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# A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of Elementary Principals Involved in Dual-Career Relationships with Children

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A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of Elementary Principals Involved  
in Dual-Career Relationships with Children

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF  
EDUCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

By

Kirk A. Zeeck

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

April 2012

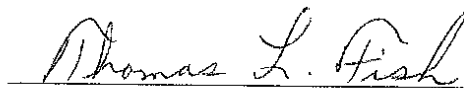
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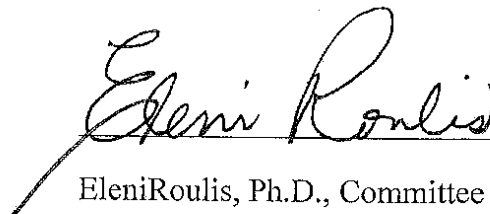
Lived Experiences of Elementary Principals:  
A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Family Experiences of Elementary Principals  
Involved in Dual-Career Relationships with Children

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

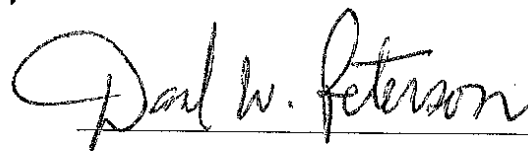
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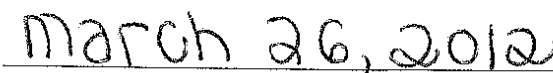
Thomas L. Fish, Ed.D., Committee Chair



Eleni Roulis, Ph.D., Committee Member



David Peterson, Ph.D., Committee Member



Final Approval Date

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Jan, and my children, Morgan and Samantha. Their encouragement and support have been tremendous over the past nine years. I also dedicate this to my mother and father, Mana Rae and Allen, who have encouraged me and given me the space I needed to grow throughout the years, and to my grandparents, for their inspiration and lessons over the years, but especially my grandmother, Bernice, who continues to inspire me with her quest for knowledge and voracious love of reading.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The doctoral adventure is a tremendous effort put forth by one human being; yet, the journey is supported by a vast many others. I first want to thank my wife, Jan, for her consistent support throughout the highs and the lows of the journey. She understood my drive and ambition to be my best. She was there to provide encouragement and motivation at critical times. Many hours were spent behind the laptop, which meant time away from family. She kept the household running and the girls engaged. I also want to thank my children, Morgan and Samantha for continuing to work hard, be nice and have fun during my absence. I also want to thank my extended family and friends for their support and understanding as I repeatedly received words of encouragement.

I would like to thank the elementary principals involved in the study. I appreciate their willingness to take time away from their families and busy schedules to have conversations with me. I want them to know how much I gleaned from each of their stories that will help me become a better husband, father, principal and person.

I would like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Thomas L. Fish, and committee members, Dr. David Peterson and Dr. Eleni Roulis. Dr. Fish kept me focused and provided clear guidance as I worked through each phase of the dissertation process.

Finally, I would like to thank the faculty of the leadership program, especially Dr. Bruce Kramer, Dr. Don LaMagdeleine, and Dr. Susan Huber. Dr. Kramer inspired me to think more globally as a “Deweyian” philosopher. Dr. LaMagdeleine increased my awareness of social justice. Dr. Huber, as my first chair, guided me during the initial phases of the proposal.

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the experiences of eight elementary principals from the Midwest who were involved in dual-career relationships with children under the age of 18. The primary data collection method was in-depth interviews. The data were coded and analyzed according to the research questions. The research resulted in three major themes which emerged out of the experiences shared by the elementary principals: 1) there exists a gap between actual and perceived values; 2) stress develops from a high number of work tasks; 3) coping strategies are utilized to manage daily stressors. I analyzed these themes from the principals' experiences through the theoretical lenses of theory-in-use and espoused theory, symbolic interactionism, cultural hegemony, and authentic leadership. The experiences associated with the elementary principals in this study serve as a framework for discussion about the gap that exists between principals' actual and perceived values.

This research revealed a gap between elementary principals' actual and perceived values. A conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that principals involved in dual-career relationships are unable to recognize the gap between their actual and perceived values due to a strong commitment toward both their profession and families. A high number of time intensive work-related tasks contribute to increased stress and an imbalance between work and home roles. The gap is held apart by the perception of the immediacy of work task completion in comparison to the perception of less immediate family needs.

Recommendations are offered for elementary principals, district level administrators, and for further research possibilities. Given that there are a variety of factors that affect the gap between actual and perceived values, the proposed recommendations should be considered carefully on an individual basis.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

In Leave It To Beaver, Ward and June Cleaver lived a fictional life that mirrored the typical family structure of the 1950's. Ward went off to work each day, June tended to the cooking and cleaning, and the children, Wally and Beaver, minded their parents and caused little trouble. All seemed well in this single-career parenting relationship. Today, an increasing number of parents find themselves in dual-career relationships – both juggling the responsibilities of demanding jobs while tending to the needs of their children (Becker & Moen, 1999; Haddock, 2002) - dramatically impacting the social construction of the family system in the decades following the 1950's (Haddock, Ziemba, Zimmerman, & Current, 2001; Viers & Prouty, 2001; Farris & Haque, 2008).

Women of lower economic status have been employed in the labor force for some time; however, an influx of middle and upper class women into the workforce has researchers beginning to address challenges for couples in dual-career relationships (Haddock et al., 2001). Researchers are divided as to whether a shift to the dual-career family structure is beneficial or detrimental. Dual-income families are thriving and in better condition than the family of the 1950s (Barnett and Rivers, 1996). “The terrible anxiety of economic uncertainty that can cause so many tensions in families is eased by two incomes, and the health of two-earner couples is bolstered as a result” (Barnett and Rivers, 1996, p. 2).

Principals' lives have become more stressful in and out of the workplace as they are constantly accessible via cell phones, email, and other methods of communication

(Langer & Boris-Schacter, 2003). Principals are enjoying less vacation time, leisure time, and less quality time with family and friends (Langer & Boris-Schacter, 2003), which can increase work-family conflict (Tatman, Hovestadt, Yelsma, Fenell, & Canfield, 2006) leading to a lower quality of life.

I load my laptop and incomplete paperwork into my briefcase; there hadn't been enough time during the day to answer the flood of email and complete evaluations, timesheets, professional development plans, et cetera. I reflect back on my day and wonder "Where did the time go?" Now it is time to begin planning my evening on the way to pick up the children at the child care center: dinner, homework, house cleaning, and my schoolwork – the expansion of the nine hour day to twelve. Although the school day was active and the hours seemed to drain away, it was a success and I look forward to seeing my family and hearing about their day. I do not, however, look forward to sneaking in work during the evening hours.

As a teenager, I toyed with the notion of becoming an elementary school administrator, unaware of the complexities and stressors associated with the role. As a student, I found school administrators to be inspiring, easy to speak with and genuinely interested in students. As a teacher, early experiences with principals captivated my spirit and from an observer's perspective, lent to highly enjoyable positions. However, later experiences as a teacher provided a different perspective of the administrator – harried, overworked, and overburdened. As a seventh-year administrator, parent of two young children, and spouse of a career-driven wife, I have found the pace and demands of school and family life to be often overwhelming.

From my experience, I have found elementary principals to bounce like balls in a school; engaged in countless one-minute conversations acting as efficiency machines to lily-pad-leap them through the day. The day begins with a morning meet and greet as students, parents and staff enter the building. The day continues with instances such as: a walk and talk with a teacher as the class shuffles to music; discussion with a custodian near the rear of the building; a visit with lunch staff; conversing with a student roaming the hallway; having a word with a visitor not wearing a name badge; wishing students well at the end of the day; and on and on and on – staying late and many times packing up unfinished business to be completed at home in the evening.

Interruptions rip up an elementary principal's day like twisters moving through tornado alley. Plans are made. Plans are abandoned. The atmosphere is in a constant state of flux. What was seemingly organized is ridiculed with stress-inducing events: pulled fire alarms, water leaks, irate parents, broken arms, technology malfunctions, late lunch deliveries, suspicious intruders, runaway students, superintendent visits, and loss of plumbing. Each unplanned event keeps an elementary principal toe-tapping throughout the day, drawing from physical, mental, and emotional energy reserves. Imagine living with this pace while being married to a spouse who also has challenging career commitments, all-the-while raising children and maintaining a household of responsibilities – activities, laundry, dinner, home repairs, bills, homework, house cleaning, lawn maintenance, snow removal, school functions, et cetera.

Our family has had to place limits on our lifestyle due to time constraints and increased stress levels. For instance, we have decided to forego growing plants in the

house as weeks will fly by before we notice they need watering – usually ending in death. Daily tasks and children’s activities have hampered our ability to go on dates. We have decided to limit the number of children we wish to raise to two as the thought of three or four do not seem possible within the realm of our busy schedules. Our two girls, ages six and nine, frequently beg for a pet – declined by their busy parents. Their frequent begging is deflected to the attention of neighborhood dogs. Our thinking - if we are unable to care for plants, then how could we care for an animal?

Over the past seven years, I have heard other principals involved in dual-career relationships with children paint similar work-life scenarios. Principals wonder, as I do, if the position is worth the stress and time away from family. Principals agree that the work is stimulating and rewarding; however, family activities are sometimes sacrificed due to time constraints or pure exhaustion. Also, housework and child-care must be consistently monitored and managed as if it is a third job.

In contrast, I have heard other principals state that they would choose no other profession over elementary administration – they were born for this role. One principal confirmed the role to be stressful, but manageable while at school – making a commitment to leave on time at the end of each day to spend with family. This experience differs from a majority of the principals I have heard tell stories of stress and strain, at home and at school. All of this leads me to focus on the experiences of elementary principals in dual-career relationships with children as the basis for my doctoral research.

This study contributed to the research on the experiences of dual-career couples. These experiences provided a rich context to explore the balance between the work and home relationship of elementary principals. “Contemporary working couples are traversing an uncharted terrain. They are changing both the composition of the workforce and the division of family labor, but are finding few institutionalized mechanisms for managing their joint work and domestic responsibilities” (Moen & Yu, 2000, p. 311). This is particularly important as couples with demanding jobs and little autonomy have the lowest quality of life and the greatest work/life conflict and overload (Moen & Yu, 2000). More specifically, principals across the country are considering leaving administration due to a variety of reasons, including hours and loss of family time (Adams, 1999).

