavior” (p. 167). Ogawa (2005) is one of many theorists who have attempted to reexamine leadership from a less dominant paradigm—to “step back and view educational leadership from a broader perspective to rethink the persistent issues” (p. 89). Indeed, as Brown (2005) points out, “school administration was initially structured as a ‘manly’ profession” and “research historically reflected this andocentric bias” (p. 110). This belief has influenced all that is considered legitimate knowledge within the field and the related learning materials. All that is “known” and believed about school leadership arises from this dominant discourse. Young and Lopez (2005) contend that

using a feminist-poststructural lens to examine discourse on educational leadership research, one would find that those who have had the power to define good research have primarily been white male researchers; their experiences and perspectives have traditionally provided the basis for most research texts, research funding, publishing opportunities, and so on (p. 346).

In addition to studies of new leadership methods, nondominant researchers outside the dominant paradigm could offer insight into the lack of minority figures in positions of
leadership. Blackmore (1989) describes the existing limited view of educational leadership, one that is rational and hierarchical in which facts are separated from values and gender, race, and class are seen as unproblematic, largely due to the absence of discussion of power and how power impacts social relationships. Blackmore continues,

> By conceptualizing leadership in terms of gender-neutral personal attributes and focusing upon individual merit in apparently value-free contexts, this lack of female “leaders” can be readily attributed to the socio-psychological unsuitability of women, rather than the manner in which educational leadership is conceptualized and practiced (p. 20).

Within the dominant paradigm, new ideas are rarely challenged and dominant ideas prevail. A reframing of research would include alternative approaches and more collaboration across different areas of the field. English (2003) describes the struggle within education between those who seek change and those who hold tightly to the status quo. He describes forums in which scholars debate ideas related to leadership, including those sponsored by the University Council for Educational Administration, the National Conference of Professors of Educational Administration, and the American Research Association. During these debates, according to English, those he describes as modernists discount new ideas as “illogical” when compared to tried-and-true scientific and empirical approaches to education (p. 212). English defines hegemonic modernism as “a discourse in which the rules of modernism have been enshrined as all inclusive and commanding (thus hegemonic). All other alternatives are either considered trivial, inapplicable or otherwise relegated to subservient positions” (p. 248).

According to English (2003), the alternative to modernistic hegemony—which continues to promote one truth and a system based on that which is rational and scientific—would be multi-paradigmatic instead of monistic. This would, ideally, lead to more
integration among researchers, an exchange of ideas, and synergy that could solve the complex problems of education. Researchers would band together based on their shared passions and areas of interest. There would also be movement between groups, such as researchers from curriculum and instruction and administration. Ideas would be discussed and debated, reducing hegemony and the perpetuation of dominant themes. Most importantly, new ideas and ways of thinking would be exposed and added to existing knowledge, thereby making way for nondominant leadership theories to emerge.

**False Consciousness**

Another reason for the continuation of the status quo may be due to what Feinberg (2004) refers to as “false consciousness,” which occurs when nondominant groups adopt the same point of view and values of the dominant class. According to the authors, this obscures a marginalized person’s understanding and consciousness of his or her own class. When the dominant class has successfully established its own way of thinking among most members of the subordinate class, hegemony is created. The authors offer as an example slaves who believe they are the property of their master, or workers who adopt the same values as their bosses. The dominant class is in control, and this control is perpetuated through cultural outlets such as the media, churches, and schools (p. 50). Noddings (1992) asserts that because White men have so long been in positions of power, it is their experiences that define how we think about race, gender, and ethnic equality. The masculine experience is our standard—even, according to Noddings, without our realizing it. It may be that for many members of society, the dominant discourse has become so entrenched that it becomes impossible to recognize the ways in which it keeps us marginalized. Without realizing we are being marginalized, we are apt to accept traditional leadership norms. False consciousness
leads people to believe that they have been given a fair shot as a result of public schooling.

Feinberg and Soltis note that because of this belief, according to Marxism, schools help provide political stability: A hierarchical, autocratic system is maintained, people are happy in their false consciousness, and capitalists continue to get what they need.

Follow the Money

Dominant groups use their resources to maintain their status as the dominant group. According to Emery (2004), corporations in America use their influence (money) to drive the agendas of policymakers. Along with a massive network of organizations, think tanks, and nonprofits, corporations’ interests are promoted as they define our schools as “failing” and in need of rescue. The answers to this crisis include, to name just a few, reforms such as training educational leaders as businessmen, accountability, performance pay, and charter schools. Private business is then positioned to reap the financial gains from endeavors such as textbook and test publishing, creating academies to train superintendents and school boards, and establishing networks of charter schools that operate without the supervision of locally elected officials. The influence of well-funded conservative groups such as the Broad Foundation, the Business Roundtable, the Progressive Policy Institute, the Public Education Network, and others ensure that opportunities for alternative leadership models will continue to be minimal at best. Likewise, policies and job benefits that would support an increase in hiring leaders who are outside the hegemonic elite are silenced and the pressure on those with career aspirations to conform is increased.

Dismantling the Powerful Paradigm

Orthodox Marxists believe that “each social form must have within it the seeds of its own destruction; otherwise basic social change would not occur and the class in power would
continue to sequester and use their power forever” (Feinberg, 2004, p. 54). Marxists believe that one purpose of education is to provide this critique of society in order to assist in the deconstruction of power groups and make way for social change. It is ironic that although the majority of educators, both teachers and administrators, are women, social change to reflect their majority has not been forthcoming. In a career dominated by women (in number), the field lacks leave policies and job structures that would legitimize and address the role conflicts women face when considering career choices. In fact, the literature has illustrated that women often suppress their conflicts and acquiesce to the status quo created and maintained by the dominant class which has held power over us since the start of public education in America. We can find guidance in the literature for dismantling the powerful paradigm that has silenced the needs and experiences of women. We must be able to do what Blackmore (1989) described and “activate networks of interest both inside and outside the bureaucracy, a traditional strength of the feminist movement” (p. 38). Marshall (2005) contends that a lack of connection between education policy and the needs of those the policy impacts can cause frustration and anger, which may compel educators to take up the role of activist required for change to occur.

Lugg and Shoho (2006) also urge an activist stance, similar to historical figures such as educational theorist and analyst George Counts, and work together to inspire and promote a shift to what education can be rather than what it currently is—change that promotes social justice rather than the managerial status quo method currently endorsed. Lugg and Shobo note Counts’ insistence that “educators not only get involved with politics, but that they lead political change” (p. 201). Within the current dominant models of leadership, where the status quo is largely unquestioned and punitive measure are employed to maintain the status
quo, the emergence of what Counts described as “an education that will reveal the deficiencies in our heritage and the dangers threatening the principle of equality in the contemporary world” (Counts, 1978, p. 35) is unlikely. According to Lugg and Shoho, the current educational environment is even more politically contentious than during Counts’ era, and only the truly committed will emerge from the plethora of obstacles and barriers that confront leaders who would fight for the needs of the nondominant: “Less committed leaders will opt to remain in more peaceable political waters, blending into the environment of inequity and injustice to protect their job” (p. 202).

Conclusion

The literature reviewed above describes the potential of female educators to successfully lead schools. It identifies role conflicts that are significant when women in education make career choices. The absence of these conflicts from policymaking discourse has been shown to stem from continued forces such as stereotypes, biases, false consciousness, and pressure to conform with dominant beliefs in order to realize career goals. To break out of this paradigm, the literature encourages female educators to become activists, not just by getting involved in politics, but by becoming leaders of political change. To do so, women are encouraged to form policy networks and to use policy windows as an opportunity to establish those networks. To support these goals and inform leaders and policymakers in education, this study examines the experiences of female educators and the conflicts they face when making career choices. Recommendations will be made that could foster the advancement of women in the field and lead to policies that serve the needs of all they impact, not just dominant groups.
According to Mertz (2006), women represent the greatest untapped source of candidates for public school administrative positions. I hope this study will contribute to policy changes that could help us tap into that resource more fully while also creating more positive working and living conditions for the women who fill those positions.
CHAPTER 3

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study seeks to delve more deeply into the role conflict faced by women trying to balance their careers as principals with family demands, specifically motherhood. Current educational leaders and policymakers see potential candidates for the principalship either staying in their current roles as teachers (Adams & Hambright, 2004; Williamson & Hudson, 2003; Loder, 2005; Wynn, 2005) or waiting until later in their careers to assume the roles of principal with only a few years to serve before retirement. Research reviewed in Chapter 2 illustrated that the strengths of feminist leadership are well suited to address the daunting challenges faced by today’s educational leaders. Chapter 2 also described why acceptance of feminist leadership has been slow, the causes of which include systems for leadership that were developed by men for men, leaving women and other nondominant groups outside the policymaking arena. This explains why, despite efforts to recruit and retain candidates to the principalship, a shortage persists and is growing. Failure to examine this shortage as a women’s issue has led to a lack of success in addressing the issue. While policymakers can examine data to see the “graying of the profession,” an examination of the deeper reasons for the phenomenon is needed so that strategies will address the dilemmas that cause the shortage.
Selection of Qualitative Methodology

To fully understand the issue of role conflict for women school principals, a qualitative study is an appropriate and logical choice. The feelings and emotions women experience when grappling with major life choices such as career and motherhood defy quantitative data collection strategies. A survey, for example, might only capture the decision of a woman to assume a principalship and her age. Women’s experiences can be deeply emotional and require more open-ended methods to assess. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985),

Human phenomena are themselves the subject of controversy. Classical social scientists would like to see “human phenomena” limited to those social experiences from which [scientific] generalizations may be drawn. New-paradigm inquirers, however, are increasingly concerned with the single experience, the discovery, with that most powerful of all threats to conventional objectivity, feeling and emotion (p. 179).

To capture the women’s stories and voices, I needed to listen as they told their story. Themes and patterns were revealed, and the interview and observation process helped me identify what is important and to generate working hypotheses. These were modeled after Piotrkowski’s (1979) landmark study of how families are influenced by work. The themes and patterns were revealed only because I allowed participants to speak without interruption. Creating hypotheses ahead of time about what influences women in their decisions about motherhood or career would have been premature, since there could have been factors and complexities that I had not considered. Piotrkowski cautioned against this when reflecting on her own study: “The premature isolation of specific variables and exclusion of others may have precluded gaining an understanding of the family as a complex system” (p. 288).

Responding to these cautions and avoiding development of a rigid hypothesis helps to bypass the dangers described by Lincoln and Guba (2000): “There are two dangers inherent in the
conventional texts of scientific method: that they may lead us to believe the world is rather simpler than it is, and that they may reinscribe enduring forms of historical oppression” (p. 184).

Qualitative methods prevent assumptions about the conceptual framework from obscuring the truths of the participants. Where factors arose that were outside of the framework I had drafted, the qualitative approach allowed for a reflective turn. Instead of forcing the participant’s experiences to fit into predetermined categories, such as on a survey, qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to change direction and capture the nature of the phenomenon. As Dean, Eichhorn, & Dean (1967) point out, “The field worker can constantly modify his categories, making them more suitable for the analysis of the problem he is studying” (p. 22).

Site and Sample

The study sample consisted of female principals who were mothers and female principals who were not.

I chose my own school system as the site for the study. Patton (2002) describes the value of directly observing participants by seeing them in their role firsthand. He instructs researchers to “describe the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspectives of those observed” (p.262). He goes on to encourage closeness with subjects: “Direct, personal contact with and observations of a setting have several advantages” (p. 262). These advantages include understanding the context within which people act, less danger of reliance on prior conceptions, and an opportunity to see things that may routinely escape the awareness of people in the setting. For these reasons, I
chose my own school system as the study site. Working in my own district allowed me to reap the benefits described by Patton as well as to ensure that the site was what Marshall and Rossman (2006) refer to as “realistic.” It also facilitated access to participants. Because I conducted the research while employed full time as a principal, and due to the economic limitations of taking time off and travel, it was important that study logistics be as convenient as possible. Traveling to another district would have limited the time I was able to spend with participants and increased my dependence on methods such as surveys and questionnaires to collect data. As Geer (1964) described her fieldwork with undergraduate students, “to read what the students say is not as compelling as experiencing it in the flesh, hearing the voices, seeing the gesture and expression” (p. 150).

This site was also appropriate because it is among the largest districts in the state and the nation, and realistic in that it contains a diverse set of schools that led to a variety of experiences for participants, making the results more generalizable to other female principals across the United States. Participants’ principalships were likely to vary widely, as the schools in the district are quite diverse. The district has high-poverty schools (over 65% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch status), as well as affluent schools (less than 5% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch status). The district contains schools that are suburban, rural, urban, and metropolitan, and spans several townships and a wide geographic area. The district contains traditional-calendar as well as year-round schools, magnet schools, and alternative schools. The schools also vary in the challenges they face. While some of the schools receive praise and achievement, such as being recognized as Magnet School of the Year, other schools face challenges such as being in the throes of “District
Improvement” due to persistent failure to meet the achievement requirements of No Child Left Behind.

These diverse working conditions, as well as the diversity of the principals interviewed, afforded rich and varied data collection from the participants that enhanced the transferability of the study to other female principals. Their experiences are likely to be representative and inclusive of the diverse experiences faced by their colleagues across the nation. Additionally, the large number of principals employed the district increased my ability to find an adequate number of willing participants for each of the four categories above and a diverse set of women within each.

Entry and Access

The first step in gaining access for this study was to contact the district office to request permission to conduct the research study with their employees. Several of my colleagues had completed doctoral programs and have used staff members of the district for study participants. School system leaders have historically been supportive of staff members seeking to conduct research within the district. An initial meeting with a district representative was arranged to discuss the planned study and identify any potential restrainers. The representative had no objections to the study as it was presented and offered herself for further support and advice as needed throughout the process. Once IRB approval was obtained, a letter was sent to the district’s superintendent requesting permission to use the district as the site for the study and its principals as participants (see Appendix A). The letter included details related to the purpose of the study, the number of participants needed, the frequency and duration of the interviews at the workplace, guarantees that data would be gathered during non-work times, and assurances of anonymity for participants. I also allotted
time in the project to meet with district-level personnel to answer any questions or address any concerns if there was a problem with receiving permission to proceed to selecting participants.

Once permission was granted by the district, I created letters of invitation to possible participants. The letter identified me as their colleague and explained the purpose and rationale for the study (see Appendix B). Following feedback from the IRB process, I also included a much more detailed consent form for the participants with the letters of invitation (See Appendix C). I had concerns about conducting the research with participants with whom I had an existing relationship; these are described in the next section on researcher role and ethics. The packet included a self-addressed stamped envelope for participants to return signed consent forms to make responding easy for participants. I followed up with an email and phone call to participants a short time after sending the invitation and consent packet. I also encouraged participants to contact me with any follow-up questions or concerns related to their participation in the study and I was prepared to make adjustments and be flexible to accommodate their needs. Still, understanding that making a commitment to participate in the study was a tremendous time commitment on the part of the participants, the data were skewed to the principals who had fewer time constraints and who felt that they could afford the time it took to participate. I drafted a follow-up letter (See Appendix D), but after mailing the initial invitations, I was relieved to have enough participants and did not need to send it.

The next step was determining the best site for the initial interview. I needed to alert participants ahead of time to potential emotional reactions to the topics we would be discussing, which I will describe further in the next section. For this reason, I let participants
select the site for the first interview, as well as the most suitable time. In earlier attempts at data collection, I learned about the importance of making certain that neither the time nor location of visits with potential participants inconveniences either party (see Appendix E). For instance, calling participants while they were working or conducting interviews at their workplace could be perceived as conducting personal business on school-system time, which could conflict with district personnel guidelines. Alvesson (2003) points to such concerns associated with access, which are both ethical and political in nature. Once the participants and I had agreed on a time and place to meet, I assembled a schedule for the initial data collection.

**Researcher Role, Reciprocity, and Ethics**

As a silenced, underrepresented group, participants shared stories about their competing roles of mother and principal that have not been widely represented in mainstream discourse on educational leadership, where the dominant research has been on achievement and efficiency. I hoped that through my role as researcher, interviewing and observing participants, I could capture these stories with integrity and authenticity. Van Maanen (1988) acknowledges that “there is no way of hearing, seeing, or representing the world of others that is absolutely, universally valid or correct.” Lincoln (1993), however, talks in great detail about the obligation of researchers seeking to represent the voice of underrepresented groups in ethnographic studies. Four specific responsibilities are detailed to support a researcher who hopes to do justice to the group they seek to study.

First and foremost, my extensive review of the literature in Chapter 2 was necessary to ensure that I was adequately prepared to make meaning of the information I collected from the participants, but also to be certain that my methods revealed the voices of the participants
and did not impose meaning on them or alter their voices or experiences. As Lincoln (1993) describes in her guidelines for qualitative researchers,

Alternative epistemologies and methods will become the standard for engaging in such research. Traditional epistemologies and methods grounded in white andocentric concerns, and rooted in values which are understood to be inimical to the interests of the silenced, will fail to capture the voices needed (p. 32).

I had concerns about my ability to refrain from exerting influence during the interviews. Because I had so much in common with participants, I realized that there would be a tendency for me to participate rather than listen. Also, I had casual friendships with some of the participants as a result of time spent working together in the district. My natural inclination would be to relate to them in a friendly, intimate manner. Piotrkowski (1979) highlights this as a potential benefit, writing,

Once we are aware that the crucial procedural feature of qualitative research is to establish rapport and understanding between participants and researcher, the personal characteristics of the interviewer become, not another source of unreliability, but a possible asset to establishing the relationship (p.296).

Wade (1984) describes the difficulty in remaining detached when establishing relationships with participants:

This stance was crucial to my image in the field where I had to present myself as a detached investigator and as the university administrator committed to the general well-being of black students. Observers (especially in active and affective participation in a setting) may relax any structure to be the “totally unaligned” researcher. The nature of participant observation calls on the investigator to react to subjects emotionally and behaviorally. To present oneself as an unalterably neutral character in the course of the subjects’ life events courts an impression that the observer is gullible, amateurish, inane, or uncommitted” (p. 219).

Still, for the sake of the study I resolved to do my best to be vigilant about not making assumptions or drawing meaning from the responses of the participants based on my own
bias, which would further exclude their voices from the social and scientific discourse (Lincoln, 1993). Collecting authentic accounts from participants, I knew, would require patience in addition to discipline. Again, Lincoln (1993) describes the role of the researcher:

It will be the inquirer’s role to seek out stories, to engage in listening both active and patient. As women discovered in the consciousness-raising groups of the 1970s, it sometimes takes an extended amount of time for the silenced to seek and find their voices, and to frame their stories (p.34).

Maintaining a strict adherence to my role as researcher, as listener, and truly capturing the voices of the women as they reveal themselves was a great challenge and an important ethical consideration.

In qualitative inquiry, one must monitor and manage potential conflicts of interest. Because I was conducting research in the district where I am employed, this was an issue to be managed. I knew that I would have to strictly adhere to the arrangements that we had established collaboratively for when and where the research would take place. Like Wade (1984), I had to be deliberate about identifying which hat I was wearing, not only for participants’ sake, but also to ensure that I was conducting an ethical study. I resisted the temptation to follow up on an idea or an emerging theme when I happened upon some of the participants in settings other than our official interviews. I also resisted temptation to let personal relationships with participants tempt me to relax my procedures. For the sake of protecting participants’ safety, I adhered strictly to our scheduled meeting times. The subjects we would be discussing carried the potential for emotional reactions for both of us—reactions that participants had the right to determine when and how they processed. As I discovered from my first attempt at the study (see Appendix E), the content of the interviews could veer into unanticipated depths that stirred deep emotions not in only the participant, but
also in me. As Piotrkowski (1979) notes, “It is presumptuous to think that while those we study change, we ourselves—as researchers—remain untouched by the process” (p. 288).