The need to study the relationship between work and home roles was identified over four decades ago (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1965; Kanter, 1977; Pleck, 1977). Since then, research projects have evolved to understand how middle-class, dual-career families experience the complexities of work and family life. The Alfred P. Sloan Center on Parents, Children and Work conducted the 500 Family Study - a study of 500 middle-class, dual-career families that examined how child development, marital relationships and family life are influenced (Schneider & Waite, 2005). Viers and Prouty (2001) reviewed the literature from the 1960s-2001 on the strengths and stressors of dual-career couples. Their findings included the following domains: “work overload, social networks, work and family roles, identity conflicts and power, personal and societal views, marital distress levels, division of household tasks, and communication” (p. 169). Additionally,

other researchers have studied dual-career families in order to understand gender (King, 2005; Craig & Sawrikar, 2009), career counseling (Parker & Arthur, 2004), parenting (Milkie, Raley, & Bianchi, 2009), marital relations (Dew, 2009). Yet, despite the fact that elementary principals are involved in dual-career relationships with children, their experiences remain relatively unexplored.

A range of research illuminates the elementary principalship - for example, burnout (Friedman, 1995); failure (Matthews, 2002); work life (Renner, 1985); principal shortage (Whitaker, 2001) and comprehensive studies (Doud & Keller, 1998; Protheroe, 2008). However, after an extensive search of several databases, I was unable to locate any studies focused specifically on elementary principals in dual-career relationships with children.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of elementary principals within a 30 mile radius of a Midwestern urban area who were involved in a dual-career marriage with children under the age of 18. This study added to the existing bodies of research for elementary principals and dual-career couples. Anecdotes, themes, and conclusions provided dual-career couples with enlightening perspectives to help cope with stressors encountered during work and non-work environments.

A few overarching questions guided my research throughout this study: What aspects of a dual-career marriage with children did principals find most challenging/rewarding and why? What systems did they have in place with their spouse



to balance their work-family roles? How did their day-to-day life as an elementary principal impact the family? How did they balance work and home life?

### **Definitions**

The following definitions are provided to ensure uniformity and understanding of these terms throughout the study. The researcher developed all definitions not accompanied by a citation.

*Elementary principal:* Elementary principals are educational leaders who administer a building of students within the grades of pre-kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

*Coping:* “Constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

*Dual-career relationships:* “Dual-career relationships” imply both partners’ careers require high levels of personal commitment, advanced educational levels, and the possibility of promotion cycles (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1971; Potucheck, 1997). For this study the spouse was a full-time, salaried employee vs. an hourly wage employee.

*Role conflict:* “The extent to which a person experiences pressures within one role that are incompatible with the pressures that arise within another role” (Kopelman, Greenhaus, & Connolly, 1983, p. 201)

*Role overload:* “Having too many role demands and too little time to fulfill them” (Coverman, 1989, p. 967).

*Role theory:* “Human beings behave in ways that are different and predictable depending on their respective social identities and the situation” (Biddle, 1986, p. 68).

This chapter provided an introduction to the study and described the purpose of the research. Recent research indicated that principals' lives have become more stressful at work and home (Langer & Boris-Schacter, 2003). In addition, dual-career relationships with children add another layer of complexity to busy parents' lives (Becker & Moen, 1999; Haddock, 2002). It was my intention to examine the lived experiences of elementary principals who were involved in dual-career marriages with children in an attempt to uncover themes that would help principals cope with stressors encountered in work and non-work environments. The following chapter will review relevant literature.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature related to elementary principals involved in dual-career marriages with children. The literature is organized into categories including: the elementary principal, dual-career relationships, coping strategies, role overload and role conflict, role enhancement and role expansion, and work/life balance. The chapter concludes with a review of relevant analytic literature. The theories used to analyze the data in this study were espoused theory and theory-in-use, symbolic interactionism, cultural hegemony, and authentic leadership. Espoused theory relates to the words an individual uses to convey what they do, or what they would like others to think they do, while theory-in-use is the theory that actually governs an individual's behavior. Symbolic interactionism provided meaning of the everyday interactions of principals within their dual-career environment. Cultural hegemony addressed how cultural norms subtly control an elementary principal's beliefs and actions that work against their favor. Authentic leadership theory examines one's moral perspective guided by their core values, beliefs and thoughts.

A review of the literature reveals evidence of a rise in dual-career family research after the 1960's. While some research discussed a variety of strengths and stressors of dual-career relationships (e.g. equity, role relations and role strain, marital satisfaction, life satisfaction), no research examined the experiences of elementary principals involved in dual-career families. This study is unique in the fact that it is focused on elementary administrators experiencing life within the context of dual-career families.

## **The Elementary Principal**

Many authors have written about the complex role of the elementary principal.

“The American principal today is being held responsible for student achievement while working at a job that is emotionally depleting, excessively time-consuming, and defined by ambiguous responsibilities and authority” (Langer & Boris-Schacter, 2003 p. 14).

Vincent Ferrandino (2003), former Executive Director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), commented on the position:

It has been said that there is no hotter seat in all of education than the one in the principal's office, and few principals working today would disagree with that observation. School leaders catch it from all sides, contending with the sometimes competing interests of teachers, parents, central-office administrators, school boards, and community members. (p. 70)

Principals across the country complain that they are constantly accessible by their cell phones, pagers, and e-mail to an ever-expanding constituency. In general, they enjoy less leisure time, less vacation time, and less quality time with friends and family.

Langer and Boris-Schacter (2003) commented on a busy principal's work-home life:

As the principals' work becomes more stressful and insecure, so have their lives outside of the workplace. Even though many women have joined the ranks of principals over the last 50 years, with a substantial impact on the ways their home lives are organized, children supervised, and chores divided, the public's nostalgic image of the principal and the principal's work has remained virtually unchanged. (p. 14)

Swent and Gmelch (1977) surveyed 1,156 Oregon school administrators to determine their origins of stress and how they coped with it. The researchers determined that general areas of administration were the most bothersome. The most frequent source of stress was attempting to comply with state, federal and organizational rules and policies followed by the time invested in meetings (Swent & Gmelch, 1977).

Overwhelming expectations, long hours and extreme workload of the principalship produce incredible stress for school leaders (Lovely, 2004). Langer and Boris-Schacter (2003) surveyed and interviewed more than 200 principals across the United States and determined that principals constantly deal with three pairs of tensions: instructional leadership vs. the reality of managerial tasks, personal vs. professional demands, and the principal's role vs. community expectations. Past expectations must be changed to meet the rising demands of the principal's role. Otherwise, it will be difficult to recruit and retain qualified principals.

Principals are finding their role to become increasingly fragmented, causing much anxiety (Armstrong, 2004). "In 1998, responding principals were asked to classify each of 56 areas as being a "major," "minor," or "little or no" concern. Fragmentation of the principal's time headed the list (72 percent identified it as a major concern)" (Protheroe, 2008, p. 49). The current participatory management structure of the principalship is considered uncertain, or fragmented, with so many stakeholders' opinions involved (Armstrong, 2004). The fragmented, taxing role of the principal has been shown to be a stressful position. The stress level can be magnified when combined with a spouse who

has an equally demanding occupation and children who constantly vie for time, love and attention.

### **Dual-Career Relationships**

The terminology of dual-career and dual-earner are frequently used interchangeably when researching working couples (Yogev & Brett, 1985). Dual-career relationships differ from dual-earner relationships in that careers require high levels of personal commitment, advanced educational levels, and the possibility of promotion cycles (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1971; Potuchek, 1997). By definition, the dual-career situation places a burden on partners to coordinate, integrate and balance between family and career roles both as a couple and individually (Rachlin, 1987).

Dual-career relationships are a relatively new phenomenon, especially where both partners attempt to balance family with professional roles requiring intense commitment and involvement. It is a widely held notion that females maintain home life, while males take primary responsibility for earning income due to their 'breadwinner' role. "Until fairly recently, men and women did lead very different lives. Today, for the first time, there is a generation of women whose lives parallel those of their husbands" (Barnett and Rivers, 1998, p. 7). This is consistent with the principalship. Female principals have been increasing in numbers throughout the last 50 years, creating dual-career relationships that substantially impact the organization of home lives and the way children are supervised (Langer & Boris-Schacter, 2003).

Researchers are divided on whether dual-career relationships are beneficial or detrimental. Those who contend the union is beneficial generally point to very good

health overall of the parents (Barnett & Rivers, 1998), enhanced intellectual relationships (Rice, 1979), thriving children (Barnett & Rivers, 1998), eased economic anxiety (Barnett & Rivers, 1998; Rice, 1979), and reduced marital conflict and increased quality of life (Purohit & Simmers, 2010). Those who take a detrimental stance argue that physical and psychological health problems occur when wives experience role and work overload (Rachlin, 1987; Viers & Prouty, 2001) and couples suffer role strain from multiple demands (Peronne & Worthington, 2001).

Couples can experience many benefits from well-balanced dual-career relationships. Women experience lower levels of depression and anxiety rates than the women of the 1950s and although they lead busy lives and find themselves stressed, they have very good overall health (Barnett & Rivers, 1998). Men are not the distant, workaholic fathers of the 1950s; rather, they tend to be quite involved with all aspects of their children's lives (Barnett & Rivers, 1998). Parents report feeling relaxed, friendly, and cooperative with low levels of worry, frustration and stress (Schneider & Waite, 2005).

Dual-career couples may also benefit from dual-incomes. The two full incomes ease the terrible anxiety of changing economic times that can cause strain in families (Barnett & Rivers, 1998). Dual-career couples are able to balance power differentials through the wage-earning power of the woman and balance societal views with their own personal norms (Schneider & Waite, 2005; Barnett and Rivers, 1998). The synergistic advantages of dual-career relationships include "the possibility of enhanced intellectual companionship, greater material resources as a result of two incomes, and the possibility

of both spouses feeling more self-fulfillment and contentment in their lives” (Rice, 1979, p. 65).

Many couples are satisfied with their freely chosen life-style where both parents have careers (Rice, 1979). However, couples that decide to work are faced with multiple role demands as well as pressure from society to be good parents. “The ‘family values’ crusade of the right wing, to the degree that it succeeds in invading people’s thoughts, will only add to the stress of working couples by insisting on a model from the past that is increasingly impossible to achieve in the present” (Barnett & Rivers, 1998, p. 21). Furthermore, Barnett and Rivers (1996) cited a newspaper poll that showed an increase in the proportion of adults who agreed that preschool children would likely suffer if the mother worked. The researchers consider this statement preposterous and, in fact, have found much evidence that shows children will not suffer if their parents work. It is important to note that parents will compromise their health if they agree with the negative image of working mothers and internalize guilt from an inability to live up to an impossible mystique (Barnett & Rivers, 1998). Through mutual positive emotional support, couples experienced less marital conflict and increased quality of life (Purohit & Simmers, 2010).

The dual-career relationship can be compromised if not carefully balanced. Dual-career spouses tend to have driven personalities and are willing to invest a lot of time and energy to achieve career goals, which may lead to competitiveness and conflict with their spouse (Rice, 1979; Schneider & Waite, 2005). Hard work takes time - time away from “the emotional and/or domestic and child-care task support system” that provides the



other spouse with a sense of being taken care of by their partner (Rice, 1979, p.3). The absence of these supports results in conflict and perceived stress, which can be detrimental to a marriage (Rice, 1979). In addition, couples may be forced to restructure or reduce their paid work to buffer the intrusion of work demands (Becker & Moen, 1999).

Fragmentation has challenged contemporary families in Western society (Schneider & Waite, 2005). Families are physically distant from each other for most of the day and tend not to spend time together when they are at home as they are involved in personal activities such as crunching in more hours of work or surfing the web. This compartmentalization can threaten family relations and potentially risk family stability (Schneider & Waite, 2005). The effect is even seen in children as Sylvia Hewlett links long parental work hours to the increased likelihood that children will, “underperform at school, commit suicide, need psychiatric help, suffer a severe eating disorder, bear a child out of wedlock, take drugs, be the victim of a violent crime” (Hewlett, 1991, p. 81).

Fragmentation, driven personalities, demanding occupations and parenting roles can cause conflict within the dual-career family structure. Higgins, Duxbury, and Irving (1992) focused on work-family conflict in a study of 220 individuals involved in dual-career relationships with children. The study concluded people have less control over their work lives than their family lives. Additionally, individuals with traditional beliefs expect to experience work-family conflict and may have difficulty balancing work and family domains (Litzky, Purohit, & Weer, 2008). The stress resulting from this conflict has been shown to increase psychosomatic symptoms (Revicki, 1993; Coverman, 1989;),

psychiatric symptoms (Rahim & Psenicka, 1996) and decreased job satisfaction (Eckman, 2004; Hogan, Lambert, Jenkins, & Wambold, 2006; Glynn & Jimmieson, 2003; Batlis, 1980; Ryan & Morrow, 1992). Strategies can help principals cope with the imbalance and stresses they encounter in their lives.

### **Coping strategies**

Coping strategies are physical and mental efforts used by people to manage internal and/or external stressors that exceed the resources of the person (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It is not the environment or the individual alone that creates stress but the interaction between the two (Lazarus, 1991). "Stress is not a property of the person, or of the environment, but arises when there is a conjunction between a particular kind of environment and a particular kind of person that leads to a threat appraisal" (Lazarus, 1991, p. 3). This type of appraisal is termed 'cognitive appraisal' - the ability to regulate emotions through coping strategies (Lazarus, 1993).

Two levels of threat appraisal have been labeled: primary and secondary (Lazarus, 1966). Primary appraisal focuses on the degree of danger from a situation and is an instantaneous reaction. Secondary appraisal intervenes between the threat and coping process and is concerned with the amount of danger developed from the implementation of a coping strategy or the extent that one is relieved from the danger. Secondary appraisal is purely intellectual.

One's perception of stress is determined by the interplay of personality and environmental stimulus (Monat & Lazarus, 1977). The cognitive processes establish the intensity and quality of an emotional reaction; also, these processes provide a base for

coping strategies which constantly shape emotional reactions by changing the dynamics between the person and the environment (Monat & Lazarus, 1977). The first thought in a reaction to a threatening situation is, again, referred to as primary appraisal and is a quick decision based upon your current mood, concerns, and emotions. The second thought derives from coping strategies and self-regulation. Lazarus believed that emotions ebb and flow creating constant feedback and reappraising. The constant inconsistency forces people to regulate their emotions through coping strategies. Experience plays a critical role in this process. One elementary principal explained, “Experience is the best teacher. I learned not to worry, gave up perfectionism, and became more realistic in expectations for myself and others” (Brock & Grady, 2002 p. 59). On the other hand, some principals form a habit of working very hard and get used to the go, go, go lifestyle (Brock & Grady, 2002).

The two major functions of coping are problem-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Problem-focused coping strategies attempt to actively seek solutions by controlling the troubled environment through direct action, decision making, and/or problem solving (Lazarus & Fokman, 1984). Emotion-focused coping strategies concentrate on regulating emotions stimulated by a stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Prevention of stressors through preparation, a problem-focused strategy, is a positive means for coping with stressful situations to avoid burnout. Whitaker (1996) found three implications of her exploratory study that investigated causes of principal burnout. First, principals yearn for support systems, such as formal and informal

networking, to help them manage conflict and pressures. Second, educational administration training programs must prepare prospective principals with a strong belief system to understand the political realities of the job. Third, central office administrators must provide principals autonomy, provide professional growth opportunities, and fully recognize the role's challenges and difficulties. In a similar vein, Oplatka's (2001) study of the life stories of 25 Israeli elementary school women principals builds upon Whitaker's second implication regarding administration training. She determined that management trainings should convey the multiple and complex nature of the early years in the principalship by exposing novice administrators to case studies of veteran principals.

An arsenal of emotion-focused coping strategies has been recommended to help educational administrators cope with the effects of stress. Examples include enjoying the simple pleasures such as listening to music, taking a short walk during the day, enjoying scented candles, reading to students, viewing photo albums, et cetera (Schmidt, 2004). Taking pictures of student activities in the morning will help bring creativity to afternoon meetings. Other recommendations include: reserving part of the week to celebrate good students, temporarily escaping to somewhere in the building, focusing on things done well, and, by all means, having fun (Schmidt, 2004). Other research (Metzger, 2003) suggested physical activities, dream work, having a drink, honest communication with staff and staying away from school on the weekends.

Stress is not always negative and we can use stress constructively to develop ourselves and promote good health (Gherman, 1981). Gherman postulated five goals of coping to reduce stress:

- “1. Realize potential of self-direction.
2. Assume self-responsibility as a major factor in health and sickness.
3. Minimize detrimental effects of distress.
4. Restore sense of harmony with environment.
5. Achieve and maintain a high level of health” (p. 207).

A few basic principles can help accomplish these goals. First, understand that your personal or organizational lifestyle produces stress. Stress is the unrelieved state of arousal from daily experiences; not the more dramatic occasional crisis. Second, recognize the need to develop ways to relieve stress in order for the body to repair itself (Gherman, 1981).

It is a commonly held understanding that health derives from proper nutrition, exercise, and mental fitness. People, including physicians and other health experts, take a synergistic approach to the six aspects of well-being: “physiological, nutritional, environmental, emotional, spiritual, lifestyle values” (Gherman, 1981, p. 208). Each action in an area supports, enhances and capitalizes on one another. On the contrary, unattended aspects of your life may throw you off balance with adverse results. For example, overeating may lead to obesity and lack of energy. The lack of energy may diminish your productivity at home and at work. This may cause stress from your spouse and boss, leading to lower self-esteem and catapulting your entire lifestyle out of balance.

### **Role Overload and Role Conflict**

Role overload and role conflict have been used interchangeably in the literature; however, they are associated but divergent concepts (Coverman, 1989). Role overload occurs when too little time is available to complete the demands of the position. The unreasonable number of tasks within a given period can push people beyond their stress capacity. This may cause reduced performance, defensiveness, and poor judgment. The feeling of being frequently behind schedule increases feelings of hostility. The hostility becomes a stressor for the individual and for those around them. Researchers have found role conflict attributed to more frequent occurrences of family and job distress (Kelloway et al., 1999; Ford, Heinen, & Langkamer, 2007); decreased life and job satisfaction (Carlson and Kacmar, 2000); and deteriorating health (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992, 1994).

Role conflict stems from role overload when one of the multiple roles becomes more demanding than the others, making it difficult to complete tasks in other roles. Role conflict has been defined as “any condition in which incompatible expectations are placed on a person because of their positional association” (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Gross, Mason, & McEachern, 1958). According to role theory, conflict occurs when juggling several roles (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005). Elementary principals face competing demands between their roles at work and home, which may cause conflict. For example, as a building administrator, an elementary principal is held responsible for the successful operation of their school (Ferrandino, 2003). Additionally, as a married partner, it is important to spend time with

their spouse. Furthermore, as a parent, children demand time and attention to meet their developmental needs. What's more, parents and friends, among others, require time to maintain relationships. Multiple roles may be emotionally detrimental and overload a worker's system (Lee & Phillips, 2006) and involvement in multiple roles, such as parenting and spousal relationships, leads to strain and reduced psychological well-being (Coverman, 1989).

In another example of role conflict, a household with two working parents and children in the home may make it difficult to meet the needs of family and/or work life – thus, creating a conflict. According to role theory, collective demands of multiple roles can produce role strain; however, available resources such as social support from direct supervisors or family may reduce or prevent role strains by allowing individuals to cope with these stresses (Kahn et al., 1964). Higgins et al. (1992) suggested organizations must change their policies to curb “further increases in work-family conflict with a resulting increase in absenteeism and turnover and a decrease in job satisfaction, productivity, and morale” (p. 71). Langer & Boris-Schacter (2003) reported several flexible structural changes suggested by principals that would reduce conflict and increase principal retention. A few of these flexible concepts included: distributed leadership, a co-principalship, administrative assistants, and increased support and professional development (Langer & Boris-Schacter, 2003).

### **Role Enhancement and Role Expansion**

In contrast to role conflict, the expansion of participation in multiple roles, such as those found within the work and family structures, may enhance one another and be

more supportive than harmful (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Thoits, 1983, 1986). Role expansionist theory, rather than role conflict theory, is more likely to describe the interaction between work-family (Lee & Phillips, 2006).