An additional ethical consideration to be mindful of related to the accessibility of the participants was the work conflict that this accessibility could cause. Adhering strictly to agreed-upon times and locations for interviewing would serve to protect participants and myself from potential backlash and negative consequences from our supervisors, who would not likely agree with conducting research while “on the clock.” The job of principal is often unpredictable in nature, and though we might assume that we had time for a quick follow-up interview, it would be inappropriate to conduct such meetings while we were supposed to be giving our full attention to our schools. Fortunately, the participants’ schedules were accommodating and we were able to conduct interviews during off-work times when such conflicts could be avoided.

The final ethical consideration involved anonymity of the participants. Again, I had existing relationships with many of the participants, and maintaining separation of my role as researcher and friend was crucial not only to gain quality data, but also to protect participants’ emotional safety. I originally intended to use pseudonyms, for participants, but based on IRB feedback, the identification of each woman was simply limited to “participant.” In addition, steps were taken to secure all data collected that could reveal participants’ identity, including locking file cabinets, shredding old notes, password-protecting all electronic files, and destroying any pictures or tapes that were not going to be used as supporting documentation. Because assuring anonymity for focus-group participation was impossible, focus groups were omitted from the original study design, based on IRB feedback. .
I hoped to provide some minimal reciprocity to participants for their time and the intrusion into their home and work settings. I recognize that this is a huge sacrifice for them. Financially, I am limited to my own funds to provide rewards. Therefore, while I do plan to purchase small gifts for participants following completion of the study, I also plan to look to the pioneers of qualitative research for ideas about how to make reciprocity available. Piotrkowski (1979) describes the benefits her participants experienced as a result of having someone to talk to about their frustrations and challenges as mothers. Similarly, Doppler (1998) has written about the camaraderie that was established when she, as a gay woman, was a listener for teens who were also gay. I hoped that for participants, the opportunity to discuss their lives would be rewarding, and that having an opportunity to share their stories with another female principal would be beneficial.

A Topic Worthy of Exploration

As I conducted the interviews, I was struck by how eager the participants were to be involved in the project. In graduate classes, professors had cautioned that finding subjects might prove challenging. Not so in this case. The women were excited and frequently asked me what I was learning in my work. They would often greet me at the first interview by saying, “I definitely have something to say about this topic!” As I made my way through the interviews, certain themes became common, and often the experiences described shared similarities that become hauntingly familiar. I had anticipated hearing participants describe the long hours and the time spent away from loved ones. I had not anticipated that the women would talk so much about the changes in the job over the past decade, consistent with the NAESP study. While I had experienced loneliness as a principal, I did not expect this to be common among other principals. One principal described her life prior to the principalship as
highly social, always doing things with friends, but said that her life since had been reduced to just working. She said friends didn’t even bother calling anymore, because they knew she would not answer. She was not alone. There were also struggles with regrets; some participants wondered whether they had derailed their personal lives for the sake of a successful career. This theme was brought home poignantly in the stories of the women and became one of the most salient in the analysis of the data.

While I didn’t set out to recruit ultra-successful principals, later analysis of the data revealed that my sample contained successful women, some of who are considered to be at the top of their field (see Appendix G). The duality of outstanding success professionally and personal lives marked by significant gaps and challenges would be a pattern that I would see repeated as I progressed through the interview process. The women bravely shared stories of their work as a priority and described some of the consequences related to that prioritizing. From weight gain to high blood pressure to sleepless nights, ended marriages and isolated weekends, the stories of personal sacrifice and consequence were compelling.

The purpose of this study was to legitimize and allow the experiences of the women to be heard. The interviews revealed that in many cases, participants were hiding what was happening. Their experiences were validated as they shared, sometimes through tears, how they had silently wrestled with the competing demands of home and work. One principal whose marriage ended just as she was assuming her first principalship described keeping that secret; the truth was revealed more than a year later, when employees of her school began seeing her husband out in public with another woman. A staff member approached and she described being relieved that it was finally out in the open. The staff member wondered why the woman had felt she had to carry that burden in private. She explained, “I was so afraid
that if I messed up or if I weren’t at my best, people would think, ‘Well, gosh, she’s dealing with this divorce and she’s dealing with this and no wonder she’s so whatever . . . ’ and I didn’t want anybody to ever be able to say that.” Another principal cried while watching students perform, thinking of her missed opportunity for motherhood, while parents and teachers assumed she was moved by the talent of her students. I hope that my study will give women permission to talk with their colleagues and new principals entering the field about the personal toll being a principal can take—in itself a valuable type of reciprocity.

Data Collection and Recording Strategies

To understand the complex set of circumstances that shape a woman’s decision to have a career or to be a mother or do both, I used interviews, life history and observation. I planned to mirror Piotrkowski’s (1979) method of starting with an open-ended question (“Tell me about it”) and then proceed to, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe, let the story “unfold, cascade and emerge.” Like Geer (1964), I had a working hypothesis of variables I predicted would emerge; however, I included the flexibility to change course to respond to emerging, unpredicted ideas presented by the participants. By using this open-ended approach to my interviews, I hoped to capture the true experience of the participants, not my idea of what their experience had probably been. Piotrkowski describes her own decisions as researcher, asserting that use of this method makes certain the research is inclusive of the truth for participants, whereas more structured methods can silence those experiences and leave them absent from the discourse about the phenomenon:

The straightforward questions that may appear valid on their face would have obscured complex processes that needed to be explored in greater depth. While it is important to know what people think about the issue, it is equally important to know what lies behind a simple yes or no answer (p. 289).
Dean, Eichhorn and Dean (1967) affirm that interviewing and observation are most appropriate for this type of study:

Among the most frequent uses of observation and interviewing are the following: testing of hypotheses where structured methods cannot be employed; reconstruction of an event or series of events; case histories of an individual, an organization, or even a community; and pilot inquiries into new problem areas where the purpose is the production of hypotheses rather than the verification of them (p. 20).

After the first review of my IRB application, I received support and assistance from Dr. Barbara Goldman, Pre IRB Consultant for the School of Education at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Dr. Goldman advised having a working set of questions and to make those questions available to participants with the invitation to participate (see Appendix H). The list became quite long, yet proved helpful in making certain that all the areas I hoped to explore were in fact discussed.

When interviewing the subjects, I planned for each initial interview to last at least one hour. I planned to record the interviews using a digital voice recording device, as long as participants gave permission. If not, I planned to take written notes during the interviews. I hoped to truly capture the experiences of the women through these interviews. As Grogan (1994) asserts, this qualitative research method allows for the production of “new accounts of individuals’ lives that contribute to a more complete view of social situations” (p.9). I planned to assemble digital recordings and my notes into electronic files. The data collected from the initial interviews addressed big questions leading to the development of more focused and specific questions, following the path of Marshall and Rossman’s (2006) Conceptual Funnel.

All of the interviews lasted well over an hour and, in some cases, up to three hours. All of the participants were willing to have their interviews recorded; even so, I found it
helpful to take notes while recording to assist me later when organizing the results into themes. Additionally, because the interviews were recorded, I was able to listen to the interviews multiple. This repeated exposure was very helpful in identifying common themes and salient points.

Some follow-up interviews were scheduled. According to Piotrkowski (1979), “the scheduling of at least two interviews can prove invaluable. It enables the investigator to review the first interview for important areas missed or insufficiently discussed and permits misunderstandings to be corrected.” As time and funding were available, and based on “assessment of the quality and type of information such an interview . . . provide[d]” (Piotrkowski, 1979), second interviews were then scheduled. When there was saturation on a given aspect of the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I knew that collecting further information would not be necessary. In other cases, subsequent interviews were scheduled to clarify points or collect additional data for themes that had emerged through the data-analysis process.

Data-Analysis Strategies

As stated above, data collection and analysis are intertwined. In this study, I was looking for relationships between the role of principal and the role of mother and underlying themes connected to those relationships. Some ideas from the literature review emerged as potential areas of influence; however, I hesitated to develop categories for data coding prior to the start of the collection of the data, because I did not want to be biased in my observations or interviews. Defining categories ahead of time can be dangerous because those categories “have their own biases, for what one uncovers depends on the initial categories” (Piotrkowski, 1979, p. 308). I planned to take a more emergent intuitive stance
(Crabtree & Miller, 1992). This required me to rely heavily on my “intuitive and interpretive capacities” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 155). As I reviewed the transcripts from the interviews and notes collected during the observations, I was able to do so without a preconstructed template, but instead by “searching for segments of text to generate and illustrate categories of meaning” (Crabtree and Miller in Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.155). Informal analysis began while stories were being told and I listened for emerging themes. Schatzman and Strauss (cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2006) describe the process that a researcher follows as she begins to recognize patterns and themes when collecting data and “discovering significant classes of things, persons and events and the properties which characterize them.” Over time, the researcher begins to make meaning of the raw data. Categories become evident and the researcher is ready to being coding the data to prepare for interpretation.

I originally planned to seek support from the Odum Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for assistance with coding the data. Using the ATLAS.ti program, I planned to load responses from each of the participants during the interviews as well as notes from observations onto a virtual workspace where data would be laid out across the space. The program offers the ability to move and manipulate the content around as appropriate. I felt the virtual workspace would allow me to see patterns of ideas and relationships among different responses and actions and then assign codes to data based on identified categories. When planning the study, I felt this would be necessary to capture my ideas with ease and efficiency. Marshall and Rossman (2006) advise “writing early and often.” However, I found the transcription process for each of the interviews to be quite a lengthy process. Because all of the interviews were at least an hour, and in some cases up to...
three hours, the transcription process took up to six hours for each participant. The intimate experience of transcribing each of the interviews completely, as well as listening to the interview multiple times, as offered me the opportunity to identify themes. Using digital software for transcribing, I was also able to make notes of which passages of text to link to those themes. This method of data organization was sufficient, and therefore I concluded that use of the ATLAS.ti would be unnecessary. Although I established a tentative conceptual framework derived from the literature review, I was committed to maintaining the flexibility of an inductive approach to truly capture participants’ accounts.

As these patterns, themes, and categories were revealed, I assigned them to categories that represented my analysis of the themes as they related to the conceptual framework. Patton (2002) cautions against forcing data into categories. I realized that I needed to remember this and, if I found that data were not obviously aligned with the categories I had established, be ready to rethink my categories. As Dean, Eichhorn, and Dean (1967) note, “The field worker can constantly modify his categories, making them more suitable for the analysis of the problem he is studying.”

The final task in the data analysis was interpreting the information. According to Spradley (1979),

> The essential core of ethnography is this concern with the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand. Some of these meanings are directly expressed in language; many are taken for granted and communicated only indirectly through word and action. But in every society people make constant use of these complex meaning systems to organize their behavior, to understand themselves and others, and to make sense out of the world in which they live. These systems of meaning constitute their culture; ethnography always implies a theory of culture (p.5).

I planned to present the information gathered from each participant in the form of a story. Policymakers and educational leaders could be influenced by the stories of those on the
margins who have suffered the unintended consequences current policies; I hoped that this would help educators explore ways that “analysts of politics and policy might reframe the dominant standard stories to encompass the realities of children, families, and educators and discourse that supports social justice (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005, p.71). As Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin (2005) point out, researchers and policy analysts must be the ones to illuminate the pitfalls of current policies. This can be done effectively through the use of what they refer to as “lived realities” (see APPENDIX H). Marge Foreman, lobbyist for NCAE (North Carolina Association of Educators) agrees: “Legislators need to hear the research, but they also need to hear the personal stories. They need to see a face on it” (M. Foreman, personal communication, April 23, 2009). My responsibility will be to use my writing skills to make sense of the findings, offer explanations for what was discovered by drawing conclusions and making inferences, and present the information in a compelling way that honors the voices of the women.
CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS: BREAKING THE SILENCE

The purpose of this project was to investigate more fully the experiences of female school principals when their roles as administrators intersect with their roles as mothers. This study was needed, as much energy has gone into investigating the power of feminist leadership and the barriers women face in acquiring positions of leadership—yet the stories of successful principals’ personal sacrifices and consequences, regrets, and coping strategies are absent from the literature. The question of “having it all” was also at the forefront of my own life as I turned 41, hit my 10th year as a principal, and began to struggle personally with the fleeting possibility of motherhood while considering the coping strategies I have developed and wondering how other women in my field were dealing with the same dilemma. I wondered whether my career had affected my current circumstances, and I wondered about the lives of women I knew who were principals and mothers. I wanted to delve more deeply into the subject of women in our field and discuss topics that, up to now, have been considered inappropriate or irrelevant to the academy and to policymakers. Successful recruitment and retention of the best leaders cannot happen without acknowledgement of and attention to these issues.
As discussed in Chapter 1, women are now significantly represented in the principalship; in North Carolina, women outnumber men. In the district where the data for this study were collected, there are almost twice as many female principals as males.

Nationally, the number of female principals has also risen. The increase in the number of women principals, as well as the shift in the age of entry into the role, has created new conflicts. Whereas women in the 1970s were often prohibited by their districts from being mother and teacher simultaneously, new generations of women are now navigating an unpaved path to find where their identity lies when assuming the role of principalship during the same time span when women traditionally become married and start families.

Organizing Themes

This study involved 13 principals at various stages of their careers. Some were mothers at the time they became principals. Some were principals who then became mothers. Some of the principals were not mothers. Data were collected through interviews and were analyzed for salient themes using a conceptual framework developed from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Using the study of Bradbury and Gunter (2006), in which “complementary factors” and “competing factors” were identified, the stories of the participants were analyzed to examine these elements with regard to family systems, work systems and the integration of work and family lives. As data were analyzed, the respondents’ stories showed the various ways being a principal can intersect with a woman’s role as a mother. I noticed how the path to motherhood was influenced by a woman’s work as an administrator and organized the data accordingly around those pivotal points. Like participants in the Bradbury and Gunter study, my participants were principals. In contrast to their study, however, mine included both women who were mothers and women who were
not. While recognizing the factors that supported these women so that they could be mothers and principals simultaneously, this study went further to examine the consequences when balance cannot be found, the regret when hard choices have been made, and the cost to those involved when one role intersects in an unyielding fashion with the other. These became the organizing themes for the data analysis.

In the first section, I demonstrate the ways in which the demands of the principalship have changed. The internal and external pressures experienced by participants will be explored, as well as the consequences. Lack of personal agency, health issues, social isolation, and difficulties with establishing and maintaining a family were the consequences identified by participants as a result of their careers. In addition, I explore the consequences unique to the participants who were also mothers. The competing demands and divided priorities participants faced were explored, along with the consequences.

In the second section, I present the experiences of women who are building both successful careers and families. For these women, key factors emerged that contributed to their success. A strong sense of personal agency—believing that they could do it—was key. Having the support of family, colleagues, and supervisors was also essential. Integration of work and family life also emerged as a critical component for these women. And finally, establishing and maintaining personal boundaries that kept work in proper perspective was identified repeatedly as crucial.

In the third section, the ways in which being a mother complements work as a principal and serves to elevate the job status will be examined. Through their careers in educational administration, leadership is reframed. Balancing motherhood and the principalship increased the level of credibility the participants felt they had with parents.
They had a heightened sense of empathy for and connection with the experiences of a wide range of stakeholders. Stories of how participants without children dealt with this difference will also be examined. Being a mother also served to ground participants, and those stories will be reviewed along with the contrasting experiences of participants without children who experienced regret. I will then focus on the advice participants had for women just entering the field on the topic of balancing the roles of mother and principal.

A Changing Job

As the NAESP survey (Protheroe, 2008) reviewed in Chapter 2 demonstrated, fewer principals are staying in their jobs due to an increase in demands and the longer hours required. As reported by some of the participants, the demanding nature of the job made dreams of motherhood seem unattainable. For some of participants, getting their first principalship was a reality check. One described it this way: “I think when I became principal, I knew that this is no joke. This is hard stuff and, you know, I still leave here every day going, ‘God, I should have looked at the data, I should have . . . ’ There are so many things that I should have been doing but there’s only so much you can do in a day. I think until you’re in it, nobody knows how much time you spend.”

The demands of the job are extensive, and perhaps the greatest demand principals face is the amount of time needed to be successful. For some, pressure stems from high-stakes testing and accountability. For others, it comes from the leadership culture within their district, which expects principals to be highly visible and accessible to stakeholders. Some principals reported pressure to work at a higher level because, as women, they still felt there was something they had to prove. For other principals, upon reflection, they concluded that a great deal of the pressure was self-induced and ultimately a boundary that they would have to
negotiate to sustain a long career. These various pressures and the way they have impacted the demands of the principalship are described below.

Pressure

Bradbury and Gunter (2006) reference the pressure felt by female administrators to perform their roles successfully, and how this conflicts with motherhood at times, pulling them from their families. The literature review also included findings of the NAESP study (Protheroe, 2008) where surveyed principals reported the principalship’s being a hard role to recruit for due to long hours, increasing work responsibilities, and work-related stress. With these findings as the framework, the participants’ stories were analyzed. Many shared the feeling of being pressured. In some cases, pressure stemmed from external demands, while in others the participants felt that it was self-imposed—in some cases feeling as if they “had something to prove,” yet acknowledging that it was pressure they were placing on themselves.

External Pressures

In the principalship, great pressure exists at all times. According to some of the study participants, who echoed the NAESP survey (Protheroe, 2008), this has increased greatly in the last 10 years. One principal who recently left her post feels that the job has changed dramatically since she first became a principal 10 years ago. Part of the changes stemmed from extreme pressure to get good test scores leading to longer hours at work:

When our school went on the list as one of the schools below 70% proficiency, that was devastating for me. To go to every Principal’s Meeting and see your school’s name up there, it was devastating, because I knew how hard I’d been working and I knew how hard the staff had been working. Those things just stress me out and I become overwhelmed with looking at the data and thinking about what we could do differently. I’m a perfectionist I think. When things aren’t perfect, I just work more.
For some principals, even if they knew they needed to step back and make time for other priorities in their lives, the pressure of high-stakes accountability proved too powerful to ignore. For some, the fear went as far as being afraid of ultimately losing their jobs: “Just being fearful of, if we don’t show results, what impact is it going to have on me and as the parent who carries the insurance for her family, that is a huge stressor.” Regardless of how good a job the principals felt they were doing, they knew that without good test scores, their jobs were at risk.

Another principal at a school whose academic results were not meeting expectations described why she was hesitant to pursue motherhood: “When I said I was going to be trying to have a baby, that was when the school became designated ‘Low Performing.’” While she acknowledged that other factors also influenced her delay, she remarked,

[When] the school became Low Priority, I already didn’t have it as a priority, but it definitely couldn’t move to the head of the list at that point because I couldn’t be out on maternity leave when I’ve got a school that’s Low Performing, and the staff was [needing] a lot of monitoring and a lot of support and we’re putting in all these tights and we’re building in all this accountability as a school. Things were so difficult at school that I never would have even considered taking off six weeks or longer.

She talked about coworkers who would ask her when she and her husband would be having a baby and explaining to them how her work was influencing the delay: “That’s what I told them. ‘Ya’ll want me to have a baby; you’ve got to raise improvement. Raise improvement, raise the achievement.’” Though she was saying those things to her staff in a joking way, she admits that their status as a Low Performing School and how that might impact motherhood was definitely on her mind:

That was in my mind, that if this does happen during this time period, you know, it’s gonna have to be managed ‘cause if you have a baby you need to be there for that baby, but if you are in a school in School Improvement you cannot check out and not be heard from for six weeks.
Stress levels and external pressures were significantly higher for principals of schools deemed Low Performing. A heightened level of stress was also noted among principals working in year-round schools. The challenges associated with the demands of year-round schools seemed to exacerbate the difficulties of this already difficult job. One principal, who had since become principal of a traditional school, described her considerations of motherhood while she was assigned to a year-round school:

I think being a year-round principal and being a parent would have been exceptionally challenging. Like I’m behind right now, but at least by the end of this week I will feel a little bit caught up. In year-round, there’s never this time [spring break]. The longer I stayed in year-round the harder it [got]. You just can’t be effective. Performing at my optimum level just wasn’t really possible and I don’t know that it’s possible for anybody in year-round. Somebody has to do something for year-round principals, because it’s really not humane, especially if you are in a school that is struggling. I think if I become a mother now [that I am a principal at a traditional school] I do think I would feel less of the “I’m not feeling effective anywhere I am” kind of conflict that I feel every working mother has to feel at a certain extent, but I think it is definitely greater for women in leadership and I would assume that even more so [for] women in leadership in year-round schools.

Pressure related to student achievement was a common theme among the participants. In addition to needing to make results happen in a high-stakes testing environment, principals also describe the need to be visible at all times in their schools as an overwhelming demand of the job.

You’ve Got to Be There

One of the demands described by the principals was with pressure to be visible at all times, both during and after school. A principal of a high-profile middle school described feeling pressure to be at her school all the time, much to the shock of a fellow male middle school principal:

When I first came here I lost it for a while in terms of my contact with people because I wanted to make sure I was at everything. I wanted to be at everything, be available all the time, you know. I was going to everything but I felt like I was really losing
myself. I talked with a fellow male middle school principal. He is good for me because he is like, “You do what?! You go to what?! No!” I [would] want to stay at everything. I would get here at school at about 6:15 a.m. and I would leave about 7:00 [p.m.] because I was always available for everybody and then I would try to catch up with my work after school and I would be here till 7:00 trying to answer all the emails and I could feel myself, like something is going on with me internally—you know, this is giving the school system a little bit too much.

Similarly, another middle school administrator described the stress she felt when she wasn’t able to be visible to her staff:

There are conflicts. This morning I had to take my daughter to daycare and it doesn’t open until 7:00 and I didn’t get to work until 7:15. Teachers are supposed to be there at 6:55 and I’m 20 minutes late and that sucks because I really like to be visible first thing in the morning and go see everybody and make sure everybody is okay.

She felt this conflict more intensely because she had been out recently due to her mother’s death and health issues with her father.

It’s like I had to be in and out so I just haven’t been as visible as I want to be so it’s like, “Crap, I gotta take my daughter to school,” because I’ve been out but you know I gotta take her to school!

The pressure to be at school came not only in being visible to staff and parents, but also to the community, as described by a principal of a year-round school who is a mother of three. A conversation with a community leader made her realize the community is always watching and making judgments based on what they see:

I went to a reception recently and there were a lot of distinguished guests there and a woman came up and she said, “I live right around the corner from your school.” She works for a law firm that represents some of the special ed cases in the district and she said, “And I know your car, and that’s a good thing. I know how much you’re working and I know how hard you are working and I know when you’re up there on Sunday afternoons and evenings and I know how late you stay in the afternoon. I know that [make and model of the car].” And I thought, “Wow, this is a person who is not even a parent at my school and she already is watching me. So, people in the community, they look for that type of thing.

Being at work before school, after school, and on the weekends was a pressure felt by many of the participants. This was another example of the difficult demands of the role. Part of this
pressure dealt with needing to prove something to stakeholders. This pressure was greater for minority principals.

Credibility can be more challenging for women who are minority. A Black principal described the unique pressure she felt as she assumed the principalship at a high profile middle school:

It was the weirdest thing. I didn’t deal with the racial thing until I came here. One parent said to me, “What does this Black lady know about my [Academically Gifted] child?” And I was like, Wow. You don’t realize that I was an AG child, come from a family of kids that were brilliant. I’ve got cousins that went [in]to science and math [at] Stanford, Smith. . . . So I had to prove myself. I felt like I had to prove that I was worthy to be here and it was very challenging so I had to make sure that I was there so they would see—Wow, this Black woman, she is there, she’s interested, and she’s supporting my kids. I just had to come on in here and work and prove that I’m worthy to be here, which caused extra stress on me.

Pressure from supervisors, teachers, and even members of the community to be visible was a common theme among participants, who reported that it significantly contributed to the demands of the principalship.

External pressure due to high-stakes accountability, the need to be visible at all times, and trying to win over stakeholders have all contributed to the growing demands of the principalship. In addition to these external demands, some principals also reported dealing with pressure from within to work harder, as described below.

Internal Pressure

While external pressures were evident in many participants’ stories, participants also described the pressures they placed on themselves. In several cases, participants described having something to prove. In reflecting on the numerous awards and achievements attained during her time as principal, one participant found the term “proving” to encapsulate her experience best.
I guess I was probably on two journeys, you know, the personal journey [and] the career journey, and it was never really about the award. . . . No one thought our magnet model was going to amount to a hill of beans, and the former superintendent has since told me that he never thought it would fly and so there was proving. Proving that yeah, it could. Proving that yes, a single woman with two children can do it, too. So I think my career can be summed up in “proving.”

For some, it was not only a matter of proving that they could be successful or proving that their school could be successful, but feeling as if they needed to do more because they were women. One veteran principal explained,

I always feel like I have to outwork the men. I’m early, I take notes. I volunteer for everything. And then in the afternoon when they all want to go and have a beer or something, “Yeah, yeah, yeah. I’ll go.” For me it’s outworking them. I think women—we overanalyze things and hyper-think through things that a lot of men [don’t]. I perseverate over it. . . . It’s a scenario in my mind, it’s not real world, and I know that. But I don’t know what to do with that.

One middle school principal described a life-changing trip to Africa that raised the pressure she placed on herself:

It was increased exponentially having seen another side of the world and interacted with people who were still content with very little. I came back with this trust, there’s no excuse for me not to go back to school and get these degrees and do well and apply myself at the highest and push myself to the point. This has been a journey and I take it very seriously to be here.

She also put more pressure on herself because her family and friends believed in her. While starting her first principalship, she was raising three children and completing her doctorate.

They believed in me far more than I believed in myself, but they didn’t know that. I felt the pressure at one point of the expectations of other people and feeling that, “I gotta do this ‘cause they expect it to be good. They expect me to be able to handle this.” So, I silently dealt with any type of doubt, frustration, feeling less than, any fear that I had. I kind of silently did that. My parents didn’t necessarily tell me to keep that in, but I felt, I think I took it as important for me to make sure that I didn’t show that because people expected things—I felt I had to stand and deliver immediately, and I had to do so in [a] way that did not reveal the fear, the anxiety, the feeling like, “I don’t know what I’m doing in this meeting, I don’t have a single thought, these people expect me to say something profound . . . and I don’t have it.”
Working longer hours and being at school seemed to be a common trait among participants, and internal pressure to perform was a common cause. One principal explained how she stayed at school longer as a way to combat internal feelings of pressure:

I felt like if I was here physically, I was in control of what was going on here. I was always afraid I was going to miss something if I wasn’t here. I still work a lot. I don’t leave before 6:30 and I always work one day on the weekend. But what was happening was when I would get home [was that] I would also immediately start working again.

These choices eventually took their toll on this participant’s family.

The consequences of the demands of the job and the way participants handled those demands were also explored.

Consequences of the Demands

As the demands of the job have grown and pressure has increased, women in administration have faced consequences personally. These consequences include isolation and difficulty finding relationships, difficulty maintaining relationships, and a lack of personal agency about their ability to do more than their jobs, including taking on motherhood. For women with children, a shortage of time and divided priorities between work are ongoing consequences of the demands of their jobs, consequences that sometimes led to mental and physical health issues.

Isolation

Isolation was a common theme. For instance, I heard from women who were unable to find time for activities outside of work that could lead to marriage and family. Once the work day was through, participants simply found there was nothing left for them to give to social activities. They realized how this could potentially impact their hopes of one day
having a family. For one veteran principal who now mentors younger administrators, this dilemma concerned her:

I have three male assistant principals and three female assistant principals. All of my male assistant principals are married with children, [but] none of my female assistant principals are married or have children. And I don’t see it happening if they don’t get out of here. But tomorrow night they are going to get in the car and drive themselves down to the [school’s] ballgame two hours away and they don’t have to! I’m on duty. They [aren’t]. And they are going to do it the next night. I worry that they will have regrets.

One single principal without children described how the demands of the job had changed her life:

Pre-administration, I probably had more friends that would call me and I would talk with, but I think that the more I got into this and became so immersed in it, I wouldn’t call them back, and I know it was on me because I would be tired. As a result of that, some people that used to call me stopped calling me. Recently I’ve realized that I have been really out of balance. I’ve been trying to reconnect.

She went on to describe her dating life and current relationship with a man who lived several hours away.

We don’t see each a whole lot and we’ve been dating for like four or five years. We might see each other once a month on average. I’m okay with just talking to him on phone right now, ‘cause that way he’s not here. I don’t have to do anything special. He wants this country girl that wants to cook and do all this stuff, and when he comes I’m like, “Where you wanna go out to eat?” and he’s like, “I thought you were going to cook.” [I think,] “Do you know what I just dealt with?”

For the principals who had held the role over a number of years, the isolation described above emerged as a lasting pattern. Their worlds became reduced to work. In some cases, participants found they were reconsidering this as they got older—as their children left home and they communicated with colleagues who had retired about the void left when the job was no longer part of their lives.

The older I get the more I realize friendships failed because people would call and say, “Do you want to go out and do this?” and I would say, “Oh, I can’t because I’ve
got this or I’ve got that.” And then they stopped calling. So, I had to get a reality check and say, “Who would I call at 2:00 in the morning that would be there for me?”

This principal’s advice to women entering the role was:

At the beginning of your career, you give energy to maintaining those relationships so you don’t have any regrets. I think that if you have to make a choice between doing something related to school and doing something with a friend or family member, you should always defer to [the] friend and family member. And I have learned that LATE in my career.

An experienced middle school principal described receiving an ominous prediction about the demands of the job when she decided to become a principal: “I was dating this guy. He wasn’t necessarily the most supportive about it. He was like, ‘Why would you want to do that? I mean, you won’t have a life. You won’t have a life.’ [Laughs] “He was right about that.”

The idea that the job is separate from the person was another realization reported by principals with more experience: “Yeah, I probably would have come to the realization much earlier that I am not this school, this school is not me, and I think when you work so hard you have to stop to really realize who you are as a person, because all you know is school.”

A middle school principal who had never been married and without children reflected on the intersection of her work life and personal life:

My biggest regret is the fact that I didn’t focus through and get married and have kids. That’s my biggest regret. That is the thing that can get me. Sometimes when I’m driving in, I think about it. Or if I see those kids performing, I’m like, “I wish I had stopped to smell the roses and taken care of that side of me.”

Like the high school principal above, she makes sure to advise participants who are looking up to her: “I’m always like, make sure you get out and get you somebody. You got to have a baby”—because this is my biggest regret. This is my biggest regret.”
For some of the participants not having a relationship has been a consequence they have faced as a result of their demanding careers. For others, the consequence they faced was a relationship that ended.

The End of Relationships

When some participants attained their first principalship, their primary relationships came to an end. The frequency of this in relation to the small sample size struck me as significant; I had not found this aspect of the career trajectory discussed in the literature.

For one principal, just as she was ready to take her first job in administration, her husband decided that he was ready for children. Though this wasn’t cited as the sole reason their marriage ultimately ended, she felt it was a significant issue.

Part of getting divorced was because I didn’t want to have kids right then. My husband [had] finished law school. Some of his friends were having kids, and all of a sudden he wanted to have kids. That was about five years into our marriage and we had kind of said that for at least five years we wouldn’t have kids, but then all of a sudden he wanted to. I am a teacher wanting to be an administrator, you know? Just ‘cause he got his degree? I mean, he would have helped, but I knew who would ultimately be responsible for the kid. Growing up I always thought I’d have a kid. It wasn’t like I didn’t want to have a child, but I wasn’t ready to have a child right then.

Their marriage soon ended.

An elementary school principal described how her marriage nearly ended when she assumed her first principalship:

There were some pretty significant changes after I became principal. I began working really, really long hours at school. It wasn’t healthy at all, and so as a result my marriage really deteriorated, and I did not know it was deteriorating until it was almost too late. Bottom line, I was spending way too much time here and hardly any time at home at all.

She went on to describe how she had learned that her husband was contemplating leaving her:
At this point I [had] a second child who was three; my older one was nine, and I found a note at home one day that my husband was looking for apartments. He was going to move out. I discovered that someone else was kind of filling the void [for me]. I was very fulfilled at work. My assistant principal worked very late as well and we were—we did everything. And emotionally, I had my assistant principal. We talked about everything, emotionally. I was fulfilled and he [her husband] was not. He was lonely. We were here and I didn’t realize that I was neglecting going home and so I ended up in a year of marriage counseling trying to save the marriage. Before I took the principalship I said, “It’s going to be different from when I was assistant principal, you need to know . . .” I said, “Are you ready for how this is going to be different?” He was like, “Yeah, yeah, I’m ready, let’s do this.” And then about a year into it everything just . . . it was bad. I can’t believe I can even talk about it now without . . . it was excruciating.

This couple was able to survive their difficulties through marriage counseling; the participant explained that through their work in therapy, they were making conscious choices to avoid problems.

He can say to me now, “I really need some time,” and so we do things very deliberately. We let Mom keep our boys and we go out on dates now. We never did things like that before, but we have to make time for it because we don’t ever want to be back where we were.

Similar to the other women who faced relationship struggles when they were first appointed to the principalship, this principal’s partner felt the lack of attention available for the relationship was the ultimate cause of their difficulties. The fact that he was having an affair with another woman was revealed in the midst of an argument: “It was a really intense fight, probably a week after I found out, and I said, ‘What is it about her?’ I screamed that—‘What is it about her?’ and he screamed back at me, ‘She listens to me.’ And I never forgot that: ‘She listens to me.’”

I wondered if she agreed with his assessment that she had not been listening to him. She agreed: “I had not. Because I was so preoccupied with the principalship, like I cannot turn it off. I think about it all the time.”
This experience was strikingly similar to another elementary school principal. Shortly after assuming her first principalship, she realized her marriage was ending. She waited almost two years before sharing this information with her staff for fear they would attribute any missteps to the end of her marriage. “You know, when it all came down to the divorce and the whole nine yards, his reason was because I worked too much.”

For yet a third woman, her relationship also ended after she took her first principalship. Her partner gave the same reasons. The relationship end came when she discovered that he was having an affair with another woman. “That is what he said when I caught him cheating on me: ‘You work too much. You’re never here. I want somebody I can go out with.’” Having recently been assigned to open a brand-new school, she wondered if she would ever meet someone else.

I’ve been single for a year and a half without dating anybody, and it’s not even that that’s bothering me that much, [but] now I’m scared that the longer I do that—will I ever come out of that? Because now that I’m going to open a new school, I know that my hours are going to be even more than they probably are here, because at least here I know this school.

One of the most experienced principals, who now mentors new principals, shared advice she gives her interns: “I tell my interns a lot, do not let this job break up your relationships. And it can. It could. But your mission in life is to preserve your relationships. It is. You’ve got to figure out that balance, and it would be too easy to let this job consume you.”

A veteran administrator whose marriage came to an end as she assumed her first principalship remembers coming to see this as a systemic issue as she surveyed the room during a monthly principal’s meeting:

I started to watch other principals’ marriages fall apart and I remembered looking, and—I’m going to cry—looking in the room and seeing so many principals who were
getting a divorce and thinking, Okay, I’m one of those, too, and what is it about us, you know, can you not have it all? I remember thinking, Are there men that can deal with people like us?

In some way, the work became an escape as her marriage ended:

So, I’ve got this job [where] people are counting on me and I’ve just got to throw myself into my work and I remember going home so many nights bone-dead tired, but almost being grateful for that level of exhaustion so that you didn’t have to think about what you really had to deal with—and that is so unhealthy, but that was my survival, you know? The superintendent would say to me, “You’ve won one award after another after another after another,” and I would say, “And I can tell you every personal crisis that was attached to that award.”

For the women in the study, working hard to find relationships and keep relationships healthy, the demands of the principalship could be difficult to manage. For some women, dreams of being a mother remained strong even when they were not married. However, the idea of pursuing motherhood as an unmarried woman proved to be another complicated choice for female administrators.

Considering Motherhood Without a Primary Relationship

Some participants—like those described above—were not in a committed relationship, yet still were considering the role of motherhood. The demands of the job had consequences for these women as well. For them, there were careful considerations stemming from the job of the principalship. In some cases these considerations steered them away from pursuing motherhood. Some wondered if there would be backlash because of being single—if it would hurt their careers, impact their reputation professionally, or even potentially cost them their jobs. A former high school principal who assumed her first administrative post around the age of 30 said,

I still would have been thinking of the next step and maybe feeling like that would hurt because as a single woman, if you are going to do it—if I was still married as a high school assistant principal having a kid, okay, I mean that would have been okay, but as a single woman doing that? And then moving into being a principal as a single
woman and having a kid, that’s just another whole thing. There would have been a great cost. I think there would be a big price to pay. You never would know if it was affecting your next steps.

For one middle school principal, seeing teachers and assistant principals have children without being married had offered her hope; however, she had other concerns about pursuing motherhood without first getting married:

I’m encouraged because I think it’s a different time. My only concern about me having a baby is, if I had a baby here, for some of my African American girls here who live in the neighborhood, I would probably put even more stress on myself to make sure they could see a positive role model because I know they are talking about having babies now, saying, “I’m going to have a baby,” and “I’m going to have a baby shower and a cake,” and I’m like, “Honey, that’s not what it’s about.”

For another principal, the subconscious stress about possible backlash was something she felt could be having an impact on her ability to conceive. She was not married and stated,

Maybe somewhere in the back of my mind I am thinking, Well, what would people think? And you just don’t ever know how those things—in the crevices of your mind that you don’t think about, because you are doing budget or hiring 25 people or whatever—how they are affecting you physiologically.”

Lack of Personal Agency

While some of the single participants were still considering the pursuit of motherhood on their own, many participants felt unsure about how they could actually pull off motherhood while also performing their jobs as principals. Lack of personal agency was another consequence of the demanding job that emerged during interviews. Smith (2011) defined agency as being present when a subject took control of her life and career choices; participants without agency felt that decisions were externally controlled.

Of the 13 participants in my study, four had never been married and also did not have children; all four had expected to one day be married and have children. Two additional participants were married, but did not have children. One was still attempting to get pregnant,
and another had decided to stop pursuing motherhood. I explored with these women their changing sense of agency as it related to motherhood. The demands of the job were cited as a concern in almost all cases. In some cases, the demands of the job not only encroached on the woman’s ability to pursue motherhood, but even, according to these participants, the degree to which they could pursue any interests outside of work. One principal described how time off from work was typically spent:

There are weekends, like when I leave here on Friday, I go home and I park my car and don’t come out until Monday morning, and don’t want to! Like I said, I don’t want to see. Quite honestly, I don’t feel like I’m in a place where I could give another person the time a relationship takes. I have given up marriage and motherhood for career, I can’t say I knew that in the beginning, but it ultimately has been what I’ve given up.