Individual participation in multiple roles, also known as role accumulation, produces positive outcomes for individuals in three ways (Voydanoff, 2001). First, family and work experiences can have additive effects on well-being. Research on role accumulation has consistently demonstrated beneficial effects on psychological and physical well-being (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). An increased number of roles enhances one's power, prestige, social connections, individual resources, and emotional gratification (Thoits, 1983). Additionally, work and family satisfaction have been found to have additive effects on life satisfaction, happiness, and perceived quality of life (Rice, Frone, & McFarlin, 1992; Rice, McFarlin, Hunt, & Near, 1985). Benefits of multiple roles include better health for full-time working mothers (Barnett, 1998) and increased positive experiences of working fathers at work and at home (Hill, 2005; Carlson & Frone, 2003). This research suggests that people who are involved in, and are happy with, family and work roles experience a higher quality of life than those who are only involved in one role or have dissatisfaction with one or more of their roles.

Second, involvement in both work and family roles may buffer someone from the stressors in one of the roles (Voydanoff, 2001). Studies have demonstrated that satisfying, high quality work experiences have weakened the relationship between family stressors and impaired well-being (Barnett, Marchall, & Sayer, 1992; Voydanoff & Donnelly, 1999). Also, a satisfying, high-quality family life has been shown to minimize



the relationship between work stress and impaired well-being (Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992). For example, the parent role creates a buffer from stresses of some work tasks (Lee & Phillips, 2006) and positive parenting experiences of dual-earner couples help buffer them from psychological distress (Barnett, 1994).

Third, an individual's experiences in one role can generate positive experiences in another role (Voydanoff, 2001). Resources learned in one role through social relationships may be reinvested in other roles (Sieber, 1974). For example, elementary principals may develop adolescent development theory through their education, which could provide guidance as a parent of their own children. Also, an individual's personality may be improved through the accumulation of a variety of roles as they learn to be accepting of opposing views and flexible in adjusting to the demands of others (Sieber, 1974). In this way, an elementary principal's personal life might affect their professional life through the experience of raising their own children, thus developing patience for working with other parents and their children.

Greenhaus and Powell indicated that "when work and family role identities are similar, individuals can express themselves in similar ways across roles and can see the connections between the skill or perspective acquired in one role and the requirements of the other role" (2006, p. 84). This suggests that when there is a synergy between roles, the likelihood of work-life enrichment is increased.

### **Work/Life Balance**

Work/Life balance and work/life boundaries have had much focus in recent years (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Clark, 2000; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Lewis,

Rapoport, & Gambles, 2003). “Work-life balance is about being able to achieve a balance between working life and life away from work that is acceptable to the individual; a balance which allows the successful fulfillment of potential in both domains with minimal stress” (Waumsley, 2005, p.4).

The relationship of work and non-work domains is either integrated or separated (Kanter, 1977). Integration recognizes that an interaction does take place, while separation implies there is no interaction between the two spheres. People tend to take charge of their actions rather than react to what is happening within their work and life domains (Clark, 2000). Flexibility and permeability are two components that help determine the strength at which the domains are separated or integrated (Hall & Richter, 1988).

Flexibility is the amount of physical and temporal movement between borders (Barnett, 1994). Flexibility of one’s work schedule may determine the presence or absence of “negative spillover effects from home to work” (Barnett, 1994, p. 655). Permeability, also known as spillover, is the concept that thoughts, attitudes and feelings spill over from one sphere to another (Clark, 2000; Hall & Richter, 1988; Kirchmeyer, 1992). Permeability is the amount to which each sphere allows psychological concerns of one sphere to encroach on the physical location of others (Barnett, 1994).

Permeability has been widely researched (Goodman & Crouter, 2009; Bumpus, Crouter, & McHale, 2006; Barnett, 1994; Kirchmeyer, 1992; Small and Riley, 1990) since Kanter authored his ground breaking book *Work and Family in the United States: A critical review and agenda for research and policy in 1977*. A negative spillover effect

from work-to-non-work is more common than the negative spillover effect from non-work-to-work (Forma, 2009). For instance, an elementary principal is more likely to carry home the emotions of an argument with a teacher or parent rather than carry an emotional dispute with their spouse from home to school. Maintaining a positive non-work atmosphere may be very influential in sustaining a positive net effect of nonwork-to-work spillover (Kirchmeyer, 1992). “When marital or parental experiences are positive, there is little relationship between job experiences and distress. When marital or parental experiences are negative, there is a stronger relationship between job experiences and distress” (Barnett, 1994, p. 655).

Work and family are bidirectional; they interact with each other to be facilitative and conflictual (Hill, 2005). Occupational and family roles for both men and women have an asymmetric permeability (Pleck, 1977), meaning that work demands spill over into home life and *vice versa*. A study of employed adults with families confirmed Pleck’s hypothesis of asymmetric permeability and determined that work interferes more with family than does family interfere with work (Frone et al, 1992; Carlson & Frone, 2003). Strategies can help dual-career couples increase positive spillover and reduce negative spillover.

Flexible work schedules have the strongest effect on working couples’ lives (Barnett & Rivers, 1998). Flexibility will decrease employee stress, increase retention (Barnett & Rivers, 1998), and increase productivity (Deming, 1986). The rigidity of one’s work schedule may determine the presence or absence of “negative spillover effects

from home to work” (Barnett, 1994, p. 655). A flexible employer is one strategy to combat the “spilling over” effect of work-home or home-work conflicts.

A review of relevant literature has focused on the elementary principal, dual-career relationships, coping strategies, role overload and role conflict, role enhancement and role expansion, and work/life balance. The literature review will now shift focus to the theoretical lenses used to examine this study.

### **Relevant Analytical Literature**

The theories used to frame this study are espoused theory and theory-in-use, symbolic interactionism, cultural hegemony, and authentic leadership. Theory-in-use is the theory that actually governs an individual’s behavior, while the words an individual uses to convey what they do, or what they would like others to think they do, is termed espoused theory. Symbolic interactionism helps to provide meaning of the everyday interactions of individuals within their dual-career environment. Cultural hegemony addresses how cultural norms subtly control an elementary principal’s beliefs and actions that work against their favor. Authentic leadership theory examines one’s moral perspective as guided by their core values, beliefs and thoughts.

### **Theories of Action: Espoused Theory and Theory-in-Use**

Argyris, Putnam and Smith (1985) stated “espoused theories are those that an individual claims to follow. Theories-in-use are those that can be inferred from action” (p. 82). Argyris and Schön (1974) assert that espoused theory of action is communicated by someone to proclaim how they would behave under certain circumstances, whereas someone’s theory-in-use is the actual theory that governs their actions. The theories of

action become congruent, or aligned, when one's espoused theory matches their theory-in-use, i.e. espoused theory of action fits their actualized behavior (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

Argyris (1976) argued that few people are aware that their espoused theories are not the theories they use. A majority of people are unaware because they are blind to the fact that they behave differently than their espoused theories (Argyris, 1976). Argyris (1976) explained two reasons for this blindness, "First, most of us are programmed with theories-in-use that do not teach us to reflect accurately on our behavior and its impact, especially while we are interacting with others, and second, most of us are also programmed not to tell others when we experience them behaving incongruently with what they espouse" (p. 639). If these two reasons for blindness continue, then it is highly unlikely that individuals would become aware of them and therefore change them, leaving them prisoners of the theories (Argyris, 1976).

### **Symbolic Interactionism**

Take any situation: a family dinner, a music concert, a night out with a spouse, a conflict between parents and teachers, an armed intruder – each of these situations has an amazing depth of complex human social life. All situations can be analyzed through a number of different perspectives, each illuminating something more about the aspects of human beings (Charon, 2004). Symbolic interactionism is a sociological theory and research approach that can help to bring forward the truth of a situation.

The philosophic tradition of symbolic interactionism, with deep roots in pragmatism, can be traced back to scholars such as William James, Charles S. Peirce,

John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead. These pragmatists believe that all living creatures accomplish their environmental demands in practical ways (Hewitt & Shulman, 2011) and that human beings' experiences continually adapt in a constantly changing social world made possible only with a mind which can contemplate the situation (Jeon, 2004). Herbert Blumer, a sociologist from the University of Chicago, further advanced Mead's earlier philosophic work and actually coined the term 'symbolic interactionism' (Jeon, 2004). Mead (1934) and Blumer (1969) were devoted to the methodology of interviewing and observing actors in their setting to determine how they define the environments from which they act in. "The symbolic interactionist emphasizes that humans are dynamic, that they are rational problem solvers, and that society is a process of individuals in interaction – cooperating, role taking, aligning acts, and communicating" (Charon, 2004, p. 189).

Symbolic interactionism's main focus is to understand what is going on by understanding what the actors themselves think about their environment (Charon, 2004). This is analyzed through linguistic and non-linguistic gestures. While most non-human living things live in association with each other and are affected through these associations, humans are the only animals that use linguistic symbols of speech to communicate meaning (Hewitt & Shulman, 2011). Humans also exist in a world of social objects, such as symbols, which are used to represent and communicate something (Charon, 2004).

It is important for symbolic interactionists to work directly with the empirical social world instead of a simulation (Blumer, 1969); that is, derive meaning from real

people in real situations. 'Meaning' is an important aspect in understanding social processes, interactions, and human behavior and researchers must 'grasp' the meanings experienced by humans within particular situations (Jeon, 2004).

### **Theory of Cultural Hegemony**

Antonio Gramsci, credited with developing the concept of cultural hegemony, described it as the dominance of a ruling class through the cultural activity of social groups (Carlisle, 2005). Cultural hegemony is a "process by which we learn to embrace enthusiastically a system of beliefs and practices that end up harming us and working to support the interests of others who have power over us" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 3). It is the practice by which individuals learn to live, and love, the prevailing system of beliefs and practices (Brookfield, 2005). Gramsci (1971) wrote that in civil society hegemony is apparent in the "spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general directions imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (p. 12). "The dark irony, the cruelty of hegemony is that adults take pride in learning and acting on the beliefs and assumptions that work to enslave them" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 2).

The subtle power of cultural hegemony is its widespread nature that allows no chance for resistance or any way to develop alternatives (Brookfield, 2005). The enemy is impossible to defend against when it is embedded in an individual's daily life through their own thoughts, actions, and relationships (Brookfield, 2005). Cultural hegemony is illusive and flexible and always in a continual process of realignment (Brookfield, 2005). Williams (1977) wrote that hegemony is constantly being challenged, which creates an increased sensitivity to anything that threatens its supremacy. This means that "it has

continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified” while concurrently “it is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own” (Williams, 1977, p. 112). To summarize, although hegemony is constantly being reshaped by the oppressed and the oppressors, it will always remain in control as the dominant beliefs will persist as part of the cultural atmosphere (Brookfield, 2005).