In some cases, participants felt that while they might be able to find the right relationship, it was less likely that they would be able to fulfill the demands of their job and also be able to fulfill the duties of motherhood to the level they would expect of themselves in each role. As one elementary school principal put it,

I’d like to get married someday, but it’s got to be somebody that understands the passion that I have for my job and [that] the chances of children are very slim. I have always said that I wanted to adopt, but I can’t imagine leaving here at six o’clock at night and going home to children, because I wouldn’t give them what I need to give them—that I’ve given the other 850 that are here every day. I wouldn’t dare bring a child into the world and not give them everything—or I don’t want to have a child and give them so much that I slack [off] here, ‘cause this is important to me too, and now my eggs are just drying up so I’m like, They’re all wrinkly now. [Laughs]

A first-year principal described her changing feelings about the possibility of balancing motherhood and the principalship:

My boyfriend wants children and if I end up with him, then yes. If I met somebody that didn’t want any, I think I would be fine with that, too. I really am indifferent. Two, three years ago, I wanted them ever day, all day, but right now, I’m pretty indifferent and I think it’s because I’m totally still exhausted. I cannot picture how it
would work. I just can’t picture it. I think this job has exhausted me to the level of—I cannot consider having them.

It was important to me to clarify with participants if their desire to be a mother had changed or if they felt it would be impossible to do both jobs well. One principal explained,

I think it’s apprehension. I think it’s feeling like I couldn’t give them what they needed because I’m drained after I leave here and that’s not the way I was raised. I mean, my mom stayed home with me. I want to be able to give a child the same. It’s the apprehension that I don’t know if I can do it.

The demands of the job influenced a middle school principal’s feelings of agency as well as she described having recently reconsidered her plans to adopt. She described her doubts:

It would probably be [difficult] giving the child everything that it needs as well as giving the school everything it needs—you know, making sure that I am home so I can see the baby before it would go to bed. But, at the same time, I have got to be at an arts program that is going to last from 7:00 to 10:00, and if I’m not there, who is going to be with the baby that I would trust to take care of it? Just, doing both to the superior level and feeling—like right now I don’t have enough time in the day for just basic stuff.

She went on to describe a recent conversation with her partner about adoption.

I said I would really love to do that and he said, “You don’t have the time. You don’t have time for a dog, so how would you have time to take care of a kid? It sounds good, but tell me where in your schedule you’d have time to do that?” And I burst into tears because I thought, “God, I’ve given up . . .” What he said was true. I was like, It shouldn’t be that decision. It shouldn’t be that kind of decision. I got so mad with him on the phone, but then after I got off the phone with him, I was thinking, It’s a shame that he’s right.

Another elementary school principal who was also single and without children described a strikingly similar conversation with her boyfriend:

At one point I said to him, “I’m just so tired. I don’t know if I would have enough energy for a baby,” and he’s like, “You don’t have enough energy to have a baby. You don’t even have enough energy to have a relationship!” And it’s something that people just say, but they don’t realize how that really—as a woman who’s saying goodbye to her fertile years—how that haunts you. I became an administrator at 29 years old, so the whole time all my girlfriends were getting married and getting
pregnant, I was like, Of course I’m going to be at that PTA function! Of course I’m going to be at the play! Of course I’m going to any and every extra thing there is after hours. So, that’s haunting for me.

The demands of the job and their impact on the principals’ belief that they could be parents as well are exacerbated for some of the participants by their belief that, because they are women, more of the parental responsibilities would fall to them. For one of the principals, thoughts of how her boyfriend would share the responsibilities weigh heavily on her mind:

I get up at 5:30 and he doesn’t have to be at work until 9:00 and I think, Could he get up an infant and get them to daycare? I start thinking about those days when I get up at 5:30 and don’t get home till 7:00, like could he be in charge in the morning and at dinner and handle kids? ‘Cause that’s what I think would have to happen.

Even though she has apprehensions about her ability to successfully balance being a mother and a principal, giving up her job was not a solution she had considered for this dilemma, saying, “I have no intentions to do that.” The belief that raising children would primarily be the responsibility of the woman was echoed by a high school principal: “If people are in a traditional relationship, I mean it is still a sacrifice for the women. . . . It’s a sacrifice that society just accepts and you know, they don’t think about that.”

In addition to concerns about being able to give the children all that they would need, participants were also concerned about how their job performance might be impacted if they became mothers. For some principals, the idea that they could continue to perform their jobs at their current level was appealing, but in their minds not necessarily realistic:

In my mind I would like to think that I would be just as great if I had two small children at home, but the reality is, I probably wouldn’t be. I might put my job in a more—I don’t want to say “realistic,” but I might put my job in more of its proper place because I have sacrificed a lot for my job. I have worked on many Saturdays, I have done stuff at home. At night at my former school, what I used to do every Friday night, I worked until 7:00 or 8:00 and I would often come in on Saturday or Sunday. And so I think if I had children, I wouldn’t do that. So, I don’t know, I don’t know that I was a better principal because I didn’t have to worry about kids, I just think I spent more time being a principal.
For the women above, the idea of balancing their jobs as principal with being a mother brought feelings of apprehension. Changes in the demands of the job and growing pressure, both internally and externally, have led these women to reconsider their decisions. For women who have children, the demands of the job also caused consequences, which are explored below.

Competing Factors

Just as there were unique consequences for women who do not have children, there were also consequences that were unique to women who are mothers and principals. For some of the participants, recalling the competing demands of motherhood while being principal brought tearful responses. Bradbury and Gunter (2006) define competing factors as feelings of divided priorities and being faced with conflicts between their priorities as mother and administrator. Using this as the conceptual framework, the responses of the participants who are mothers were analyzed.

All of participants experienced competing demands. Some responses were very emotional and laden with guilt. One principal described her coping strategies with a newborn at home:

One of the things that I found myself doing a lot—and now I look back and I just can't believe I did it, but I know that I was trying to survive—is I would make arrangements on the weekend, the only time that I had with my daughter, for her to go and spend the night at my mom’s or at her other grandma’s so I could get more work done and I would like—I start even getting emotional thinking about it, ‘cause I was like, I can't get work done with a toddler and my husband can't chase her around with his back, so I was farming her out a lot with family to be able to get more work done.

She described this conflict’s emergence again around longer holidays and vacations and the feelings of regret:
On vacations, like Christmas vacation or spring break or things like that, when she was in daycare I would still take her to daycare so I could work, not the entire time but the occasional couple of days. I'm like, How sick is this, you have two weeks with your child and you're taking her to Kidworks? But I did.

Some of participants still have strong feelings about having missed time with their children, even though in some cases their children are now grown. One principal remembers having a three-week-old baby and a toddler at home. She had been aggressively recruited to leave her teaching post and take on her first administrative position:

It was August of ’89 and I was assistant principal at ___High School. In order to see [the baby] some days—and I didn’t think it was weird; it makes me sad now—in order to see her some days, my husband would drive over, pick her up at daycare, drive over to the high school, hold her up in the auditorium or the gym or wherever I was doing my thing and I’d wave at them and blow him a little kiss and he’d stay for 10 or 15 minutes with this newborn and drive home.

When asked if the work had ever caused her to make deliberate choices in her personal life, she responded,

Yes, and [it] still [does]. This job has caused me to not do things that I should have done. I have 600 sick days. And I’ve had two babies since I’ve worked here! Isn’t that stupid? I’m always here and that’s not right. So that tells you how heavily I leaned on my husband through the years because the girls had tonsils and minor surgeries and different things. So this job caused me to not make good decisions sometimes, not make equitable decisions. It’s not fair what I’ve done to my husband. It’s not. God love him. God love him.

For one of the principals currently trying to get pregnant, a recent removal from her post as principal and placement in an assistant principalship revealed to her just how much energy the principalship requires—including time that would be needed for family if she is able to conceive. Her temporary post as an AP coincided with changes in her husband’s career, and she found the role of AP allowed her to be more supportive of him and helped their family survive that transition:

I think the principalship is a lot more challenging than a lot of other things and even this little season of me being an assistant principal, the difference in the two jobs is
just tremendous and I know because I went from one to the other. I was an AP so I had much more time, much more energy to be, you know, a supportive wife to him. I wouldn’t have been able to give him that support that he needed at the time, just being able to listen to whatever he’s complaining about [laughs] that is really difficult. The difference in what I was able to do for my family—[and] my family is just one [other] person—was tremendous. So, I can see, looking at it [through] that lens, the difference in what it would be [like] to take care of kids if I was the assistant principal and what it would be [like] to try and take care of them in the principal role, because they are just so different.

Time

For principals seeking a balance, the increasing demands made fulfilling the roles of mother and principal simultaneously difficult. Participants described feeling pulled in different directions while trying to balance their roles. As Shakeshaft (1989) noted, taking on two jobs (administrator and full time housework) illuminates the limits of the human body and the lack of time in a day. One middle school principal described it this way:

I don’t think people realize you do have a personal life. I’d say that more about parents. They get frustrated and they want something now and it’s like, I can’t meet you at 5:30 because I have to pick up my kid at daycare, whereas in the past, I would have done it. I don’t think there’s a realistic understanding of the on/off time of administrators by parents at all.

Multiple participants felt competing demands when they wanted to spend time with their children. More than one mother felt that her children were missing out on extracurricular activities due to the demanding hours of the principalship:

I think that they maybe have missed out on some extracurricular opportunities because I haven’t been able to be the soccer mom. We just don’t have the time for me to drag them to year-round swimming, so I think there are things that I think other children do that my kids just don’t do.

Likewise, principals described the contradictory nature of the two roles, as described by Bradbury and Gunter (2006). Principals described the guilt they felt when helping their students and worrying that their own children weren’t getting the same support. One mother of two said,
I wish I had more time with the boys. I wish I had time to work with the boys on their schoolwork; I’m not there in the afternoons when they are doing their homework. And I’m often in IEP meetings, thinking, I feel like sometimes I’m working so hard for everyone else’s children that my children are missing out on some things that I could help them with. Are my children suffering because of my work? I struggle with that.

Feeling torn between home and work and having a sense of divided priorities was also a theme echoed in participants’ stories. One principal described taking off work to chaperone a field trip to DC with her son, who is autistic. The date of the trip conflicted a scheduled principal’s meeting, and she was concerned because she had never missed one before. She described her competing feelings:

I feel so guilty. This will be the first meeting that I’ve missed. I know I need to do that with my son, but I feel like it’s impacting my work because I’m missing that meeting. I guess I feel guilty when I’m with my kids. I feel guilty that I’m not doing what I need to do at work. When I’m at work, I feel that I’m not doing what I’m supposed to be doing with my kids.

I asked if there were consequences from feeling torn like that over a long period of time. For her, the consequence was being diagnosed with depression:

I had a bout of depression about a year ago. I wasn’t feeling like I was good enough and I would often say, “I’m not good enough as a principal, I’m not good enough as a wife and I’m not good enough as a mom.” Like, I can’t be perfect in all three areas, and so that was a turmoil that I was constantly battling with.

Fortunately, counseling provided relief.

Others experienced physical consequences due to the strains of competing demands.

Health Issues

As principals with children attempted to negotiate the competing demands of their lives, their personal health and well-being were affected. A middle school principal described health consequences she faced while trying to balance being a mother of three, a full-time doctoral student, and an administrator”
You’re gonna think I’m crazy. I come in at like 6:00 on Saturdays and work until 9:00 or 10:00. By the time I get home, they are just getting up. The thing that has hurt me the most is sleep. Sleep. It wears my body down. I’ve had shingles ‘cause, I think, of the stress level. I’ve juggled. There [have been] times when I’m way overwhelmed and overloaded and the only thing that helps me is to step back. I understand that. I needed to learn how to take breaks more frequently.

Some women found the competing demands of the two roles left them little or no time to take care of themselves by doing things to alleviate stress. A middle school principal with a young daughter described her shift from being a marathon runner to struggling just to find time to make it to the gym. She and her partner, who is also a school-based administrator, can’t seem to make it work:

There’s no gym time in there. It’s killing me. I like to work out, but it’s really hard. We actually sat down with our schedules to find out when we could both exercise and we were like, Oh my god! It’s just not going to work. We’ve scheduled high schools with thousands of kids! We can manage this! And we really can’t. I can still do the gym, but that’s not really fair. My gym has childcare, but you don’t want to have your kid in daycare from 7:00 to 4:30, then pick your kid up and go have dinner and then go to the gym. I don’t want to do that. No.

One principal who had dealt with depression and other stress related issues did not feel counseling would help:

I would totally go—it’s not a [question of] “I don’t want to go to counseling.” It’s probably a time issue, a money issue—and what are they going to say to me? “You’re stressed”? or “Try meditation.” Well, I did. I feel like I tried a lot of things, and it was pretty obvious that the root cause is the job. You gotta change the job.

Illness, lack of physical fitness, and depression were all health consequences experienced by the participants with children as a result of their attempts to balance motherhood with the principalship. To preserve themselves, some women found it necessary to limit their work outside the essential components of their jobs.
Saying No

Some principals found that as they transitioned to motherhood, it became difficult to continue to perform their jobs at the level they expected of themselves. In some cases this meant backing away from extra duties, not pursuing extra training, or holding off on getting advanced degrees. While the mothers felt the strain of wanting to do more within their roles, they realized that doing so would mean time away from their children and home demands.

One elementary school principal said,

I put all this time in. I . . . put probably less effort in at times because I was like, You know, there’s just only so much that you can do. I went through a period of years where I had a “Just Say No” policy. They would say, “Can you help us interview for Teacher of the Year?” or “Can you be on this committee?” or “Will you serve on the Division of Principal and Assistant Principals?” No. No. No. Nothing. I took myself off everything. I just was doing my core job, like what I had to do—and, I would say, [I did it] in an indirect way that probably affect[ed] some of my effectiveness as a principal.

In addition to committee roles and extra service work in the field, advanced degrees and licensure also frequently took a back seat for principals who were also mothers. In the district where the study was conducted, a growing number of principals have gone on to get their doctoral degree. One principal who is a mother of two described her feelings toward pursuing this next credential:

I have watched peers who are males get their doctorates, who started out at the exact same place I did, and I thought, I want to do that, but I’m making a conscious decision for my children. I would love to get my doctorate. I will not because that would take away from time with my children. I envy those who are doing it because I think I really would love to do that.

While participants spoke with passion about loving their work, for the mothers a consequence of the demanding nature of the job and having to balance it with motherhood was an inability to pursue continued education or participate in educational activities beyond their schools. This not only impacted their career status but also their sense of personal
satisfaction and fulfillment. The price of losing even more time from their children, however, was not a price some of the participants were willing to pay.

Those Who Make it Work

One of the goals for this study was to not only highlight the competing demands faced by women in the principalship who are also mothers and the consequences of those demands, but also to identify systems and structures within the lives of the women who were making it work that had helped them “have it all.” As I interviewed these participants, salient themes emerged that were consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. For some women, personal agency enhanced their ability not only to get through tough times, but to take on the challenge of being a working mother in the first place.

Agency

Participants’ accounts illustrate how principals gain a sense of agency. For one principal, agency played a role in her decision to have a second child. Both she and her partner are school administrators who have successfully navigated the challenges of having one baby. In considering the addition of another child, career decisions would be contingent on available daycare schedules—but in the end, the two feel they would make it work: “I’m like, people figured this stuff out for thousands of years and we are two very smart people, we can figure this out. We are two people with a lot capacity, a lot of resources and an ability to manage change, so we’ll figure it out.” The complex and demanding nature of the principalship bolstered her agency. Because of her success as a principal, she felt that she was adequately prepared for the equally demanding situation of having two young children while working full time.
Agency also played a role when she assumed her first principalship, at which time her first daughter was only seven months old. She described typically being up twice in the night to prepare and give bottles, then going into work the next day: “I was dragging my butt in to work quite a bit, but again, people have done it forever. In our profession, . . . you see so many mothers who don’t have the resources we have. Knowing how other people manage, I think, God, I can manage!”

Another principal who had been trying to get pregnant described her sense of agency: I haven’t worried about the reality of what it will really be like if I end up in that situation, because my attitude toward many things is—I look at the other people that have done it. There are other young women that have had babies and I just assume that they are not any tougher than I am, and so, other people survived it and I will too.

A principal who had experienced the loss of a post due to high-stakes accountability described how that very difficult situation served to bolster her feelings of agency. Her parents, who were educators, balanced their work with parenting, and this also increased her sense of agency. In explaining why she would not give up the principalship if she were to get pregnant, she said,

Maybe I have unrealistic expectations. My plan is to take six weeks. My momma took six weeks and I turned out great. If my parents did it and it worked fine, then I can do it. My expectation is that I’m just going to take the six weeks and then I’m going to go back to work.

For this principal, a recent removal from her post as principal had led her to believe that she would be able to be more flexible if she found that she needed more time off:

You know, if [I need to take more time], I wouldn’t be opposed to [that], because—and that’s the other thing, I think, that has been really valuable about the whole Renaissance experience. So many expectations of what I had were pretty much shattered. [I was] kind of thinking, If you do what you are supposed to do, it’s really going to work out fine, and then it really didn’t. That has helped me to kind of think, Okay, maybe this isn’t all that; if it turns out the way I want it to, then it’s great. I think now that I’ve had that experience—and I did have a baby—and six months into it I felt like I’m not being my best in either place, I think it would now be easier for me to say, Okay, I need to do this differently, and I would be willing to make a career
change for my family because my family does come first. I have a great career because I’m a driven person and I’ve been blessed and these things have happened in my life, but people sometimes perceive that if you are a high achiever that that’s all you care about, and that’s not all I care about. I’m just a high achiever, that’s who I am, but I think before I would have been a lot more disappointed about not being able to continue to be that high achiever in my career, and I think now that I’ve had this Renaissance experience, that if it came to a point that I thought, I can’t do these both well and I need to dial my career back and make a change, I think it would be a lot easier to do that. I think I would ultimately come to the same decision. I think I could have made that decision for my family before—I think it just, it would be a lot faster if I needed—if it gets to that point, it won’t be nearly the struggle that it would have been.

For one middle school principal, while she admitted having apprehensions about what it would take to fulfill the jobs of administrator and mother simultaneously, ultimately she never questioned whether she could actually pull it off because she felt that it was an established part of who she was. “It was always on my mind. It’s like having dual roles: One is not necessarily superior to the other. It’s like you’re always thinking about, How am I going to make this work? It’s who I am. It’s who I am.”

Support at Home from Spouse and Family

Another powerful component that women credited for their ability to make it work was the support of key individuals in their lives, whether extended family or spouse. The significant ways in which these family members assisted participants in fulfilling traditional home duties and childcare responsibilities is an important contribution of this study and provides a follow-up to Loder’s (2005) work. Participants’ firsthand stories about managing the work and family conflict illuminate how much extensive outside support it takes to succeed in both roles.

The help and support of an extended family locally was instrumental for some of the participants. One middle school principal gave birth to her second and third child following her entrance into administration while also completing her doctoral degree and fulfilling
many roles in her community. She made it clear that her support system was what made the difference. Her mother-in-law, a former schoolteacher, took care of the children while she was working: “I had a great support system. I had the most ideal system.” As she moved into the role of the principalship, her husband was teaching at her son’s school and her younger children were being cared for by her mother-in-law. This strong support system helped her believe that this opportunity was coming at the right time for her and for her family:

By the time I came here, my oldest was in middle school, but he went to the school where his dad teaches, so I felt comfortable making that transition into the principalship, ‘cause I had two little ones who were kept by grandma, who lives less than five minutes away from my house—so I have to pass her house to [get] out of the neighborhood, so I drop them off; she [gives them] breakfast and things. So I knew they were in great hands. So I felt comfortable coming as principal because of the support systems. Now, my situation is probably extremely unique [due to] the level of support that I have.