### **Authentic Leadership Theory**

The concept of authenticity can be traced back to the ancient Greeks through their advice to “be true to oneself” (Harter, 2002). Authenticity equates to owning personal experiences, including needs, wants, thoughts, emotions, preferences, or beliefs (Harter, 2002). Avolio, Luthans, and Walumbwa (2004) defined authentic leaders as “those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others’ values/moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high moral character” (p. 4). Overall, authentic leaders

Authentic leaders align their values with their actions and intentions through a process of self-regulation (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). George and Sims (2007) used the metaphor of an internal compass pointing to True North as a guide for an authentic leader’s journey through life. Shamir and Eilam (2005) argued that “authentic leadership rests heavily on the self-relevant meanings the leader attaches to his or her life-experiences” (p. 395). This understanding of the self provides a solid foundation for decisions and actions (Avolio & Gardner, 2005), which is strengthened by the authentic



leader's positive moral perspective and high ethical standards (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008).

Authentic leaders are free of defensive biases and instead develop close and transparent relationships with others (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). Continuous relational growth with others provides the deepest sense of a true self for authentic leaders (Harter, 2002). Authentic individuals are likely to have higher self-esteem and cheerfulness through an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses (Harter, 2002), especially when they balance a focus of their own needs with the needs of others (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008).

The theoretical literature summarized in this section included: espoused theory and theory-in-use, symbolic interactionism, cultural hegemony, and authentic leadership theory. The theories of action, espoused theory and theory-in-use, explained that people often say, or think, one way, yet act another. Symbolic interactionism provided a lens to help bring forth the truth of a situation through the perspective of an individual. Cultural hegemony brought understanding of the subtle power of a society's collected beliefs and ideas that control the masses. Authentic leadership illuminated an authentic leader's deep awareness of their values and morals used to guide them through life's journey.

Following is a description of the detailed methodology used to conduct this study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

This phenomenological study utilized a qualitative research methodology to investigate the lived experiences of elementary principals involved in dual-career relationships with children. This methodology was selected because I was interested in capturing the lived experiences of elementary principals through their perspective. Based on Marshall and Rossman's (1999) work, I explain my study's genre of qualitative study, phenomenology, data collection, data analysis, credibility and dependability, and limitations.

#### **Qualitative Study**

This study was designed to be qualitative. Qualitative research is an effort to understand the nature of a setting and the experiences others have in this context (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research does not forecast what is to happen in the future; rather, it is an analysis that provides a depth of understanding for those who are interested in the events of a particular setting and time. Elementary principals endure demanding schedules, especially when you blend in an equally busy spouse and active children. A qualitative approach to this study presented rich descriptions of the principals' lived-experiences to accurately describe the phenomenon.

#### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is a relevant philosophic methodology that is utilized to describe the phenomena of elementary principals involved in dual-career relationships with children. Elementary principals, through the nature of their occupation, are bombarded

with numerous situational experiences in addition to the magnitude of experiences derived from their personal lives. Phenomenology seeks to gain the truth of these experiences through the consciousness of the experiencer.

Phenomenology, rooted deep in the works of philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, and Mach, was formally introduced by Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the twentieth-century (Moran, 2000; Guignon, 2006). Husserl became known as the founder, or pioneer, of phenomenology (Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994) with a desire to convert philosophy into a strict science (Guignon, 2006). Husserl believed the key to separating science from philosophy was to direct attention toward meanings that connect our experience of objects (Guignon, 2006). Phenomenological principles assert that scientific investigation is valid when the information gained comes about through rich description that allows for understanding of the essences of experience (Moustakas, 1994).

The philosophical phenomenological method is comprised of four intertwining steps: 1) the epoche, 2) phenomenological reduction, 3) imaginative variation, and 4) synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). In the first step, the epoche, a Greek word implying to avoid, one's biases about things are excluded. Husserl first termed the epoche as the setting aside of predispositions and prejudices, which allows things, events, and people to be seen again, just like the first time (Moustakas, 1994). The epoche is a warning to be cognizant of what is really there and to stay away from the familiarity of everyday happenings, events, and people (Moustakas, 1994). It is a reflective-meditative procedure to allow preconceptions to enter and exit our consciousness freely and, once ready, the prejudgements are to be written down, or bracketed (Moustakas, 1994).

The second step, phenomenological reduction, was developed to bring precision to research findings (Giorgi, 1997). Typically, things and events are taken for granted in everyday life. Phenomenological researchers do not want to take the world for granted because things and events are not always what they seem; rather, they want to systematically understand how things come to be. Researchers advance toward objects in their consciousness with an openness, observing what is there and allowing what is there to be as it is and use textural language to describe what they see, not only the external qualities but also the internal consciousness – the experience as it is (Moustakas, 1994). “Through *the* medium of language one is able to communicate to others *the* objects of consciousness to which one is present, precisely as they are presented” (Giorgi, 1997, p. 241). Moustakas (1994) added that description “leads to deeper layers of meaning” through an “interweaving of person, conscious experience, and phenomenon” (p. 96).

Moustakas (1994) described the steps of phenomenological reduction. First, researchers bracket the focus of the research and set aside all preconceived notions to allow a sole spotlight on the research. Next, researchers horizontalize that data by giving equal value to each statement and are receptive to each statement, providing an opportunity to wash the experience back and forth to determine the condition of the phenomenon that gives it its character. Afterwards, repetitive and irrelevant statements are deleted. The remaining horizons are grouped into themes, which will be the basis for a textural description of the phenomenon. To construct a textural description one must repeat a pattern of looking and describing, looking again and describing while constantly referencing textural qualities – hot and cold; high and low; dark and light; fast and slow;

loud and soft – descriptions that illustrate a range of intensities, sizes, shapes, colors all within an experiential background (Moustakas, 1994). Eventually, themes, or layers, will emerge that had not been seen before.

The third step, imaginative variation, seeks possible meanings through differing perspectives, roles, and functions (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers use phenomenological reflection and imaginative variation to construct structural themes and descriptions from the textural meanings that go beyond the façade and into the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). “It is *the* articulation, based on intuition, *of* a fundamental meaning without which a phenomenon could not present itself as it is” (Giorgi, 1997, p. 242). Intuition allows for a free play of perspectives to enter into consciousness. Husserl (1931) explains how this process comes about:

The Eidos, the pure essence, can be exemplified intuitively in the data of experiences, data of perception, memory, and so forth, but just as readily...in the play of fancy we bring spatial shapes of one sort or another to birth, melodies, social happenings, and so forth, or live through fictitious acts of everyday life. (p. 57)

The final step, the synthesis of meanings and essences, is a process to bring all fundamental structural and textural descriptions into a combined statement of the essences derived from the experiences of the entire phenomenon (Giorgi, 1997). It is important to note that the essences of an experience can never be fully sought; rather, the textural-structural synthesis embodies the essences at a certain place and time from the perspective of a single researcher drawing from a comprehensive reflective and imaginative study of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Data Collection**

This qualitative study used phenomenological inquiry through personal memos-to-self and in-depth interviews (see Appendix A) to obtain the lived experiences of eight elementary principal participants, four men and four women. The phenomenological approach was used to understand the subjective aspects of elementary principals' behavior from their frames of reference. "Researchers in the phenomenological mode attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 23). I captured personal experiences and drew out rich descriptions and deep meaning from my participants as they described the nature of their family experiences.

I wrote memos-to-self of my lived experiences as an elementary principal in a dual-career marriage with children under the age of 18. Memos-to-self were written using my home computer and supplemented participants' interview data. I examined a map to identify communities within a 30 mile radius of Morgantown. An internet search of District websites identified the elementary schools and principals in those communities. A list of elementary principals, the buildings they administer, and the school districts they belonged to was used as a guide when determining eligible participants for the study.

Eight participants, four male and four female, were utilized to provide the evidence needed to understand the lived experiences of elementary principals in dual-career relationships with children under the age of 18. I began participant selection by mailing a letter (see Appendix B) to all principals in the Morgantown School District

whom I suspected may have fit the study's criteria to obtain my sample. The letter introduced myself, stated the purpose of my study, described the research and clarified the procedures, confidentiality, and risks and benefits. Any risk to the participants was minimal as they disclosed personal information only if they chose to do so and, as consenting adults, were informed they could withdraw from the study at any time and have their data destroyed. The letter also informed participants of an upcoming telephone call to be made to them by the researcher within a week of receiving the letter.

The intention of the telephone call was to review the purpose of the study, answer their questions, ask for their participation and, if they were willing to participate, to schedule an interview date, time, and location at the participant's discretion, and solicit names of other possible candidates. Participants chose the interview site. I recommended the location be a quiet, out of the way place such as a conference room, residence, or coffee shop.

A follow up letter (see Appendix C) was mailed to all elementary principals who verbally agreed to participate in the study. The mailing thanked them for their willingness to participate, asked them to complete a brief biographical questionnaire (see Appendix D) and reviewed the informed consent form (see Appendix E) prior to our meeting. It also confirmed the time, date, and location of the interview. Researchers recommend completing an informed consent form immediately after establishing the research procedures, but before data collection begins (Rudestam & Newton, 2001).

The elements of the informed consent form were as follows: who is conducting the study, why the participants were chosen, purpose of the study, time commitment,

benefits to be expected, potential risks and how they are managed, voluntary nature of the study, confidentiality, debriefing, contacts and questions, and a copy of the informed consent form was provided to them for their records. Principals were categorized as normal adult volunteers.

I met each participant at the agreed upon time and location for the initial in-depth, 45-60 minute open-ended interview. I reviewed the purpose of the study, procedures, risks and benefits, and confidentiality as outlined in the initial letter. I verbally went over the informed consent form with each participant making sure they understood what they were agreeing to. Following this explanation, each participant was asked to sign the consent form acknowledging they fully understood the study. I collected the completed biographical questionnaire and began building rapport by reviewing the information they provided. I then used nondirective, grand-tour questions and floating prompts (see Appendix A) to guide my questioning as referenced by Grant McCracken (1988) in *The Long Interview*. It was important to use these questions as a guide for key aspects only. The questions acted as a stimulus to help the participants' thinking along, but the true essence was derived from the experiences principals shared during the flow of conversation. Grand-tour questions were phrased in a general and nondirective manner allowing respondents to share unique experiences in their own terms. Although the grand-tour questions were scripted, conversations were also flexible and adaptable to investigate each participant's unique experience. Grand-tour questions generally focused on the following topics: strengths and stressors of dual-career families, family and



household responsibilities, perception of elementary administration, and coping strategies.

All interviews were digitally recorded in order to capture verbatim language and voice inflections. I transcribed the digital recordings to ensure quality. Participants were provided a copy of the transcript to guarantee accuracy. A follow up telephone call was made to participants allowing them to state concerns, make corrections, or ask questions. In addition, I read through the transcripts for understanding. Finally, a thank you note was sent to all participants. All collected data was stored and managed in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. In addition, audio recordings and their transcripts were saved on a secured password protected computer and backed up on a secure external hard drive. Only my dissertation advisor and I had access to the data.

### **Data Analysis**

I used Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis to analyze the phenomenological data, including my own. First, I listed all statements relevant to the participant's experience. In this process, known as horizontalization, each comment held equal value. Second, I listed all nonoverlapping, nonrepetitive statements. These statements were the invariant horizons of the experience. Third, I grouped invariant horizons into themes. Fourth, I used the invariant horizons and themes to construct an individual textural description of each participant's experience, including verbatim examples. Fifth, I constructed an individual structural description of each participant's experience drawn from the individual textural description and imaginative variation. Sixth, I constructed a textural-structural description of the

meanings and essences of each participant's experience, including the invariant constituents and themes. Finally, I used the individual textural-structural descriptions to develop a composite description of the essences of the experience for all participants as a whole. This description was the heart of the lived-experience.

### **Credibility and Dependability**

The qualitative research perspective relies on the participants' views for credibility as the only justifiable evaluator of the results. Credibility refers to the degree a researcher's analyses find participant agreement. Member check is the most critical credibility technique (Lincoln & Guba, 1999). In member check, each participant will be given exclusive access to their interview transcripts and invited to read them thoroughly for clarity and accuracy and to provide additional insight and information.

Dependability is the degree to which results are consistent with data and emphasizes the importance of the researcher to account for the ever-evolving context within which the research takes place. My role in the study was not to generate replicability, rather it was to describe the environment through those who experience it. Member checks enhanced the level of dependability of this qualitative study (Merriam, 1998).

### **Limitations**

I fully disclosed the research procedures and purpose of my study to the participants. Since some of the participants were elementary principals in the Morgantown School District, they may have known each other personally and professionally. Also, I had been an administrator in the Morgantown School District for

seven years and had built close personal and professional relationships with several administrators. These relationships made it important for me to try to protect their anonymity, which I worked toward, but could not guarantee. Pseudonyms were used throughout this research in an attempt to protect the anonymity of participants and their districts. It is likely that some participant anecdotes could be recognized by other administrators. For this reason, administrators may not have been willing to voluntarily share personal information for fear that someone might identify them through their story. The focus of this research was limited to the perspective of elementary principals. Finally, my own experiences as an elementary principal, husband and parent created a bias that placed limitations on my analysis. I did everything I could to be aware of my biases and set them aside.

In summary, this chapter provided a detailed description of this study's research methodology. A qualitative methodology was used to examine the lived experiences of elementary principals involved in dual-career marriages with children. The participant sample was made up of eight purposefully selected individuals. Data were collected through personal interviews and analyzed through Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. Credibility and dependability were accounted for through member check. Limitations included sample size and demographics as well as my biases. Following is a discussion of the findings with specifics that support and explain each finding.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS

This phenomenological study presents the lived experiences of elementary principals involved in dual-career relationships with children. Phenomenology provides an opportunity for individuals to share their life experiences in order to illuminate the previously misunderstood, unknown, or discounted (Bogdan & Biklen, 1993). A variety of experiences are provided to help the reader understand the research participants. Quotations allow the participants to speak for themselves, providing multiple perspectives.

This chapter presents the key findings obtained from eight in-depth interviews beginning with a brief description of the interviewees. The results of the study inform understanding of dual-career families in three ways by showing that (a) participants expressed a gap between their actual and perceived values; (b) stress developed from an inability to complete tasks during the working day causing work to spill over into the home domain; and (c) principals employed a variety of coping strategies to manage daily stressors. The major findings will be discussed in this chapter and analyzed in chapter five. The chapter concludes with a summary.

This study included eight elementary principal participants, four female and four male, who were married with children in the home. The number of children in the home ranged from two to seven with an age range of four to 18 years old. Couples had been married from 10 to 28 years. Principals had been involved in administration for as few as four years and as many as 21 years. Seven of the eight interviewees held master's

degrees, while one held a doctoral degree. Spouses had obtained bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degrees. Participants were from a mid-western city and either led a suburban or urban elementary building. They worked between 55 and 70 hours per week, while most of their spouses worked between 45 and 65 hours per week. One spouse had temporarily chosen to postpone her teaching career and had accepted a 15-hour-per-week tutoring position. Spouses' occupations ranged from business to education to psychology. Appendix F details participants' demographic information. Following is a brief description of each participant.

Derek is the principal of an urban elementary school. He has 11 years of experience in education, six in administration. Derek holds a master's degree and works approximately 65 hours per week. His wife of 10 years recently delayed her teaching career to raise their two young children, ages four and seven, while tutoring part time approximately 15 hours per week. His wife holds a bachelor's degree.

A principal in an urban elementary school, Brad, has worked in education for over 22 years, four of those years as an administrator. Brad and his wife both hold master's degrees. He works approximately 55 hours per week, whereas she works roughly 45 hours per week as an elementary teacher. They have been married for 19 years and are raising three children in the home, ages 16, 14, and 10.

Brian has 16 years of experience in education with seven of those years in administration. He is currently the principal of an urban elementary school. Brian holds a master's degree and works approximately 70 hours per week. His wife also holds a master's degree. She is a teacher and works about 65 hours per week. They have been

married for 11 years and are raising six children, and one grandchild, ages 18, 16, 10, 9, 8, 7, and 1, respectively. Two of the older children and the grandchild have moved out of the home leaving the children ages 10, nine, eight, and seven to be cared for.

Brett is a male administrator of an urban elementary school. He has 19 years of experience in education, five of which include administration. Brett holds a master's degree and works approximately 60 hours per week. His wife of 18 years is a trust officer who holds a Juris Doctorate and a master's degree in business administration. She works approximately 50 hours per week. Together, they are raising two children in the home, ages 15 and 10.

Peggy is the principal of a suburban elementary school. Eleven of her 20 years in education have been in administration. Peggy and her husband both hold master's degrees. She works around 60 hours per week, while her husband works roughly 60 hours per week as the president of a benefits company. They have been married together for 17 years and are raising twin seven year olds.

An experienced educator, Liz, has worked in education for 28 years, 21 of which include administration. Liz is currently the principal of a suburban elementary school. She holds a master's degree and works approximately 70 hours per week. Her husband of 27 years also holds a master's degree and is a post-secondary teacher who works 40 hours per week. Together, they are raising two children, ages 18 and 16. One of the boys moved away to college during this study.

Kaye is an administrator of an urban elementary school. She has 25 years of experience in education, 20 of which include administration. Kaye holds a master's

degree and works approximately 55 hours per week. Her husband of 26 years holds a bachelor's degree and works in sales. He works approximately 45 hours per week. Together, they have two children, ages 23 and 16. One child has moved out of the home, while the other continues to live with the parents.

Rae holds a Doctor of Education degree and works approximately 60 hours per week as the principal of a suburban elementary school. She has 27 years of experience in education, 14 as an administrator. Her husband of 15 years is a psychologist who holds a Doctor of Psychology degree. They are raising two children together, ages 10 and 13.

After interviewing these practicing principals and analyzing the data, three major themes emerged that expand and enrich the understanding of the lived experience of principals. The first theme was a gap between participants' actual and perceived values. The second theme was stress developed from an inability to complete tasks during the working day. The result of which was spillover into the home domain. The third theme emerging was a variety of coping strategies that principals employed to manage daily stress.

### **Participants Expressed a Gap Between Their Actual and Perceived Values**

In the first theme, participants expressed a gap between their actual and perceived values. Several subthemes emerged relating to this gap. These included prioritizing espoused values, actualized behavior, and aligning values during the summer.

The interview questions that were utilized (see Appendix A) were designed to prompt dialogue regarding the lived experiences of elementary principals involved in dual-career relationships with children. Participants were asked about their values and

how they were prioritized. A majority of principals prioritized values as faith, family, work, and self. In this hierarchy, faith and family took precedence over work and self.

Typical of others, two participants described prioritized values. One principal described:

We have always tried to live by 3 F's – our faith, our family, and then the funds, which is why we work. You try to keep that faith ahead of what you do about keeping you grounded - giving you perspective.

A second principal added:

My family comes first and then school comes second and then I exercise. I do a great job [of exercising] in the summer when I have more free time, but when school starts I tend to push it out because I want to take care of my kids first.

That is my first priority. [Then I] take care of school and if there is time, I will exercise.

As these individuals provided descriptions and anecdotes of their experiences, they often spoke emphatically about their family identity. One participant mirrored the sentiment of many others regarding family when they exclaimed, “It is everything! It is who we are!” It was evident through comments such as this that the interviewees perceived possessing strong family values.

All interviewees described a household culture that reflected a strong investment in the family, particularly parenthood. Participants perceived children to be at or near the top of the priority list. “It is like our saying goes in teaching...whatever is best for kids. I think that applies in your family,” said one principal who, like others, displayed love for children by prioritizing their relationship. The participant noted, “That is how I foster the



relationship with them...being with them...during their activities...I know that that really pays off and they enjoy that.” All dual-career couples took time to organize activities and events that provided children with positive experiences. Opportunities for children included education, sports, music, clubs, religion, household chores, and family vacations.

All participants spoke about the importance of being involved at all stages of their child’s development, especially during the younger years when their children crave attention. One participant reflected on the importance of minor details when the children were younger:

I remember...purposefully going to the bathroom before I went home because I knew I wouldn’t have time when I was at home. I really felt that I needed to be present with them. They were more engaged with me [at the younger age] so I would spend time playing with them or [go] for a walk.