She believed, however, that it still was very important for her not to let her support system fulfill too great of a role with her children:

There’s lots that I would not be able to do without the support system, but don’t let your support system become how you take care of your family. They are to assist you or to support you, but there’s nothing like momma. My children don’t want to see grandma if they are hurt, or whatever. They want momma to come.

Another seasoned principal attributed her sense of determination to the support of her family. Her mother’s balance of high expectations and encouragement served to bolster her own sense of agency as she took on her first principalship while simultaneously going through the end of her marriage. Her mother had raised her and her sister as a single parent:

She was very supportive. She didn’t let me wallow in self-pity. It was like, you know, Well, I did it, and you can do it, too. You’re not going to have a nervous breakdown and you’re not going to be medicated to get through what you have to get through. You are just going to muster it up because that is who you are and you’re going to learn from it and grow from it and move on, and so that kind of strong spirit . . . There were times when I was like, Well, just pity me for a minute. At one point she considered stepping down from the principalship, and it was her mother’s firm expectations that led her to stay: “You are NOT going to fail and NO. you are not
going to go back and teach”—because I thought, Well, I’ll just teach and it won’t be as hard and I won’t be like under the microscope, you know how it is. Everyone is watching.

This principal’s sense of agency was bolstered through the support and high expectations of her mother. She went on to experience a long and successful career as a principal, with recognition for her achievements both locally and nationally.

In some cases, the support of a spouse made it work. One principal described the ways her husband fulfilled duties that lessened the work and family conflicts:

He is the nurturer. He went to every first day of school for the kids from kindergarten on. He took the little video camera in. I remember daycare, when I would pick them up in the afternoon, they would say, “We didn’t want to say anything to your husband, but your daughter’s shoes didn’t match today and her dress was on inside out,” and I’d say, “You know, he’s doing the best he can and I’m okay with it.” He did their hair, he did, and you know, he’s got great relationships with them for that. He was in the Indian Princess stuff. I did the Girl Scouts LAMELY. I was a terrible Girl Scout mom, but I tried. [Laughs]

Another middle school principal described the concrete ways her husband’s support had assisted her in managing her responsibilities successfully:

He has a lot of control over his schedule, so we can make it work. Pickups, games, you know, transportation, things like that, going to meetings, he’s always been right there when we go to teacher conferences. We schedule conferences at times when both of us can be there, because I’m not going to be the only spokesperson. I think that is important that he convey that as well. And [his] getting involved like that, I think that has boosted his . . . level of support for me, because he sees what teachers are dealing with and what good parenting can do for a child and for a school.

Children also emerged as a source of support and encouragement for their mothers.

One middle school principal with three children explained,

My children are automatic cheerleaders for me. When I come home, no matter what kind of day I’ve had, they don’t care if I’m a principal. You know, they know that I’m a principal, they know what I do. I share with them things I have to do. I say, “I’ve got a lot of meetings with teachers,” and they are like, “How did your meetings go?” Often times they will pray for me. They will say, “You’ve got End of Grade tests and things are coming up,” and they know.
Support at Work from Colleagues and Bosses

Participants’ ability to succeed was greatly affected by having supportive systems and structures within their work organizations. Examples included supervisors that respected and acknowledged a “family first” philosophy and who appreciated participants’ needs to attend to their duties as mothers; colleagues also offered support. One single mother of two described how her district-level supervisor helped her make it work when she took her first principalship. She remembers the discussion:

The children were at a different school when I was appointed principal, and I remember just dreading asking her if I could bring them with me. Back then it was a little bit taboo to have your own kids at the school that you worked at and so I just said, “I need your help and I can’t do this job if I can’t have them with me.” It was taboo and you had to have special permission, and I remember just mustering up enough courage to ask her—you know, “Can I bring them?” And she had gone through a divorce as well and she said, “Absolutely. I’m going to insist that you do that.”

For some, support was also found within the school-system community. One of the participants described the dilemmas she faced as the mother of a newborn and a newly appointed administrator:

I remember coming to school one day in tears because my nanny was sick and my husband had taken off. He made the real money, and he goes, “You know you really need to take some time off and you need to stay here until we get this daycare.” I couldn’t do it. I freaked. And so, I go to school and I bust out in tears and within two hours three of them had given me numbers of people [for daycare].

One middle school principal described her unique maternity leave arrangement following the birth of her first child. A high school assistant principal at the time, she knew she would need something different from the traditional six-week maternity leave. She and her principal were able to construct an arrangement that worked for her family. Her principal allowed her to work some days for only part of the day and then use leave forms once the time off added up. On other days, she would work the entire day. Through the flexibility of
her principal, she was able to spread her leave days out over time. At the end of the time, she was able to renegotiate her contract and take an 11-month position versus a 12-month position, to have a full month off with her baby. She didn’t return to a 12-month schedule until her child entered kindergarten.

    My principal was very supportive. She wanted me back and basically her quote was, “I’ll take you whenever I can get you. My mother-in-law basically moved in with us for six months, and I gradually worked my way back up to full time in six months, and it was great. It was what I needed to do. It was good for the family.

This experienced principal—whose own child is now in high school—believes that flexible scheduling is something schools must be willing to offer to women. “Quite honestly, if we aren’t willing to do that, we are either going to discourage women from pursuing more complicated or higher-level positions or we’re going to discourage them from seriously thinking about motherhood.”

For an elementary school principal, the support of her assistant principal while she was on maternity leave stood out as crucial in helping her make it work. “My maternity leave was awesome! My assistant principal was there, so I left. . . . I was not worried one bit what was going on while I wasn’t there.”

    Similar to her colleague, a middle school principal also found support from her assistant principal:

I’m on call 24/7. I’m the principal 24/7, and if I’m in Target or somewhere else, I’m still on call. It’s important for me to unpack a lot of that before I go home, so there are times when my assistant principal and I will go and grab a quick bite or something and just sit around and talk just so I can come down a little bit from the day and from the concerns, so when I do go home [I’m] fresh. I’m fresher for my children. It’s important for me to transition. I’ve tried it the other way, where I’m just like rolling—get in my car, get them, and keep going, and I haven’t distanced myself. It brings me down.
Setting Boundaries

One theme that emerged from participants who were effective in balancing both roles—succeeding in an extremely high-profile position where performance expectations are perhaps among the highest nationally and also as a mother—was the importance of establishing boundaries. Participants described backing away from both external pressures and internal expectations and evaluating the reasonableness of those expectations. It took courage, in a time of high-stakes accountability and a very competitive job market, but participants ultimately learned that it was critical to their success both professionally and personally. One implication of these findings is that the next generation of principals will benefit by being discerning when planning work-related time and attending to personal needs, which include not only outside relationships but also personal health and well-being.

A middle school principal described her experience when she was the mother of a new baby and also an assistant principal at the high school level. She deliberately established and communicated her priorities:

It was tough being in a high school and trying to meet those demands with a baby, but we were able to work it out and I don’t have any regrets. One of the first things I said to the principal was, “I may have to apologize to you a lot, but I will never apologize to my child. There will be things that I will miss or maybe can’t do as well as I would like to do them at any given time, but I can’t apologize to him because he’s my first priority,” and it worked very well.

Another middle school principal explained how she reflected on her life and determined what she needed to do based on her life’s circumstances at that point. She referred to these points in her life as seasons:

I realize that, you know, there are seasons that we all have and you have to know what season you are in. Sometimes you are in a season to grow. Sometimes you are in a season to be quiet and still. Sometimes you are in a season to stay focused, sometimes you are in a season to love, and knowing that is very important because it makes you have to constantly adjust. And that’s the thing that I’ve learned since
becoming a principal. I don’t think I knew this as an assistant principal as much—that I have to stop enough to adjust. . . . I [couldn’t] keep doing things [in my usual way] when my daughter started taking piano lessons. That meant I had to make some adjustments here to what my schedule looked like.

She also thought about her time in terms of withdrawals and deposits to make sure that things stayed in balance: “Some weeks you’re going to get it right and some weeks you’re not, and you can’t beat yourself up about that. You can’t. You just have to go back in and know that when you’ve made a withdrawal, that you owe a deposit to your family and that deposit doesn’t come from just sitting around in the room at the same time.” She goes on to say,

The biggest growth is realizing that I have to change as things change in my life. So as things change for my children, I can’t just keep going [on with] business as usual. Like, if you have one child and then you have another child, you have to change what you are doing. You can’t just pick up kids and keep on going. You have to stop, reorganize, reprioritize, as your life calls for it and if you don’t do that you get burned out. Then you really start ignoring people because you aren’t paying attention to the signs in your life. So that’s the survival mode of being a working mom [with] three school-age kids. Sometimes you are going to get Mother of the Year banner every day and then some weeks, you are going to think [Social Services] is getting ready to knock on your door. Some days you are going to get it right and some days you won’t, but you can’t beat yourself up about it. You just have to pay attention enough to know deposits and withdrawals and live by that. Live by that. You’re not perfect, not going to be perfect, but you can have it all as long as your heart is in the right place and you are aware of it. Make sure you give and gain.

For some of the participants, establishing personal boundaries came as a result of realizing there were limits to what they were able to do as wife, mother, and principal and accepting that they were doing the best they could. For one principal, this meant making spending time with her children her first choice. She explains,

I honestly came to a point where I said to myself, You are doing the best you can do in all three of those areas, and if somebody comes in here and says you’re not the right principal for this school, you’re just not making the growth that this school needs, I can honestly say that I did the very best I could with the time I had. Before I was feeling like I was never doing enough; now I know I’m doing absolutely as much as I can. And I couldn’t do humanly any more than I’m doing.
When asked what advice she would give to incoming women seeking to successfully negotiate motherhood and the principalship simultaneously, one elementary principal with two children offered this:

Find that balance immediately. And establish that and make that a priority. Like, say, I’m going to work until THIS time and then I’m going to go home and spend THIS period of time with my family. If you are the kind of person that can be a perfectionist and not be able to turn it off, then you have to schedule it to turn it off and then go ahead and do that from the very beginning.

Health issues led one middle school principal to establish personal boundaries. She realized she was spending far too much time at the office and imposed time limits on her workday to exercise and be more healthy. “Every day now, I have my clock on my phone set to 4:30, and it’s the sound of a rooster—and so even if I don’t get out at 4:30, I’m aware that it’s 4:30: So, okay, it’s 5:00—pack your bags and go.” Though she saw some improvements while students and staff were off for summer vacations, those improvements were difficult to sustain once the school year resumed:

I was concerned about my blood pressure. This summer, when we had that little bit of down time, I was exercising and I loved it, but it’s like as soon as the teachers came back, boom! I stopped doing it again and I have got to retrain my mind. When the teachers came back I just got back into the old habits so now I’m trying to look at taking care of myself more, but it’s a process—I mean, I really have to.

Setting personal boundaries emerged as an important component for women who were trying to balance both roles, and, as participants’ stories demonstrated, maintaining those boundaries is an ongoing effort.

One middle school principal with a son in high school described having clarity about the boundaries and self-expectations of mothers who are also trying to fulfill the demands of the principalship:
There is a myth about being this supermom, superwoman; it’s a MYTH. I debunk it every opportunity I get. I think it’s counterproductive to women to talk about, Oh you can have it all. You can do everything! No, you can’t. You can’t. You have to decide what is the most important thing.

She went on to explain how she reconciled feeling pressured to do more at school:

There are times when we could commit to doing more. There’s certainly [that] tendency in education. So, if it’s something that I feel like is appropriate and something that needs to be done and it’s in the best interest of the school, I’ll certainly give it full consideration; it’s not an automatic no. But I am very cautious—and I think this is one thing that my staff appreciates, is that I am very protective of our personal time, because I believe you can’t expect staff to commit to all day and then come back and give 100% at night and then show up on the weekend and then grade those papers and record that data. Everybody has limits. That is no indication of your, necessarily, your frailty or your inability to do the job. It’s all about what is reasonable for you as an individual.

For some of the principals, giving advice was easier than taking it, especially given their similar drive to be the best at their work. They described mentors and supervisors urging them to assess and reconsider how much they were giving to their work. One principal recalled her boss putting it this way: “It’s just 10 days.” When the principal asked what she meant, the supervisor explained, “Postings. Your position will be posted for 10 days, and in 10 days there will be somebody to replace you. Is it worth it? Is it really worth it? You can draw the same kind of paycheck as Joe Blow down the street and not work at the level you’re working or giving the hours you are giving.” This reality check took on greater meaning for the participant because it was coming from her supervisor, who was a female assistant superintendent who had never married or had children. Her boss was letting her know that while she was making significant sacrifices for her job, once she left her position, there would be someone else to take her place. Even though her supervisors valued and appreciated her excellent work, the organization would go on following her retirement or departure. She continued, “No one told me that I had to work as late as I worked and no one
told me that, you know, I had to go for awards or anything like that.” Recognizing the need to set boundaries doesn’t always happen at the start of a career; for this principal, it evolved over time.

Another principal recalled her evolving beliefs when she was a first-year principal learning to discern where the pressure was coming from. As she spent long hours away from her children, trying win over a less than welcoming staff, she began to realize that she was the source of the pressure. This helped her to establish healthy boundaries.

I struggled my first year. I struggled more that year with feeling like I couldn’t learn it unless I was here, so I poured a lot of time into work. I did have regrets as far as time. I knew I was taking tremendous chunks of time away. And I had to question myself—Am I here physically to make myself feel better about a situation I have no control over? I realized, You know what, I was my own worst enemy in the fear factor of whether I was ready for this job. And sometimes we do it to ourselves where we allow the opinions of other people drive our actions. I felt like if I wasn’t here on Saturdays, I wasn’t doing my job. And that time I did feel bad as a mom. I felt like, I’m not going to get Mother of the Year. I’m not getting Principal of the Year. I’m not getting anybody! I’m not even getting Me of the Year! So that was tough. And that’s when I doubted whether this was for me.

For some the lesson of putting family first eventually arrived, though later in their careers. One principal described missing the beginning of the current school year to attend an important family function. She explained the reactions of some of her fellow principals when they heard the news: “You missed the first day of kindergarten?” And I was like, “Hell, yeah! And it feels good!” But I learned much later in my career [that] you can be truly effective and not have to feel you have to make those sacrifices. I think in order to have it all you’re going to have to say no.”

For one principal, the end of her marriage caused her to reevaluate how much time she had been devoting to her career and move toward being in charge of her own boundaries.
Though she did not return to her marriage, the experience did lead her to make deliberate decisions about how she would strive to maintain balance in her life.

Part of the whole [being] 30 and getting divorced was [to] get my priorities straighter, balancing personal and professional. Part of that was trying to have better boundaries, because my whole life up until then was totally professional. I mean, totally, in the sense of, you know, every weekend, every whatever, [it] was just totally my job. So part of [being] 30 and getting divorced forced you to face a whole lot. So if anything, I was better at finding some time for personal things to do. I’m not the most sensitive person, but I’m definitely a more sensitive person now because of that—so when I say [I’m] not going back to being that person, it’s also—it’s not so much the workaholic that scares me as much as the person that would step over people probably unknowingly.

Integration of Work and Family

Another common theme among principals who were able to “have it all” was successfully integrating their personal and professional lives. For some, that meant having their children enrolled in the schools where they were serving as principal. For others, it meant assuming a post in a school that was located in the community where they lived.

One veteran principal was surprised that some administrators did not want to work at a school in the same community where they lived; she saw this as a key element in her success:

I had to embed my family. People say, “Oh, I don’t ever want to live next to my school, I need that separation!” Not me. I need total integration. These kids go to my church. I go to their church. They sell me my beer, my tampons. I don’t care. It’s total integration. My kids went here. Both of them. I handed both of them their diploma. Could not have done it without that. Could not have been a parent. ‘Cause I never would have gone to any of their stuff. I’m stuck here!

Over and over I heard stories of mothers who had to have their children with them at school after hours to get their work done. For most of them, they felt this integration was a positive experience for their children: “My children have grown up in this school as little babies and they come up here on weekends with me and they’ve learned how to just do their
own thing while mom is working. They draw, they play on the computer, they are very independent because they know when Mom is working, Mom needs to work.”

Another principal described her preference for integration, specifically to be employed in close proximity to the schools her son has attended:

I do like being close to him. He plays a lot of sports and he is very involved in school. I want to be there. I mean, I want to be in attendance, so one priority has been that he be in a really great place for him personally, educationally, and athletically and extracurricular-wise, but also that we as a family, that it works for us as a family. And so it’s been ironic that where he went to elementary, middle, and high school, I’ve been close by—so I’ve been able to get to the game, get to the meeting, get to the PTA function, whatever, and make that work.

One middle school principal with a small child described the conversations she and her partner have had about the necessity of integrating home and school in order to be parents and full-time school-based administrators, especially now that they are trying to have another child. She is an experienced middle school principal and her partner is an experienced assistant principal seeking her first principalship. To make it work, they feel they must be selective about which jobs they apply for, based on the start times of those schools.

It’s interesting. We’re trying again. She’s an assistant principal and she has more flexibility with arrival time and I don’t. Obviously, as a principal you have to be there on time. You have to be a good role model and you can’t set the example of rolling in 15 minutes late because you have to drop off your kid and there’s not a lot of daycares that are open at 6:15 a.m., and that’s not really healthy for a 3-year-old to be dropped off at 6:15. We’re really struggling with—if we have a second child, what the heck are we going to do? You’re not really looking at schools anymore that you might want to be principal at, you’re looking at schools [in terms of] what hour do they open. There’s a school that is open and I [asked myself], Are you interested? And then [thought], No, that’s a first-tier school [starting at 7:15 a.m.]. And I was like, Okay, you can’t do a first-tier school.

She found that being in a relationship with someone who was also an administrator provided a unique level of support. Because her partner understood the demands and challenges she faced in her role as principal, there was a level of understanding
I think it’s really good to have someone at home that understands about administration because you can’t vent with your colleagues. You might want to, but you can’t. But you can come home and vent to someone who understands. It’s nice to have someone at home that knows [that] if you are at a high school dance, you would rather be anywhere else in the world. Someone else who is not an administrator might be like, What the hell?

One principal described managing her children while also working on the weekends to complete the many extra hours of work the job required:

They would go to school with me every Sunday afternoon. We’d go after church and we’d pack our lunch and they would play in the gym and I’d let them get on the intercom and bring their bicycles, and they’d play while I worked, and that’s just sort of how we got through it.

Integration for some participants meant making deliberate career decisions. In deciding at which school level to pursue her first administrative post, one administrator explained why she selected elementary despite a background in middle school when her son was two: “I was looking ahead for when he started kindergarten and wanting to be close to home—and possibly in a school where he could attend—so I could work at the elementary school where he would go to school, and that ended up happening.”

Not all principals wanted the integration of school and home to be so complete. One principal found that stepping back from her school community was important for her success:

Right before I became principal, my family and I moved 20 miles away from this community. I knew I needed to be away from the community. I needed to raise my children and go to church and have a home separate from the community where I worked. Now, just 20 minutes down the road, I’m able to have some privacy. I’m just a mom, not the principal of the school.

Similarly, an elementary principal with two young children explained how being a mother has influenced her career choices: “I’ve always said I would go to middle school, but not until my youngest goes to middle school. That’s when I’d be open to that.”
One principal felt there was more that could be done to facilitate integration for women who were mothers. She felt that offering all employees preferential assignment for their own children would help tremendously—not just at the same school as the mother, but, for children enrolled at different levels, assignment to schools that would fit with transportation and childcare needs: “I am blessed because my kids end up going where I need them to go, but that shouldn’t be [left to chance]. It should be a seamless process.” This participant felt that this was one thing the school system could do, without much cost to the district, to support women who were trying to balance motherhood and career. In light of the work that women in the district were doing, this participant felt it was a small price for the district to pay.