Strengthening the parental identity, this participant also shared an established daily dinner routine:

We never turn the TV on when we eat. We always say grace before we start [dinner] and [afterwards] we always share about our day. That’s where you feel like you really made a connection with your children in that half hour or 45 minute period of the day.

In addition, family values were strengthened through an evening story bedtime routine. “Those are fun memories that you have of those read alouds that you just didn’t think would matter, but [they do]. They still carry it with them.”

Children's needs changed as they developed, yet parental love remained strong. All participants shared supporting their children as they grew older by attending activities, events, and productions. Parents also continued to value interaction with their maturing children. For example, although the focus switched from evening story time to helping study for tests or other content specific skills, parents continued to enjoy the interaction of, for example, "slaughtering some Spanish words" with their teens.

Priority values between faith, family, work, and self are constantly challenged. The stark reality is work often becomes the highest priority. The workload of an elementary principal, combined with that of a professional spouse, often clouds the perception of priorities creating an inconsistency between perceived and actual values. A couple of participants admitted revelations commonly held by other principals. One openly shared:

Unfortunately, work is usually the highest priority because I know if something needs to get completed by a certain day or timeline sometimes that will slip into a highest priority for me and then being a mother and usually being a (begins laughing) wife is usually put on the back burner.

Another principal observed:

You want to say that you are always guided by your family, but sometimes that can get distorted fairly quick because 80% of what I do is work and it is very easy to get caught into that work cycle where I always want to be better at work and this is what I need to do and yet forgetting about what is really and truly important.

Although principals attempted to prioritize time for their family, as evidenced in previous descriptions, they were constantly pressured by a mountain of work tasks. I asked elementary principals to describe their daily workload in an attempt to understand the type and level of work involvement. Principals noted a wide variety of tasks to complete each day, many of which were “usually spent on people” by helping parents, staff and students solve problems that arose intermittently throughout the day, limiting their ability to complete paperwork-type tasks.

Participants are cognizant of the work that spills over into the home and its impact on the children. Time spent with children at home may be perceived as “quality time,” but in reality, it lacks quality. One principal, representative of many others, wondered about the development of her young children, “I often worry (about) how much this impacts my children. Are they happy? Are they healthy? Are they learning and developing like they should be?” She also wondered about the impact of reduced time for visiting with extended family such as grandma and grandpa or cousins and aunts and uncles. Generally, participants were concerned about how the amount of time they and their spouse spent away from the children would affect their development.

Like most parents, participants cared deeply about their children’s well-being. Children’s needs often held a high priority for interviewees as evidenced in the comment, “Whatever is best for kids needs to be at the forefront of what you are doing.” However, as demonstrated in the following statement, this participant prioritized the job as primary and the children as secondary, “[I] take an interest in what they do and sometimes the job

has to take a back seat to my kids' needs." The job was primary, and 'sometimes' secondary to the children.

Participants attempted to schedule work around family activities, making time for weekend get-a-ways, children's activities, sporting events, and general family time. Yet, one participant described how even though one might perceive family as priority, work is lying quietly in the background controlling the amount of time spent with loved ones:

When the kids were young we always did family game night and I would always have to put a time limit on it because I had to get back to work. I never try to say that to them, but in my mind I have got 'this much time' and then I have to move on from there.

Work followed principals wherever they went. Several participants commented that technology allowed them to respond to emails while away from their desk. One participant noted the high number of incoming emails and described "sneaking" in responses during family time in an attempt to ease the load later:

The number of emails we answer is huge. Maybe you have a chance while they (the children) are going to the bathroom and you can answer two or three emails and catch up that way, or maybe you are in the middle of a soccer game...and you can answer three or four. You try to catch little bits like that as you go.

Several principals also recognized evaluations, in addition to email, as tasks completed outside of work. Unlike email, which mainly spilled over into the home due to sheer quantity, evaluations required a great deal of concentration, which all participants

agreed was difficult to find time at work to complete because of constant interruptions and a focus on human interaction. One participant described uninterrupted time at home:

A lot of evaluation work is done at home because once the kids are in bed that is uninterrupted time for me, and I can concentrate on work...and when I write evaluations I work hard to put as much thought into that process as I can.

Principals often expressed an understanding that work spilling into the home was encroaching on their family life. However, principals new to administration tended to lack strategies to balance work and home lives. One veteran principal reflected back to the days as a young administrator at the age of 29, recalling being very naïve and having a difficult time leaving work at work. The principal would often take work home believing, “That is going to be the case. Those things are going to happen.” The principal continued to take her work home and had a difficult time feeling alright about quitting the practice, but eventually, after 20 years in the position, she finally understood the importance of “Okay, I am not going to bring that home with me” and began to balance life the best she could.

Most novice principals with less than seven years of experience, who were unsure about their ability to prioritize values, used phrases such as “I hope” and “I think” to describe their improvement. One novice principal shared a comment about improvement toward balance. “I would hope that I get better each year and with each experience learn something from it and become more efficient and balanced.” Another novice principal added, “I think I am doing a little bit better job than last year, and this year I hope to do a better job with prioritizing and taking time for... me or the kids and not so much with

work.” He admitted that he was not very good at “being present” at home his first year as principal as evidenced by his sneaking away to answer and respond to emails during family functions. This principal believed he improved in this area after four years in elementary administration by stopping what he was doing to remind himself: “It will never be all finished.” His continued improvement toward an actual values hierarchy was demonstrated by the following statement: “It goes back to the faith and family and, if my family needs to come first, I have got to do that. That is something I did not do very much the first year and I am getting better at that...I think.” Whereas novice principals confessed uncertainty related to their ability to prioritize actual values, most veteran principals, with greater than seven years of experience, claimed to have developed skills throughout their tenure to help better align values – so they perceived.

Actual and perceived values are more closely aligned during the summer months. Time is an important commodity of participants and their spouses, one limited during the school year, yet in abundance for the educators of the family during the summer. Elementary principals shared how they “burn so hot” during the school year and need time off over the summer to recuperate. The summer break provided principals with an opportunity “to give [themselves] a break” and not try “to do too much,” allowing time for family to climb back to the top of the actual priority list. One person echoed the comments of most participants when they exclaimed, “[In the] summertime our family life is absolutely fantastic!”

Summer breaks are the polar opposite of the school year. The summer is all about “total family time.” It is a time to realign the core values held deep within. Participants

reported having a closer connection to their children during the summer months when time can be scheduled as desired and family life is much more in balance. One participant echoed the views of others when he said, “In the summer...it is just you and your time and you can schedule your time as you need to and make time for more family things.” A majority of the comments regarding how interviewees spent their time in the summer focused on the children. Time was spent with their children playing at a park, swimming at a pool, golfing, visiting the zoo, biking on a trail, or gardening.

Principals overwhelmingly agreed that their family identity changed dramatically during the summer break, especially in families where both parents were educators. I refer to these couples as having a “dual-educator” relationship. Interviews revealed that dual-educator couples spoke of the benefit of common family time. For the most part, teachers and administrators share a similar working calendar, including vacation days during the school year and in the summer. All dual-educator principals beamed when describing common vacation time with family. One principal ranked a common schedule as the most family friendly aspect of an educator’s profession, providing opportunities for valuable family interaction.

Participants in this study struggled to maintain perceived values of faith, family, work and self in the wake of actual job demands. It is to be noted that although interviewees listed faith as the top priority, participants commented very little regarding its significance within their lives. There were only two comments during the hours of interviews. One principal mentioned attending weekly church services and saying grace

during family meals. Another principal commented on the importance of giving to the church and reserving Wednesday evenings for religion.

Among participants, children were often identified as the top priority; however, the invasion of work into home consistently threatened the values hierarchy often leaving work as the top priority. It was evident from the responses that novice principals were unsure of their ability to keep values prioritized and veteran principals, even though they had developed strategies and were confident in their ability to maintain priorities, continued to struggle amidst the workload stress.

### **Stress Develops From a High Number of Work Tasks**

The second theme emerging was that stress developed from a high number of work tasks. Subthemes relating to this were work stress and family stress.

When asked about their day-to-day life as an elementary principal, each participant spoke of stress derived from the amount of time they devoted to their profession. All principals had similar feelings as one individual who shared, “During the school year family time is a little more stressful due to the hours that we all put into our careers.” A majority of stress stems from the abundance of daily tasks, which overloads the principal causing work to spill over to evenings and weekends. Overloaded principals regularly feel as if they neglect their families, leading to conflict and/or stress.

Work/family conflict is illustrated by the following comment:

I remember vividly two times when I said I was going to be [at an activity] and I was not. I felt horrible as a parent because I could not be there and I wanted to be, but it just did not work out.



Principals acknowledged that stress primarily related to being inundated with a large quantity of tasks each day rather than a few intense stressful situations such as irate parents or health emergencies. The enormous number of tasks to be completed took much more time than was allotted each day, causing principals to spend time on work tasks in the evenings and on weekends, referred to as spillover. Work spilling over into the home limited family time and strained the ability of participants to maintain prioritized values. The amount of work spilling over into the home left one participant feeling non-existent. He expressed frustration through difficulty in arranging dinner dates with his family throughout the school year, “I feel like for 10 months out of the year I disappear.” Another participant expressed feelings about the time spent outside of work: “Sometimes I probably put in way too much time at school and feel like I’ve neglected part of my family responsibilities.”

All principals agreed that no day is typical, and they must maintain a heightened state of alertness to expect the unexpected during their already busy schedule. Although no two working days are similar, they generalized their schedule into three time periods: beginning, during, and after the school day. Mornings, prior to the beginning of the school day, were designated for attending meetings or “being present” in the hallways to “make connections” with students, staff, and parents. Principals shifted responsibilities once the school day had begun to focus on dropping into classrooms to provide teachers with instructional feedback, contacting parents, answering email, and meeting with staff and students, in addition to unexpected situations that arose during the day. The final time period, following student dismissal, was usually filled with a variety of meetings.

Principals rarely took a break from the unrelenting pace and, therefore, frequently were unable to complete the miscellaneous tasks that continued to pile up. Incomplete work that spilled over the end of the school day was taken home to be completed at a later time.

The line between work and home for working professionals is often blurred, thus tipping the scales and creating a life imbalance. Participants more often cited examples of work spilling over into the home rather than home spilling over into work as evidenced by this principal's comment: "There are a lot of times that I either have to be in very early or we have events at night, which conflict with our kids' events."