Another principal felt improved leave benefits would support principals pursuing motherhood. In our state, maternity leave is six weeks. Women may take longer if there are related health issues, such as a caesarian birth. The lack of flexibility occurs when women want to extend their leave past 12 weeks, even if they have those days available in their sick-leave balance. As one principal explained,

My doctor wrote me a note for three months, so I had three months paid under a doctor’s note, but I would have loved to have been able to . . . afford to take it nonpaid and stay home for six months or a year. Three months went by so quick. She [was] barely holding her head up. That was hard. I could have stayed out longer, but policy didn’t allow it. [It’s] like, I’ve earned them, so let me use them. But you can’t.

Even when employees have sick days, they cannot use more than 12 weeks’ worth without a deduction in pay. Participants felt that more flexibility for women on maternity leave would be a significant way to support female employees.

The stories of women who are successfully balancing motherhood with the principalship demonstrate what is needed to succeed, given the demands of the job today.
Principals who are mothers experience an elevated status among the stakeholders they serve. The next section describes those benefits, as well as how principals without children experience the lack of those benefits.

Complementary Factors

Bradbury and Gunter (2006) described ways in which being a mother complemented the work of the principalship and the ways that being a mother served to elevate the principals’ status. This phenomenon was echoed in a variety of ways by study participants. Through their various experiences as mothers, they felt their work as principals was better. In some cases, the challenges and difficulties they experienced while attempting to balance work and family helped them relate to families and students who were going through difficult times. Because of their own experience as mothers, participants felt empathy that allowed them to connect more successfully with families. Drawing from their own experiences as mothers helped them to more fully understand family situations and act with greater authority, putting themselves in the shoes of whatever stakeholder they dealt with in their role as principal.

Empathy, Responsibility, and Credibility

One mother of two, whose marriage ended just as she was beginning her first principalship, spoke of this. She believed that being a single mother became a complementary factor for her work as principal:

I think that every experience that I have had has helped me become a better principal, in the sense of understanding children from broken homes, understanding teachers who are going through a difficult time—and so really, my life experiences have just, I think, ultimately become a gift in helping me understand other people.
Another principal with two children with diagnosed disabilities also felt an increased level of empathy as a result of being a mother. She spoke about how special education meetings were different for her because she is a mother of special-needs children herself: “I look at my role as the LEA a little bit differently. I have a perspective that maybe some people don’t have and I can see—I know what it feels like to be on the other side of the table as a parent.”

According to another participant, being a single mother and struggling to balance that with the demands of the principalship helped her relate to the stakeholders in her school in a unique way:

You step back and go, Wow, how did I really do all of that? There are always other people who are struggling with far more than you are and it puts it back into perspective. There are very few things that I cannot relate to—struggling, wondering, Oh my gosh, did I pay the light bill? Have I got enough money to do this, have I got enough money to do that? And really understanding that people are doing the best they know how to do. If I hadn’t had the experiences and challenges I’ve had, I don’t think I could have related to the parents that walk through the door of my school. I think the reason I am successful with parents is because I say, “Look, I understand.” And I don’t mind sharing my personal life to a point of helping them know that I can empathize with them.

Another principal with one child described how empathetic feelings not only gave her common ground with parents but also gave her more credibility. “I totally get now how parents feel in certain situations because I can personalize it to what it must feel like to receive information I just gave them about my own child, and also [I have the] credibility with parents to say, “I’m a mom.” I think that helped me do the job better.

While the mothers all felt they had a certain level of credibility due to having their own children, some women felt motherhood increased their feelings of responsibility to their work. They imagined how they would feel in certain situations if it were their own children
involved. They believed that this helped them understand situations better, but also caused them to work harder to make the best decisions possible. A middle school principal explained how her experiences as a mother and a full-time principal influenced her work:

There’s a level of understanding that works on both ends that I think stands out to me, and it’s front and center because I have little ones in school. So when I’m talking to children, I talk with my sons and my daughter in mind. It gives me a level of sensitivity and understanding that I think is very important, and it assists me.

Staying Grounded: Children Level Us Out

The job of principal is demanding and complex. Giving tremendous amounts of time and energy to the job was a salient theme in the study and throughout the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. For some of the participants with children in the study, children served as a complementary factor, helping participants recalibrate their lives and establish appropriate boundaries for work. After having children, participants were compelled to step back and attend to motherhood duties. Without children, some of the participants felt their tendency to work longer and longer hours and to maintain a work-centered life would have continued. An experienced principal with one child explained how her child did in fact help ground her: “I think having a child probably grounded me more, because I just would have worked that much harder. Like, I probably would have completely ignored my husband and gotten a divorce, but my daughter grounded me in that, you know, you can’t ignore this little baby.”

Even for principals without children, the thought of one day being a mother came with predictions of establishing more boundaries with regard to work. One principal who does not have children was asked to consider whether she would have made different career choices had she had children. She replied,

I don’t know. I think I still would have chosen to go into administration. I don’t know that I would have gone through [a routine of being] at work till 8, 9 o’clock and eating McDonalds and getting fat. I don’t know that I would have gone through that,
cause you would have to go home. I would make—I feel like I would have had more of a life because I would have wanted to. I think so. I still would have done it; I just would have done it differently.

Reframing the Issue

For participants who were able to balance their roles as principals and mothers, the experiences of their children have the potential to help reframe ideas about working mothers. These experiences are being shared with their peers and families, and could serve to change ideas about what it means to have a mother who is also highly invested in her career. One middle school principal recalls a conversation with her son that she transformed into a teachable moment:

He made a comment to me years ago, he was probably in the fourth or fifth grade, and at the time, he had lots of friends whose mothers didn’t work and they were real involved at the school and doing different things and they didn’t go to camp in the summer ‘cause they were staying at home and he said something about, “I wish you didn’t work full time,” and instead of being insulted by that or bothered by that, it led to this great conversation about this choice I had made. I’m doing what I want to be doing. And he knew that. Trust me, we have our normal parent/child challenges, but he totally accepts the fact that I’ve chosen to work and that I’m doing it because I want to be doing it and that I enjoy it, I find it rewarding, and he’s proud of that. He says things to people [like], “Oh well, my mom works because she wants to.”

She went on to explain that for some of her son’s friends, this is a new idea: a woman being at the top of her field and working because she is fulfilled by work. She said he explained it to her this way:

“He doesn’t understand, Mom, he doesn’t get it, what you do, that you’re at the top, you’re doing exactly what you want to do. He just doesn’t get it.” And I said, “Yeah, you’re right. Most people don’t.” When they think about women working outside the home or educators, they don’t see us as being well-educated, mobile professionals. So, some of that is our own doing. We’ve not educated those around us well enough.
Another middle school principal with three children spoke about how her work set an example for her children and shape their beliefs about work and what they could achieve:

I think it’s important to my children—for them to set their goals high, especially for my daughter. I want my children to understand that working hard does pay off. My children are proud of me being a principal. They talk about me at their schools. I think they are proud about that. They realize it’s an important job, ‘cause they see their own principals, and I just think it’s important for them. I think it is important exposure for my children.

What this Means for Principals Who Are Not Mothers

According to participants without children, their credibility with parents and staff was sometimes questioned. Similarly, rather than having children who could serve as a grounding device in their work lives, many of the participants without children reported regrets related to the energy and time they devoted to work, at the expense of establishing families.

Credibility with Parents

While some women experienced having children as beneficial for their careers as principals when dealing with parents, principals without children found that at times, their competency was questioned by stakeholders. When one participant was asked whether she felt not having children affected her job performance, a first-year principal without children described it this way:

I do not feel like it impacts my performance. I feel like it impacts people’s perception of me. Nothing pisses me off more than when somebody says, “When you have children, you’ll understand,” or “She’s really good because now she has kids.” It upsets me because it’s just not true. But maybe when I have kids, maybe I’ll say, “Yep, they were right.” I feel like they are questioning my job performance solely on the basis of whether or not I have birthed children. And that makes me crazy.”

An experienced elementary principal explained her way of processing assumptions people make because she doesn’t have children of her own:

When that comes up, I know that you can’t know what it’s like to be a parent until you are a parent, but I also know what children are like because I’ve worked with
thousands of them, and I know what parents are like because I’ve worked with thousands and thousands of them, tens of thousands of them. So when people say that to me, you know, I don’t even dignify that with a response. I just go on with whatever we are talking about.

Another experienced principal described the strong emotions that emerge when such generalizations are made, because she attributes her lack of children in part to the time she has given to taking care of other people’s children. She described her emotions as highly charged on this topic. “I think sometimes it pushes my buttons because I feel like, Well, if I didn’t have this damn job, I might have children! I just want to stand on the desk and be like, You don’t know what it’s like!

Credibility with Staff

I also wanted to know whether principals felt they had been perceived differently by employees because they were not mothers. One principal was adamant:

Oh, definitely! Definitely. I have tried to be flexible with people because, you know, I know childcare can be expensive, and getting it for random days would be challenging—but, you know, your kid can’t come to the meeting, and if they are here with you on a workday or whatever, they don’t need to be in the computer lab entertaining themselves while you’re in another place. People say either, “Do you have children? Well you don’t understand” or “You will understand when you have children.” You know, that comes up quite a bit.”

One principal suggested that more specific policies related to how teachers integrate their roles as mothers and employees would help her feel less conflicted in her duties. When staff members brought their children to meetings or their children were roaming the campus unsupervised, she was hesitant to intervene. Because she did not have children, she found it difficult to maintain expectations for staff on issues that conflicted with their duties as parents:

I can hold people accountable for the dress code ‘cause I wear the same thing, and I can hold people accountable for what time they come to work ‘cause I can hold myself accountable for that, but it’s a lot harder for me to hold people accountable for
keeping their children separate from professional responsibilities when I don’t have to do that myself.

For a principal who was working at a new school, some of her challenges were associated with the school’s culture with regard to how staff members balanced the demands of home and work. I wondered whether she ever felt that she was being treated differently because she did not have children of her own. Her former school had had onsite daycare that was available for staff on days when they had to be present for meetings before or after school. In her new school, she was trying to reconcile the need for teachers to attend meetings with the need to support them and recognize that they needed daycare for their children:

[Since my arrival] there have been many more times where, when we have the staff meeting from 4:15 to 5:15, [the statement] “I have to pick my child up and I can’t stay until the end of the this meeting” has come up, and I’m not used to that in places that I’ve been—where people feel that [the] “my children” . . . explanation or reason trumps everything. Yes, your children are the most important thing in your life, but you have a job that you are supposed to do, so you need to figure [it] out. I mean, unless your child is having an emergency. You know, your child [is] being picked up from daycare at the same time they need to be picked up every day; that’s not an emergency, and that doesn’t trump your professional responsibilities here, and if it does then you need a different job—and people here don’t really have that mindset, so that has been really different.

For principals without children, trying to be supportive of and understanding with their staff can be challenging. There was a heightened level of concern with being fair and not being seen by teachers as lacking understanding because they themselves did not have children. According to one high school principal, if anything, she erred on the side of being too understanding: “Maybe it’s one of those things where I go almost overboard because I don’t have a kid.”

Personal Regrets
Beyond the consequences felt in the workplace, when principals do not have children there can sometimes be private consequences. While participants with children felt that they helped ground them and compelled them to establish appropriate boundaries with regard to work, the participants without children described doubts about the level of commitment they had made to their careers—and in some cases, at the expense of starting a family. Feelings of regret emerged as a salient theme as they moved past the age for considering motherhood. While some were very clear that they regretted not making time to establish a family, others framed their regrets in the realization that they might have erred in making work their priority—a choice they might make differently if they had it to do over again. One principal who had been removed from her post following a takeover of her school described her experience:

I think the only time I really felt like that probably was when I got booted out because I thought, you know, I could have been paying more attention. So I did think, I’ve given all this to my career, all of this to this school, and this is how I’m being treated. And I did think, at that point, [that] I may have sacrificed my opportunity to start a family because I was paying attention to that school. I did have that thought at that time, that with everything else that I felt I sacrificed in my life to try to make that school great—’cause I did feel like I gave things up for that school—I was really thinking about the school and giving it all this attention, you know, I thought really, this is the tradeoff: that I sacrifice for this school and this is what happens. I do think that if I had been in a different situation, where the school hadn’t gone into School Improvement, then I might have, you know, I might have thought about it differently. Maybe if I was around more, had more time, that kind of thing, maybe [my husband and I] would have been thinking, Oh yeah, we’re totally ready.

For some of the principals, time at work with children can be a painful reminder of this issue. One middle school principal said,

Now that I’m 44 I don’t know that I can have children. That is one of those things that can haunt you at night as you are driving. When I’m in the car—it always haunts me in the car. If I see kids performing, I’m the only one in the audience crying and people are like, Why is she crying so bad, and I’m like, But I wanted one of those
When asked whether she felt she might one day look back and regret not having children, a former high school principal concluded that whatever feelings she may or may not have about it in the future will be grounded in knowing that she made her own choices and was not influenced to do what society or her husband wanted her to do. Her choices were her own:

I guess ultimately, you know, I don’t feel like I let it be other people making those decisions for me. Even though some of those things influenced me, it was ultimately still me. That’s the choice I made. If I get mad or have regrets, it’s more the society things that make it harder for women than men making these choices. Like men, how often are men thinking about that, you know? I don’t think they are thinking about it in the same way.

Breaking the Silence

As discussed in Chapter 2, previous research on female principals has focused on their leadership traits and the barriers they face in attaining positions. Research on how the principalship intersects with a woman’s role as a mother has been sparse. The consequences of the demands of the job are not being discussed among principals, either, according to participants. One elementary school principal whose marriage ended shortly after she became a principal remembers a conversation we had had several years ago, when I was just beginning to develop my ideas for this study. I asked her about the possibility of being able to have a successful career and a family. During our interview, she cried as she recalled, “You said something to me several years ago—you know, ‘Can you do it all?’ and I think you were probably planting the seed to do this, and I kept thinking, ‘God, I really want to tell her yeah, but I can’t. You know? I just don’t think I can.’” When veteran principals mentor administrators new to their positions, advice about how to successfully balance a career and family would clearly be valuable.
One principal surmised that lack of advice or caution from mentors may have been due to the lack of similar experience to draw from, preventing female mentors from having advice or concerns to share. She believed that the job had changed (see Changing Demands section above), significantly increasing the difficulty of finding balance—but also believed that advice was not offered because there were far fewer female principals who had held the position during their childbearing years:

I definitely don’t remember anybody around me saying, “If you become a principal, it might have this impact,” but when you think about it, I’m not sure there was a generation of principals in this situation. I don’t think this ever came up, in general, for women leaders before us, or the male mentors that we may have had. You know, I don’t think people figured it out until our generation of young female principals—that “Oh, this might really be a conflict.” I never had a female principal when I went to school. I didn’t ever know many, as my father would call them, “lady principals.

Whether or not they were cautioned about the impact assuming a principalship might have on having a family, some women pursued their goals without considering the issue. Some made it clear that family situations had not influenced their career decisions. One principal described her career changes as being a product of her desire for growth and challenge. She described the last job she actively pursued, as principal of a newly built year-round school:

By the time I applied, I knew I was getting married. I did talk to my fiancé about that. The reason I pursued the school was because I had been at my former school for eight years. I felt like it was time for me to now challenge myself, and boy, did I get a challenge! But that was it. I went there because I wanted a challenge and felt like at that point I had mastered my school, I’d been there, I’d built relationships, I could do that job, . . . I had done well there, and I wanted to see if I could do well in a different environment. My decisions about my career have not ever really had to do with my family. I already knew that’s what I wanted to do, so my husband coming into my life didn’t impact me deciding to become a principal or not and us deciding to get married. . . . I didn’t really factor that into, you know, moving to the new school.

The purpose of this study was to examine more closely the experiences of female principals and the intersection of their lives as administrators and mothers. During the
interviews, the participants spoke about the lack of discourse on this topic. While some participants described thinking—but not discussing—it, others wondered whether this was a new phenomenon unique to the post–women’s liberation generation of school leaders.

Previous generations of women had fought for opportunities to serve in the role of principal, and often women entered the role after they had married and had children. Now that women are assuming the position at an earlier age, a new dilemma has emerged: how to balance those roles simultaneously. For these women, career choices had not always been made in a deliberate fashion. As time passed, consequences unfolded related to the demands of their jobs. For the current generation of female principals, their experiences mark a new chapter in the lives of working women.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: CREATING A NEW STORY

Summary of Findings

This study focused on women who work as principals of public schools in an increasingly demanding and complex field. Though I did not set out to recruit highly effective and successful women, the women at the center of this research ended up being at the top of their field (see Appendix D), recognized locally and nationally for their achievements. While previous literature reviewed in preparation for this study explored the challenges women face when seeking positions of leadership, some of the consequences I had seen as an insider were not found in the literature. Previous studies had explored the barriers women face when seeking positions of leadership, the merit of women’s leadership styles in meeting the current demands of the job, and the challenges and consequences women face when seeking advancement in educational leadership—such as attaining high school principalships and superintendencies—but the more private challenges of balancing a personal life with a career were absent. Once a woman has made the commitment to the job of principal, the consequences to her personal life are rarely examined. My research allowed women to reveal how the demands of the principalship intersected with their equally strong desires to pursue motherhood. Social isolation, the end of relationships and doubts about the
possibility that one could be a principal and a mother simultaneously were common among the women without children in the study. For women with children, health issues, guilt, competing demands, and living with divided priorities between work and home were common consequences.

I was also eager to introduce stories into the discourse that would show how women were able to side-step consequences such as those described above. Because the number of women now holding principalships is growing, and the age of those women coincides with their childbearing years, I wanted this work to offer insight and advice to women as they make pivotal career decisions that might impact them personally.

This study identifies key factors in the women who were fulfilling the roles of mother and principal successfully, which I have referred to as “having it all.” First, these women had a strong sense of personal agency; they believed that their skills and successes as principals had positioned them well to be successful in motherhood. Second, these women described strong support networks that included family, partners, supervisors, and colleagues. These individuals provided support to the women that helped them survive their demanding job and be mothers simultaneously. The women who were able to “have it all” had also learned how to establish and maintain their own boundaries. They knew they needed to have realistic expectations for themselves. For some, these boundaries came after they had experienced extreme personal difficulties or later in their careers, but all felt part of making it work was having realistic expectations and working within those expectations. Finally, the women believed that integrating their work life with their lives as mothers was key to their success. Having children with them at their schools, being strategic about which jobs they would take, and surrounding themselves with others in the field who understood the demands of the job
all helped some of the participants make their lives work. These stories of success can encourage principals considering whether to pursue motherhood. By being strategic about their career decisions and finding the right support, these women have shown it is possible to succeed both as a principal and a mother.

As Bradbury and Gunter (2006) explain, being a mother and a principal can serve to elevate the status of female administrators. The participants in the study proved this out as they described the heightened level of empathy and connectedness they had with both parents and their employees with children. As they performed their duties, they described a unique sense of responsibility, as they were able to empathize with the child’s parent and imagine the student’s needs as they would the needs of their own child. The challenges some participants had faced as they attempted to balance the demands of the principalship and motherhood also served to enhance their ability to relate to a wide range of stakeholders. In contrast, women without children found that they were often questioned by parents and staff members due to their lack of experience as mothers. They felt that regardless of their credentials and their successes, their credibility and empathy were still questioned at times.

Principals with children also expressed feeling that their children helped to ground them and compelled them to prioritize their work duties more appropriately. Participants described coming home to children at appropriate hours to care for them and the joy of having their children distract them from the demands of their day. In contrast, women without children experienced regrets related to the priority they had placed on work. These participants questioned if they had missed the opportunity to “have it all” because of their drive to be successful and their commitment to their schools. For some, advising interns and
teachers not to make the same mistakes revealed their doubts about the personal choices they had made.

**Implications**

This study has the potential to bring private experiences of women in administration into the discourse. By examining these issues openly, districts seeking to recruit and retain effective principals can expand their efforts so they authentically align with the needs of female employees. Conducting widespread recruiting efforts at national, state and local levels for high-quality administrators without addressing the consequences and demands described by the participants in this study will continue to be limited in effectiveness. Districts need to explore ways they can mitigate the consequences described in Chapter 4. By reconsidering leave benefits, allowing flexibility for workplace assignments that complement the school attended by a principal’s children, and working to create more realistic expectations for principals, districts could increase the work satisfaction and thus the retention of female employees who also wish to be parents.

As the number of women continues to grow in educational leadership, we must acknowledge the consequences of working life for women. By talking about these job-related issues and devising strategies to overcome them, working women will have guidance to help them avoid potential negative consequences such as those faced by the participants in this study. For future generations of female principals, legitimizing this topic and bringing it into the discourse will empower women to make deliberate choices about their personal and professional lives. The results of this study indicate that female administrators face consequences due to the demands of the principalship. Schools of education and mentoring
programs for new administrators should seek to address these job-related issues in order to support and retain female leaders.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Study

The small sample size and single site of this study limit the ability to generalize the findings broadly. Similar qualitative analyses of principals in other districts and increasing the sample size could help mitigate these limitations. Additionally, participants in this study began their careers as administrators within the last 20 years, and for one participant, within the last year. Expanding the study to include principals who held their positions prior to the 1990s could demonstrate how this dilemma has emerged over time. A larger sample of female administrators, including administrators from previous generations, might also provide additional strategies for overcoming the consequences faced by participants of this study.

Expanding this study to include examination of businesses and organizations with workplace policies designed to support families, and the outcomes of those policies, could illustrate how the experiences of women simultaneously pursuing careers and motherhood could be different. Just as Bialeschki, Kelly, and Raymond (1996) point out, work institutions have not kept up with the changing reality of women’s presence in the workplace. Looking to businesses such as SAS, recognized internationally for policies to support its employees, could offer insight for change. A study of women working in those organizations contrasted with women in educational administration could serve to strengthen the study’s findings.

Principals without children in this study reported feeling as if they were perceived differently by staff members and parents. A study exploring this with parents and staff
members of principals without children could determine whether this perception was accurate. Likewise, surveying students’ parents and principals’ staff members who have children to see how their status as parents impacts their impressions of the credibility, empathy, and level of responsibility of a principal without children would also be valuable.

A study including interviews of children and families of principals could offer insight as to how the demands of the job affect a woman’s ability to fulfill their personal roles. The participants in this study described the consequences to their children and families, but this was their perception of those events. Interviewing these children and family members could distinguish between what was perceived by the participants in this study and what is actually being experienced.

As reviewed in Chapter 2, researchers have examined the reasons women leave the field of administration, as well as the reasons some women with credentials or leadership potential do not enter the field (Brubaker & Coble, 2006; Howley, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Williamson & Hudson, 2003). Many of the studies cite concerns related to family as the cause. Narrowing the sample to include women who left only because of issues related to motherhood would complement this work and offer further insight for recruiting and retention efforts as well as preparatory and mentoring programs for beginning administrators.

These findings are not meant to dissuade women from pursuing the position; as the literature demonstrates, the potential benefits of female leadership are too significant to be ignored. It is, however, meant to raise awareness about the high stakes associated with such a move. As one of the participants said, “I definitely don’t remember anybody around me saying, ‘If you become a principal, it might have this impact . . .’” We have entered a new
stage in educational leadership. It is not as uncommon for a woman in her 30s to get her first principalship. As Michael Cash from DPI has shown (M. Cash, personal communication, June, 20, 2011), women in North Carolina outnumber men in the principalship beginning at age 37. For these women, consideration of the personal accounts in this study will be important so that they can make deliberate decisions about the course of their lives as mothers and principals. It is also meant to offer insight to policymakers as the realities of work and family as they pertain to female school administrators.

These findings are also not meant to invigorate or encourage groups who would misuse these findings as evidence that women should be discouraged from pursuing careers in leadership. Because women’s leadership skills have been proven to create the conditions for successful schools, creating policies to address these realities will enhance critical recruitment and retention efforts. Unless these experiences and lived realities of female administrators is taken into consideration, we run the risk of losing the best and brightest leaders in our field at a time when the need for outstanding public school leaders has never been greater.
Appendix A

August 14, 2011

Dear Mr. Tata

As you know, I am currently pursuing my doctoral degree at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. I appreciate the support I have received from Wake County Public Schools, along with many of my colleagues, to pursue this advanced degree. My culminating dissertation focuses on the relationship between the principalship and motherhood. The findings of the project will have implications for principal retention and recruitment.

I am writing to ask your permission to use Wake County Public Schools as the site for my study and a small sample of female principals from our district as the subjects. This study will fulfill the requirements of my doctorate in Educational Leadership at UNC Chapel Hill. The study may involve me visiting their schools during the upcoming school year and several interviews with the principals. Through examination of these principals, I hope to learn more about the ways motherhood and a career in educational administration intersect. I have held a preliminary meeting with Dr. Angie Wright to review any potential reservations about conducting the study within our district. She had no reservations at the time of our meeting and has offered to be available for further support in completing the research for this project.

I will be contacting you by phone within the next week to request an appointment to discuss the study further. In the meantime, if you would like more information or if you have any initial questions about the project, please contact me. I can be reached directly at 919-856-7666 or by email, jjordan@wcpss.net. I understand how busy you are and appreciate your time and consideration. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline S. Jordan
Principal
Underwood Elementary
919-856-7666
Dear _____(insert name of principal here)_____,

I am currently enrolled in the EdD program at UNC Chapel-Hill, pursuing my doctorate. For my dissertation, I am examining the relationship between the educational administration and motherhood. I would like you to be one of the participants in the research study.

I am interested in exploring the various ways that women in positions of educational administration have navigated choices related to motherhood. I am also interested in positive and negative consequences women have experienced as a result of the choices they have made as well as contributing factors related to the choices they made.

The participation of the female administrators involved in the study will include being interviewed twice. The first interview will last approximately 1 hour. Time for the follow up interview will be determined by the issues and themes revealed in the first interview, but should not exceed 1 hour. The location of the interview will be up to you. The questions for the interviews are attached in order for you to review them and determine if you will be comfortable discussing these topics with me for the purpose of my study. You may choose to answer only some of the questions, omitting any that you do not feel comfortable responding to in the interviews.

The identity of each of the research participants will remain completely anonymous. I will use numbers only to identify participants and names of schools will be omitted in the data analysis. All notes from interviews and data analysis will be made available to you prior to publication. You will have the right to make any adjustments or omissions to the material as you feel are necessary. You have the right to the stop your participation in the study at any time and have all documentation and research related to you removed from the project. Maintaining your privacy and confidentiality will be my foremost priority at all times during the study.

The study findings will be shared with my dissertation committee and other members of the UNC Chapel Hill Educational Leadership faculty. My dissertation will be published in hard copy as well as electronically.

If you agree to participate, please fill out the attached consent form and return to me in the self addressed stamped envelope provided. Thank you for considering participation in this study. I look forward to talking with you more about it soon,

Jackie Jordan
What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary. You may refuse to give consent, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty. Even if you give your consent, you may decide not to be in the study or to leave the study early.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You have been given two copies of this consent form, one to keep for your records, and one to turn in to the researchers. You should ask the researchers named above, or staff members who may assist them, any questions you have about this study at any time.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this dissertation study is to understand the role conflict between motherhood and the position of an administrator, such as a principal, as experienced by female administrators. This study will examine the choices women face related to motherhood and their careers.

I hope to explore the various ways that women in positions involving educational administration have navigated choices related to motherhood. I am also interested learning about consequences, perceived as either or both positive and negative, that women have experienced as a result of the choices they have made.
You are being asked to be in the study because you are a female administrator. Your school system is neither conducting nor sponsoring this research and there will be no consequence to you if you decide not to take part.

**How many people will take part in this study?**
I am hoping to include at least 20 administrators in this study.

**How long will your participation in this study last?**
If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed twice. The first interview will last approximately one hour. After I have had a chance to learn from your initial interview, and perhaps those of others, and extract themes, I will ask to interview you a second time to ask some follow-up questions. That second interview could also last approximately an hour.

If you like, you may also choose to share your thoughts with me after that second interview via an additional meeting, or email, or on the telephone, but that is simply an option, not a specific part of the study.

**What will happen if you take part in the study?**
As noted above, you would be asked to participate in two private, individual interviews about your career path and the decisions you have made along that path as a female school administrator. The location and timing of the interview is up to you—we can meet at your home, at your workplace, or at any other place that you consider sufficiently private to be able to talk freely.

You have been given a copy of the questions that are planned, for you to review to help you determine if you would be willing to discuss the proposed topics with me for the purpose of my study. Note that you may choose to answer only some of the questions and skip over any that you do not want to address in the interview. For all questions, you may say as much or as little as you like.

A digital recording device will be used to capture what participants say in their individual, private interviews. All the data recordings will be stored in a secure location that is locked and only accessible by me.

If you prefer to not be recorded when interviewed, you will have that option. I will ask you about that when we get together for the interview—if you don’t want to be recorded, then I will just take notes. You can also choose to be recorded, but then ask that the recorder be turned off at specific times. As a researcher, I prefer to be able to transcribe what you tell me by replaying the recording (in a private setting), rather than having you wait while I write as fast as I can. But whether or not your interview is recorded is entirely up to you.

All written notes and transcripts will also be kept in a locked storage area in the researcher’s home office. These transcripts and data files will only be available to the researcher. Protecting the confidentiality of the information and the privacy of the participants in the study will be a priority for the researcher at all times.
**What are the possible benefits from being in this study?**
Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. You may not benefit directly from being in the study, but you may appreciate the opportunity to talk about these issues with someone who also is a female school administrator and who has a strong research interest in this area.

**What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?**
There are only minimal risks foreseen for you if you participate in this research study. Talking about motherhood and career and the choices women face may remind some participants about the emotions that they have felt in the past, and those could be re-experienced, to a reduced degree, as they revisit those past experiences in the interview. To minimize as much possible any discomfort, you can decide in advance of the interview which questions you do not want to address and simply indicate you want to skip those, as noted above. You can always say as little as you like about any topic you do address, and we can always stop for a break, switch to other kinds of questions, or stop entirely, as you prefer.

**How will your privacy be protected?**
You will not be identified in any report or publication about this study.

Your privacy will be protected by making sure that we find a place and time where we can conduct this private interview, out of earshot of anyone else. The confidentiality of your information will be protected by using numbers for you rather than your name. Your school site will be identified in generic terms only, such as “elementary school.” The school district will not be named.

You will be given an opportunity to review all the notes and transcripts from our interviews for accuracy. If you want to change any of the information presented in the transcripts or the written analysis, you will be given the opportunity to have those words, phrases, or sections revised or deleted from the work.

Your signed consent form will be stored in a locked cabinet. All information obtained from you as part of this study, such as the interview recordings, notes, and transcripts, will be stored securely. As noted above, they will not contain names, only an ID code.

**Will you receive anything for being in this study?**
You will not receive anything for being in this study.

**Will it cost you anything for your child to be in this study?**
It will not cost anything to be in this study, other than the cost of transportation if you decide to be interviewed someplace other than your workplace or your home.

**What if you have questions about this study?**
You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If there are questions about the study, complaints, concerns, please contact the researchers listed on the first page of this form.
What if there are questions about your rights as a research participant?
All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If there are questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Participant’s Agreement:

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily consent to participate in this research study. I understand that I will be able to control whether and when my interviews are recorded.

_______________________________________   _________
Signature of Participant      Date

______________________________________
Printed Name of Participant
APPENDIX D

Jacqueline Jordan
Graduate Student, UNC Chapel Hill
(919) 427-3205   jacqueline1970@nc.rr.com

Dear _____(insert name of principal here)_____,

I recently sent you a letter inviting you to participate in a research study I am conducting for my dissertation at UNC-Chapel Hill. As you may recall, the study is examining the roles involved in educational administration and motherhood.

The participation of the female administrators involved in the study will include being interviewed twice. The first interview will last approximately 1 hour. Time for the follow up interview will be determined by the issues and themes revealed in the first interview, but should not exceed 1 hour. The location and time of the interview will be up to you. I hope to audio-record the interviews, but I will just take notes if you prefer.

The study findings, but not your individual transcript, will be shared with my dissertation committee and other members of the UNC Chapel Hill Educational Leadership faculty. My dissertation will be published in hard copy as well as electronically, but your name will not appear in any publication or presentation about this work, and your information will not be able to be identified by others as yours.

A copy of the questions that are planned is also attached, so you may review those as you make your decision. Note that you can choose to skip over any question or topic you do not want to address, and you can say as little as you like about any topic or question.

If you have any further questions about participation in this study, please contact me. If you agree to participate, please sign one copy of the attached consent form and return that signed copy to me in the self addressed stamped envelope provided. Please keep the other copy for your records.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. I look forward to talking with you more about it soon,

Jackie Jordan
One Qualitative Research Methods Class and I Am an Expert, Right?

Now that I had some of the basic ideas of qualitative methods in my head and had read through several examples of qualitative studies, it was time to try my own hand at collecting data using qualitative methods. Not surprisingly, this first attempt was rich with mistakes for me to reframe as learning opportunities which will no doubt assist me in modifying my techniques in order to make future attempts more effective and richer in quality.

My first attempt was an interview with a participant that lasted close to an hour. The interview occurred over the phone. The participant is a personal friend of mine whom I have known for twelve years. She was selected as a participant because she is a principal, she is not married, she does not have children, and she was willing to participate in the research study. I verbally shared with her, very quickly, the purpose of the research, the methods I would be using, assurances for her anonymity and a promise to share all interview transcripts with her in order that she might make suggestions, corrections or clarifications to her ideas as I had recorded them. She was enthusiastic about the idea and very willingly agreed to participate. We started the interview immediately following this very brief introduction to the project and her agreement to participate. Already, I had made several serious mistakes. According to Marshall and Rossman the success of a qualitative research study can be dependent on the researcher “building trust, maintaining good relations, respecting norms of reciprocity, and sensitively considering ethical issues” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 78). As I reflect on this first interview I would have to honestly say that I failed in each of these four areas.
Big No No’s for Entry, Role and Ethics

First, in terms of entry and access, I realized after the fact that I had put both of us in an inappropriate position by conducting the interview while each of us were officially fulfilling our duties as principals. I had ignored the “concerns associated with such access,” including “ethical and political dilemmas” (Alvesson, 2003). While it was very convenient to phone her at her desk, because as a fellow principal I have access to her direct, private desk phone number, it could certainly be perceived as conducting personal business on school system time, a politically incorrect activity that would not be perceived fondly by our superiors. Looking ahead it will be important to schedule interviews ahead of time at a neutral location that occurs outside of normal business hours. At one point the participant even said, “Hang on, and let me go close my door.” This should have been an indication to me that the responses by the participant were possibly inhibited by the fact that she was not in a private setting, that her responses may have been somewhat diminished by the fact that she was wearing two hats at once, that of principal and that of participant, and by the fact that our content for discussion was of such a private and personal nature she was fearful that someone may overhear her remarks. As the head of the school, these intimate details were clearly not general knowledge among her employees, and in fact during the interview she disclosed that she does not even talk about this subject matter with close friends. Looking ahead, I will need to remember this and make certain that the participants are given a private setting away from their workplace in order to comfortably respond to questions.

Another key mistake in this botched first attempt was consolidating the introduction of the project and the interview all into one event. As the days passed after the interview I could not shake the feeling that I had taken advantage of my friendship with the participant
and her trust in me and faith in my ethics for the sake of my own selfish desire to do the most amount of work in the shortest amount of time. While Solway and Walters declare that “total integrity cannot be maintained in either role,” whether that of objective researcher or trusted friend, I could have certainly done a more ethical job in juggling the two roles (Soloway & Walters, 1977, p.166). I did not anticipate my own feelings and sense of responsibility to the participant and certainly did not anticipate the guilt I would feel by not adhering to best practices and ethical behaviors of researchers. Like Geer (1964), my assumptions about the process going in were much different than the actual reality taking shape. Just as Geer (1964) developed protective feelings about the students she was researching, I was feeling very responsible to my participant and concerned for her well being. There were several steps I missed that could have protected her safety as a participant.

First, I should have offered a written description of the project along with a verbal explanation of the project to the participant at a neutral, off the clock time that she agreed to ahead of time, not on the fly caught off guard on the phone. Secondly, she should have been given time to digest the information she heard about the project and been given a chance to ask follow up questions related to the project before deciding whether or not she wanted to participate. She should also have received information in writing about how the data would be presented from the research and specifically how her anonymity would be secured. She should have been given an opportunity to ask me about my qualifications to conduct such research and to ask questions she might have about my training. And, most importantly, there should have been ample time for her to consider how participating in the interview may stir up old feelings and the consequences she might face as a result of time spent revisiting a topic that had many powerful feelings and emotions associated with it. Even though this
topic was chosen by me because of its importance and value, I grossly undervalued it by packaging it in such a fast food fashion and taking her participation in an interview related to the topic so lightly as to think she could do it while at work! My “want-to-do-ability” for the material is high because I “care deeply about the substance of the inquiry at hand” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.11), yet my actions did demonstrate that value.

To say I was disappointed in myself upon reflection of my first attempt would be an understatement. Once she started to answer the questions and detail for me how difficult and painful it was for her to reach the point where she realized she was not in fact going to be a mother I knew I had made a terrible mistake. This dear friend and fellow principal was telling me about one of the most significant factors in her life as a woman, if not the most, and we are doing it on the phone while at work. I wonder if she realized how deep we would be going when she agreed to answer my questions just minuets earlier. I know I did not, and then my lack of skill at responding to this level of intimacy and depth became undeniably apparent. Piotrkowski describes the reciprocity her participants felt as they were able to have someone listen to their challenges, fears and hurts related to their role as mother. In the future, it will be imperative that I describe to the participants the possible themes the interviews may explore and give the participants time to determine whether they are wiling to delve into often painful areas and what circumstances, such as setting and time, would be best for them to explore those topics. Certainly, unpacking those topics and then having to hustle off to deal with the latest school house crisis was not ideal planning on my part and I can only hope that the participant had a few minutes to get herself together before she was called on to perform a demanding duty as principal. Again, Alvesson’s (2003) cautions
related to closeness and closure when research is conducted in your own setting were certainly ringing true.

Finally, this first attempt served to remind me of how important it is for me to have a clear boundary and be firm in my role as researcher when I conduct the interviews. I am very passionate about the material and because part of the study will involve my own story, the tendency to integrate myself too much into the data collection will be challenging. In Wade’s (1984) “Switching Hats” she describes the dilemmas and advantages faced as she conducted research with participants who were of the same race at a site that was also her workplace. She describes being very deliberate in her interactions with the students, making certain that they were clear as to whether she was wearing her “researcher hat” or her “university administrator hat.” As we moved through the interview I felt myself alternating roles without disclosing this to the participant. As she would share her personal story about milestones she had reached in her career and the impact of decisions related to motherhood I found myself, too often I think, chiming in and giving more of a response than would be consistent with that of a researcher. I was talking with her at points more as a friend. It is possible that my elaboration on her ideas could have served to stifle her story and prevent important elements from being revealed. It is possible that as I interjected I broke her stream of thought and developing ideas were never given the chance to emerge. Because I was unsuccessful at “switching hats”, and was relating to her more and more as a friend, she was not likely to cut me off for the sake of maintaining the integrity of the data collection process.

**Not All Was Lost**

In closing, the experience was not a total debacle. As I completed the first interview the value of the project as well as the method used for data collection proved to be on target.
The reaction of those I spoke with about the project affirmed my purpose for the project and validity of the topic. The first participant absolutely saw the value in the project, because so many women in our field are facing similar circumstances, yet the subject remains mostly unmentioned and not widely studied. It is possible that the participants may benefit from having an opportunity to share their stories with me, because I share their circumstances. This situation is similar to the reciprocity Doppler predicted in her consent request for her study, Gay/Straight Alliance Participants in Public High Schools (Doppler, 1998). Just as she predicted that gay students would feel reciprocity in talking to an examiner who was also gay, the participants I interview may feel a sense of reciprocity in talking with me about a subject that they had previously felt uncomfortable in discussing with friends who do not share the same circumstances.

By examining in detail the relationship between work in educational administration and family roles for these women participants, I will be able to, as Marshall and Rossman describe, “contribute to the ongoing conversation in a social science discipline” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.11). The enthusiasm of my first participant as well as other potential participants I have already spoken with has been overwhelming and all have affirmed that this is a compelling topic worthy of further exploration. This has validated the purpose of my study to “build rich descriptions of complex circumstances that are unexplored in the literature” as well as to show “relationships between events and the meaning of the relationships” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.33). As I move further into the project, I hope that the stories told will reveal information that could serve as a guide to policymakers and employers who can respond to stresses experienced as women look for a balance between work and home. If barriers to doing both can be identified, perhaps work structures can
change, eliminating the need for women to pick one role or the other. If this happens, the study will succeed to “contribute understanding and opportunities for action in all four domains” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.35) including, exploratory, explanatory, descriptive and emancipatory.

I also feel that the decision to use interviews as the method of research was the right choice. The use of this qualitative method appears to be the best in order to truly understand the complex set of circumstances that intersect when women try and balance their roles as educational administrators and mother or wife or daughter or partner. I mirrored Piotrkowski’s method of starting with an open ended question, “tell me about it,” and then proceeded to, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe, let the story “unfold, cascade, roll and emerge.” I went into this first interview, as Geer (1964) describes, with somewhat of a hypothesis in mind. I had predicted a “list of variables” that would be likely to emerge as participants described role balancing dilemmas. However, as I listened to the first participant, I heard ideas that were new to me. Here, I had the flexibility to change course and explore new emerging ideas. As Marshall and Rossman explain when describing the pilot study strategy, during this first attempt the qualitative method demonstrated its usefulness in “generating enticing research questions” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006. p.58). The new, unanticipated ideas that emerged from this first interview did entice me and I grew excited thinking about the yet uncovered aspects of the phenomena that are sure to be unveiled as my interviews proceed. Keeping the opportunity for new questions open rather than using a fixed list of pre-established questions was critical. If I had created a survey or questionnaire or even specific interview questions with only my initial ideas driving the questions, there were key issues that I would never have uncovered. Dean (1967) contrasts
the use of unstructured methods to more quantitative techniques, “the field worker can constantly modify his categories, making them more suitable for the analysis of the problem he is studying. The survey researcher is often stuck with the categories or variables he originally used in conceiving the problem” (Dean, 1967, p. 22). Piotrkowski also describes the benefit of using an inductive approach versus a deductive approach, “Premature selection of independent and dependent variables may have prevented our learning about the full complexity of the interrelationships that were of interest here” Piotrkowski, 1979, p.288). By keeping the possibilities open and utilizing an inductive approach to gather my data, I will likely find more surprises and areas to explore in order to explore this topic in a meaningful and significant way.

**Conclusion**

This first attempt to gather qualitative data came with many valuable learning moments. While I was harshly disappointed in the ways that I fell short as a researcher, the reflection on the first attempt will serve me well in sharpening my skills for future interviews. The opportunity to see the value in the qualitative method utilized offered a powerful enticement to continue on in this meaningful, albeit time consuming, project.
### APPENDIX F

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Current Age</th>
<th>Age of first Administrative Position</th>
<th>Total number of years in Educational Administration</th>
<th>Relationship Status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Current Position, # of Years Held</th>
<th>Awards/Honors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Domestic Partnership</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Middle School Principal, 3.5 years</td>
<td>Teacher of the Year nominee multiple years, Assistant Principal of the Year Finalist, Middle School Director for Division of Principals and Assistant Principals, Mentor for new Principals and Assistant Principals, Doctorate of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>High School Principal</td>
<td>Assistant Principal of the year, Principal of the Year, Principal's Executive Program Jack McCall Award UNC-Ch (two times), Cap 8 Principal of the Year, Cap 8 President (two times), WCDP /AP Board of Directors, President, Wake Education Partnership Board of Directors,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Years of Service</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Additional Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Middle School Principal</td>
<td>Married 3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>National Board Certified Teacher, Doctorate Degree, Helping Hands Principal of the Year, Teacher of the Year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>District Level Senior Administrator (Former Elementary School Principal)</td>
<td>Married 1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Assistant Principal of the Year, Principal of the Year Finalist, Division of Principals and Assistant Principals office--Parliamentarian and Elementary Assistant Principal Level Representative, American Montessori Society Administrator Certification, Helping Hands Principal of the Year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>District Level Senior Administrator (Former Middle and High School Principal)</td>
<td>Single 0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Assistant Principal of the Year, Principal of the Year Finalist, Doctorate of Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Middle School Principal</td>
<td>Married 1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Teacher of the Year, Assistant Principal of the Year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Years</td>
<td>Relationship Status</td>
<td>Education and Awards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>In a relationship, never married</td>
<td>(Former Elementary School Principal), 7 months, Year Finalist, Jaycees young educator award, Assistant principals executive program award recipient, Doctorate of Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Principal of the Year (Finalist for multiple years prior to), Teacher of the Year (twice), Division of Principals and Assistant Principals, Numerous School Level Awards including National Magnet School of America, Governor’s Entrepreneurial Award, Title One School of Down Syndrome Association</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Years</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Recognitions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Excellence, Blue Ribbon School, National School of Character, NC Women to Watch Award, Wachovia Principal of the Year, Honorary Doctorate Degree Recipient from California University, Elementary School Principal, 5 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>In a relationship, never married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher of the Year, NC Principal Fellow, NCPAPA Distinguished Leadership in Practice Program, Elementary School Principal, 1 year and 2 months</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sallie Mae Outstanding First Year Teacher, Principal of the Year Finalist, Elementary Director Division of Principals and Assistant Principals, Finance Committee Chair Division of Principal and Assistant Principals, NC Principal Fellow, NC Prospective, Elementary School Principal, 1 year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Years</td>
<td>Relationship Status</td>
<td>Professional Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>In a relationship, never married</td>
<td>NC Teacher Academy Board of Trustees, State Superintendent’s Principals’ Advisory Council, NCAE Division of Principals and Administrators, President Co-authored article, <em>Educational Leadership</em>, 2008 NCPTA District 3 Educator of the Year, NCAE Assistant Principal of the Year, Teacher of the Year, Outstanding Administrator</td>
<td>Assistant Principal of the Year Finalist, Principal of the Year (two times each in a different school system), NCAE State Principal of the Year, Council for Exceptional Children's Outstanding Administrator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Middle School Principal (Former Elementary School Principal), 3.5 years</td>
<td>Teacher, Patrick W. and Janet R. Carlton Dissertation Award</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Math Teacher, NC Teaching Fellow</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G

Interview Questions

Describe the career path you have followed since entering the work force.

Describe any experience you had teaching that made you reflect on what leaders do.

Describe the leadership roles you had while teaching. What were your reflections on these roles?

Describe your first thoughts regarding pursuing a position as an administrator.

Who were your role models? How did they influence you?

Describe any encouragement you received from family to pursue a position as an administrator.

Describe any encouragement you received from supervisors to pursue a position as an administrator.

Describe any encouragement you received from friends to pursue a position as an administrator.

Describe any encouragement you received from coworkers to pursue a position as an administrator.

How old were you when you made the first steps toward pursuit of a position in administration? Describe in detail the steps you took. Describe what you loved and didn’t love as you first experienced administrative life?

Describe your personal life at the time you made those first steps. What, if any, influence did your personal life have on your decisions at that time. For the purpose of this study, personal life would include aspects of your life including family, outside interests, social life activities, hobbies, and other activities that contribute to your personal sense of fulfillment and/or balance.

From the initial decision time to pursue a position in administration, describe your career trajectory which ultimately led to your first position as an administrator. Please include dates in your description. For instance, if you held a position as an administrative intern, describe when that occurred and for how long.

Were there any changes in your personal life from the time you first started consciously and deliberately pursuing a position in administration? How did you feel about those changes as related to your pursuit of administration?
Describe changes to your personal life upon the attainment of your first position in administration. How did these changes to your personal life evolve as your experience as an administrator increased?

If you received any promotion or job changes once you became an administrator, describe how those promotions and/or changes impacted your personal life.

What, if any, systems or structures within your school and/or school system helped to alleviate consequences of changes faced in your personal life as a result of your role as an administrator?

What, if any, systems or structures within your school and/or school system exacerbated consequences of changes faced in your personal life as a result of your role as an administrator?

Did your role as an administrator ever cause you to make any deliberate choices related to your personal life? If so, explain those circumstances and the choices you made.

Did your personal life ever cause you to make any deliberate choices related to your pursuit of career goals as an administrator? If so, explain those circumstances and the choices you made.

For administrators with children:

When deciding to pursue your career in educational administration, describe how your child/children weighed into that decision making process?

Did you recognize any changes in your performance of your professional duties that you can relate to being a mother?

Were there times you recall that you were perceived in a different way as a result of being a mother? Can you describe the circumstances of those times?

How would describe the intersection of your life as a mother and your life as an educational administrator? Were there pros and cons? Please describe them.

If you could change one thing about your life as an administrator who is a mother, what would you change?

What do you know about supports that some businesses and professions provide for mothers? Would these things have made a difference?

Were there times in your professional life when you felt a tension related to performing your duties and fulfilling your duties/responsibilities as a mother? How did you manage that tension?
Describe any school level, district level, or policy structures that either helped or hindered your ability to balance your two roles as educational administrator and mother. An example might be free child care at your site level afterschool and before school programs.

Do you have any regrets or guilt stemming from your time spent simultaneously being a mother and an administrator?

Are there any personal factors that have helped or hindered your ability to balance your two roles as an educational administrator and mother?

What advice would you give to a woman in a similar situation with children and a career in educational administration?

Have there been any aspects of your job that you have been unable to perform as a result of being a mother?

Have there been any opportunities within your career life that you have not pursued because of being a mother?

Have there been any times when your children or other family members have spoken with you about your role as an administrator? Describe those conversations.

Have you ever observed any particular feelings or reactions of your children related to your role as an administrator? Describe.

For administrators without children:

Do you plan to have children someday?

If yes:

Have you made a deliberate decision to not have children at this time? Describe the factors that have shaped this decision.

Do you have any plans to change your career life when becoming a mother? Describe the changes you have planned.

If you are planning to continue your work as an administrator, do you have any feelings of fear or apprehension about that change? Please describe those feelings.
Have you received any encouragement or discouragement from family related to having children while also working as an administrator? From colleagues? From friends? From supervisors? From staff members who work for you?

If no:

Have your plans to not have children been influenced at all by your career in administration? Please describe that influence and when and how it occurred.

Do you feel that not having children in any way impacts your performance as an educational administrator?

Do you feel that not having children has in any way impacted how you are perceived by your employees?
By the parents of students in your school?
By your students?
By your employers?
By members of the community?
By your professional colleagues (ie other principals)?

Have you ever been questioned about your decision to not have children in the workplace?

Do you have any regrets at this time about not having children?

Are you fearful of one day having regrets about not having children?

Are there any choices you have made since beginning your career in educational administration that would have possibly been different if you did have children?
APPENDIX H

Lived Realities: Ruth

Education had long been a priority in Ruth’s family. Her father was a school principal and her mother taught kindergarten. Most of her aunts and uncles were teachers as well. Though her childhood was a busy one, making time for schoolwork was always first. Ruth, attractive and outgoing, was always a high achiever and had aspirations to one day become a corporate attorney making lots of money and living a much more glamorous life than that of an educator.

She loved college life right from the start, but she felt uninspired in her classes. Two of her roommates were early childhood education majors. Ruth watched with growing interest as the girls completed projects and couldn’t help listening as they described helping a young child learn their letter sounds. By the end of her freshman year, she could resist it no longer. Arriving home for summer vacation, she broke the news to her parents that she was giving in and joining the long list of educators in her family. They were thrilled.

During her second year teaching, Ruth started a master’s program for administration. She was eager to continue her education and her district was offering a cohort program with a small scholarship to help with tuition. The classes were tough to manage after teaching all day, but she had been successful in school before and she knew she could do it again. When she had doubts, her father was always ready to offer a pep talk.

Following completion of her administrative degree, Ruth was quickly offered a job as an assistant principal in a nearby middle school. She had privately hoped for a job at an elementary school, but was afraid to be picky during the tough economic climate of the times. She worried that her lack of experience at middle school would hurt her credibility with the staff and her ability to be effective. Once again, she squared her shoulders, took a deep breath, and reminded herself that she was from a long line of educators and she could do this.

During her fourth year as assistant principal, the superintendent visited her campus for a band concert. As parents were leaving, he approached Ruth. “I’ve been watching you. You’ve really come a long way. I think you are ready for your own school. Come by my office on Monday morning at 9 so we can talk about it.”

All weekend, Ruth’s stomach turned. She vacillated back and forth between excitement, pride, fear and dread. She was very proud the superintendent had noticed her hard work. She was excited there might be a new adventure waiting for her and tried to imagine which one of the schools he might have in mind for her. She knew of one arts magnet high school whose principal was about to retire and the idea of becoming principal there thrilled her. She also knew of a high school that had suffered through the turnover of three principals in the last year. Rumors were rampant that morale was low and that teachers were burnt out. The school had recently been deemed “Low Performing.” Parents were pulling their children out and sending them to private schools. Her lack of expertise with high school curriculum as well as the daunting challenges of that school made her weak in the knees.

What would she say if the superintendent asked her to go there? On the one hand, she had always been a success and she was from a long line of educators. On the other hand, since taking her first administrative post she rarely had time to do anything but work. If she were to take a job in a high school, she didn’t see that changing, especially if it was a high needs school. But, if she were to say no to her superintendent, she might not get another shot at a principalship.
Since she was a young girl, Mary Lou’s family and friends always remarked on what a way she had with children. She came from a large family with lots of younger cousins and anytime there was a family event, all the children could be found with Mary Lou. When it was time to go to college, the decision to pursue education was a no brainer.

Only an average student in high school, Mary Lou quickly excelled in her education classes. Following college, she experienced even greater success in the classroom. Supervisors described her as “a natural.” Before long, she was being offered leadership roles both in her school and across the state. She found the work stimulating and rewarding and privately also enjoyed the status of these accomplishments. While her work life soared, her personal life was a disappointment. Her successes at work distracted her from thoughts of not being married or having children like so many of her friends.

At the age of 26 Mary Lou was approached by an administrator about a fully funded scholarship for aspiring administrators. Her state was desperate to recruit new principals because so many were reaching retirement age. Thinking it was surely a long shot, Mary Lou applied. To her shock, she was awarded the scholarship and started school full time the following fall.

Mary Lou’s success continued through graduate school. Before the end of her internship she had already been offered two administrative positions. She finally accepted the third offer late in the summer following graduation. She was an Assistant Principal. She was 29. She was single. For the next year and a half, Mary Lou experienced all the growing pains of a new administrator. She worked long hours each day doing her best to keep up with her high performing principal, a well loved veteran who modeled feminist leadership skills such as collaboration and teacher empowerment. When the principal announced she was leaving the following year, the staff immediately began campaigning for Mary Lou to step in as the next principal.

By the time she was 31, Mary Lou was eating, sleeping…breathing her work. Determined to live up to the expectations of the staff and maintain the school’s excellent reputation, she often worked nights and weekends. Many days she left her home in the dark and came home in the dark. When things were good at work they were good. When things were stressful, she worked harder. This continued for the next seven years.

At 38, the district Mary Lou worked for underwent a radical change. A new superintendent was hired and he decided to move Mary Lou to a new school, based on her proven track record for success. She was thrust into a school with high staff turnover, low student achievement and poor morale. Parent involvement was low and community support for the school was dismal. Mary Lou felt grossly unprepared to turn the school around, but assured the superintendent she would give it her best.

At the same time, Mary Lou began to question her status as a single woman without children. She’d watched friends marry and have their first, second and third child. Now, some of her friends were even becoming…grandmothers! Lord knows she’d been to her share of baby showers having supervised so many female employees over the last ten years. On her 39th birthday, she was surprised by a sudden burst of emotion during a long talk with a friend. Through tears she cried, “I never expected it to be this way. I never expected to be 39 without children.”

For someone who had spent their life devoted to the well being of children, she found it ironic that she should be without a child of her own. She couldn’t help but wonder if all the long hours at work had derailed her chances of becoming a mother.
“I’m leaving.” Liz read the words over and over trying to digest them, still not really believing what she was reading. After 8 years her husband was leaving. She took a deep breath and read again, “I am lonely. I want someone who will listen to me. I want someone who has time for me.” As tears began to stream down her face, her emotions raged. Sadness, fear, confusion, regret, anger…all swirling around as she stood paralyzed at the kitchen counter with the letter in her hand.

She knew things had been strained since she took her new job as a middle school principal, but she had no idea it had reached this point. As her hours at work increased, they seemed to talk to each other less and less. By the time she got home from work, she was so exhausted from her day there was little energy left for small talk. When he would attempt conversation and ask about her day, she’d often respond with a simple “fine,” rather than try to explain all the intricate details for each aspect of the school’s day to day operations. Many nights, he was already fast asleep when she would crawl into bed. She would lay there wishing he would reach over and hug her and comfort her. At night all the anxiety of her huge responsibilities would race through her mind making sleep impossible even though she was far past exhausted. The endless lists of things that needed to be done, faces of children who were not making it, and replays of conversations with teachers and parents filled her mind while the bedside clock ticked by hour after hour.

Their lives had become so different since the early days when they first married. She used to love to talk to him for hours and hours at a time about everything from politics to new books to dreams for the future. They always snuggled before sleep and when they spent time together she was never too tired to listen to him or hesitant to agree to a new adventure. Since the new job, she was relieved when he gave her permission to miss concerts or dinners with friends because it was a school night or she was too tired from the week. As she stood in the kitchen holding the letter, her mind struggled to make sense of what was happening. She hadn’t done anything wrong. She was simply tired from working as hard as she could to keep her head above water in her job. Weren’t couples supposed to stand by each other through these kinds of times? Did she really want to be in a marriage with someone who would leave her because of her dedication to her job? And why wouldn’t he tell her this first and talk with her about it? How much could she really matter to him if he wasn’t even going to talk to her about it first, but instead leave her a letter! And what did this mean for her now? Weren’t they planning on a baby soon?

She walked into the living room and booted up her computer to start her evening ritual of answering emails. She noticed her hand shaking as she opened the laptop. She thought for a moment about trying to call him. As she reached for the cell phone, she reconsidered. What would she say? “I’m sorry.” What was she apologizing for? The last year and a half had been one of the most difficult times of her life, working up to 15 hours a day and still feeling desperately behind. To learn now that her husband was disappointed with her as a wife was a blow too hard to fathom. She laid down the phone and let the tears come.
REFERENCES


159