Participants noted the impact of technology on their workload. Laptops and smart phones provided the portability to work anywhere and at any time. Participants admitted to completing work tasks in the evenings, weekends, vacations, holiday gatherings, and during children's activities. One principal described completing evaluations during basketball season:

We were travelling to basketball tournaments and I remember taking my laptop and sitting in gyms [by the] concession stand area at a table and writing up my evaluations. I did it on the road in very creative spots. When they have open gym practices at our school I would sit and type my evaluations while they were practicing. If we were at a tournament, I would sit down in the gym area and find a quiet spot on the bleachers and start typing.

E-mail was the most frequently cited work task that reached outside of the working day. Participants were constantly available through wireless technology. One

principal shared: “I have a smart phone I can do some emails while they (children) are at a lesson.” A second principal described the invasion:

We constantly get e-mail and people want answers right now and with cell phones and smart phones it is like you never leave work. So a lot of times when you are at home with family you are still distracted by work.

Elementary principals involved in dual-career relationships find they are “more on edge” and have “less patience” from an overloaded weekday that flows into evenings and weekends. One principal commented, “I have less patience for my family because I have used up so much of it during the week.” Less patience can lead others to fall victim to second-hand stress – exposure to another’s stress.

Several participants shared how they had limited time to spend with their spouses, who were also constrained by time commitments through work, leading to communication issues. Participants reported that their busy, stressed-out relationships may lead to minor annoyances “snowballing into a bad situation where you get into a fight and then that creates more emotional stress.” Dual-career couples usually find themselves in this situation when they have not spoken to one another for a while, and their life is out of balance due to hectic schedules. One participant expressed communication under stress:

We talk in a formal, business way. “What needs to get done tonight? What do the children need to have done for school? What is our plan for tomorrow or what’s our week look like?” It is usually a pretty formal, business-like

conversation versus maybe more of a caring conversation such as “How was your day?” or “How are you doing?”

Most participants claimed that lack of time led to fewer bonding opportunities with their spouse, especially during the week. Principals found it difficult to spend time with their career-oriented spouse, especially when they consistently felt as if they were always working. The following is a commonly held response:

The ability for us to take a Monday and go to Champps for supper, just with us two, or have a day like we do in the summer is almost non-existent because we are always working or [with] the kids going to a different activity or whatever.

In addition to the difficulty of finding time for family, all participants found it challenging to maintain their own physical health throughout the stressful school year. Most acknowledged little to no exercise due to overloaded schedules, resulting in exhaustion, irritability, and increased stress. One participant acknowledged the difficulty of maintaining a consistent exercise routine,

Sometimes you get started, and you go every day, and all of a sudden, a bunch of things come up and so you miss a few days. [Exercising] is an easy thing to not do if you are pinched for time in the morning or at night.

Lack of exercise affected endurance. Participants became easily exhausted, thus, required more sleep and reduced the amount of time available to meet family needs. “I’m tired and go to bed really early or sleep on the weekend during the day and miss some of that [family] time or not get some things accomplished to help out with the family,” said

one participant. A 'Catch 22' scenario emerges. They are unable to exercise because of exhaustion, but exhausted from lack of exercise.

Along with a lack of exercise, a majority of principals admitted to eating an unhealthy diet during the school year. They blamed work overload, and subsequent lack of time to prepare healthful food, as the greatest contributing factors to eating fast food. One principal described a typical scenario, "You didn't want to come home after a long stressful day and spend extra time making something. It was easier to run to McDonald's on Chicken McNugget Tuesday." Another principal stammered, "The minute I became a principal I gained about 20 pounds. I've got to do a better job with what I eat."

A majority of the elementary principals' stress developed from overloaded work days. Daily schedules were inundated with e-mail, phone calls, meetings, emergencies, evaluations, and on and on and on. The number of work tasks consistently spilled over into the home domain, thus reducing family time and increasing conflict. Additionally, a principal's ability to maintain health and wellness was negatively impacted by lack of time.

### **Coping Strategies are Utilized to Manage Daily Stressors**

The third theme emerging recognizes the coping strategies utilized to manage daily stressors. Two major subthemes emerged: problem-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies. Problem-focused strategies included email management, self-reflection, professional relationships, and dual-educator relationships. Emotion-focused strategies involved developing relationships, family support, "me time," and the challenge of a healthy lifestyle.

Principals can overload their systems by attempting to complete the high quantity of daily tasks, causing a variety of stress-related symptoms. All principals developed coping mechanisms in an attempt to combat the effects of stress. Individual coping strategies have been divided into two main categories: problem-focused and emotion-focused (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The purpose of problem-focused coping strategies is for individuals to actively seek solutions or set priorities. Emotion-focused coping strategies target calming or regulating emotions stimulated by a stressor.

Elementary principals used problem-focused strategies to complete a maximum amount of work throughout the day, thus minimizing the work load brought home. Some participants plan for the bombardment of e-mails by scheduling time during the working day to curtail the number of e-mails flooding the home. One principal dedicated specific times, such as 11:00-11:30, to work on e-mails so that he could “plow through a bunch of them at school versus waiting until [he gets] home.” A majority of principals also reported consistently working through their lunch as a way to fight back the blitz of e-mails. At the same time, their behavior likely had a negative effect on their health and wellness.

Even the best laid game plan to combat the droves of e-mails at work fell victim to unintended situations, such as ad hoc parent meetings, student behaviors, water leaks, and the like. These situations left e-mail to be answered outside of the working day. All participants spoke of making efforts to find additional hours to catch up on work. Some principals found this time in the morning, while others preferred the evening. For example, one principal shared, “I try to get as much done in the morning as I can so that I

can make sure that at the end of the day I can come home and either cook supper or be there.” Another principal described the nightly routine: “Almost every evening after my kids go to bed (8:30), I am back on the computer for at least an hour answering emails or finalizing a report.”

Most participants attempted to balance priorities through self-reflection. One interviewee took a stance against work when they commented, “Some things are going to be there the next day and it will be okay.” Speaking for many who realized the limitations placed on them at work in order to manage the balance, one administrator stated, “I could almost spend a 100 hours a week at a job to do it really well and then things maybe would get done, but I can’t do that.” One principal noted how work takes over life: “Everything [work-related] seems to creep up into things that I think I know are more important [family].” This caused some principals to try balancing priorities by setting dates on their calendar for family time just as they would for work-related tasks and meetings.

Several participants improved decision-making and efficiency through self-reflection, which limited the possibility of stress. Principals explained how the ability to think through situations helped improve future decisions, as illustrated by this comment:

You think about, “How would I do that differently next time?” And you think about the bigger picture of it...”How come I handle it that way? Why did I handle it that way? What would have helped me handle that different?” And you start thinking of those things and the solutions...to maybe avoid that from happening again.

Principals turn to professional relationships as a way to seek advice and reflect upon difficult decisions when self-reflection is deemed unsuccessful. Participants sought out fellow elementary principals, assistant principals, or district level administrators for guidance, support, and to “talk about struggles.” One principal commented on the benefits of a support network, “It can be nice just to call people up and say, ‘Hey, I’ve got this going on. How are you doing this?’ It lessens the stress and anxiety level knowing that you have got a support network.” Another principal also emphasized the importance of a support network to reduce stress,

I am fortunate to have five male elementary principals all around the same age that have the same interests. [I] have the ability to visit with them on a weekly basis and talk through situations [for] advice ... We make a lot of decisions and not off the cuff ... they are thought out, reflected on, talked about, and we use ideas from each other. I think that relieves some stress when you know you have talked to someone and you find out that you are not the only one going through that or somebody has already gone through that and they can say, “Well ... expect this, expect that, it could happen, try this.” That is a stress reliever.

Several participants involved in dual-educator relationships, where both spouses are employed in the educational field, mentioned visiting with their spouse to cope with work stress. The principals viewed their partners as sounding-boards who provided helpful suggestions. Different interviews exemplify this. One posited:

That is one nice thing about Charlotte being in the same career...because anything that I think of she can be a great sounding board from the teacher perspective –



How would this be taken in your building [by] your teacher colleagues? We are able to talk through all of that.

Another experienced principal shared:

If I am stressed about a situation with a staff member, she understands it because she has lived that role. She knows all about it and the further I go from the classroom it is harder for me to understand where they (teachers) are coming from sometimes. So it is nice to bounce those ideas and those stresses off on her because she can keep me grounded.

A third spoke of the value of his educator spouse when he commented:

We understand what the other goes through because we are in the same profession and it's easy for us to relate if somebody comes home and had a bad parent conference or I had a bad teacher conference. She can relate to that because maybe she has had that happen.

In concert with problem-focused coping strategies, elementary principals also used emotion-focused coping strategies in an effort to calm emotions activated by stressors. Almost all participants spoke of developing a variety of relationships to maintain emotions throughout stressful periods. Relationships included those with family friends, personal friends, and spouses. Regarding family friends, one participant expressed the benefit of gaining “perspective outside of [their] job.” Unfortunately, most participants admitted that as a dual-career couple they were only able to develop a few close friendships due to their busy roles as parents and professionals. Some principals developed friendships in light of busy schedules by developing relationships

with parents of children involved in sporting activities with their own children. One principal found time to chat with a friend, “[I eat] bagels once a week with Margaret in the morning. We go for coffee.” Another principal described how a core group of friends provided support to “lean on”:

[I enjoy] social time with some people who understand [my] family [and] career life - whether it is a game of golf or just getting together to watch a football game. I think those are really good things that help keep me grounded outside of school...outside of family.

Some participants shared how they also sought out immediate family for support when they recognized a buildup of stress. Participants noted the following family stress breaks: eating out at restaurants, spending down time together, home projects, and exercising. One participant interjected a family approach to wellness, “As a family we are all trying to be better about [reducing stress] right now...like [biking], sailing, and swimming.” Another principal shared how distance from work-related stress was accomplished by completing house projects with family members, “My wife and I painted a bedroom together which took my mind off of the things at work...We were also able to just spend time together accomplishing a task.”

Most participants shared a need to find time for themselves in order to decompress and “calm down” from work-related stressors. One principal described finding this time by “shutting the door, shutting the lights off for two minutes...just being able to collect yourself.” Participants commonly referred to “me time” as time alone to reflect, which provided participants a chance to, as one principal put it, “keep grounded

so you can be good for other people.” Interviewees reported steadying their emotions during “me time” through a variety of reflective ways. These included: walking the dog, reading the paper, having a drink, working on a project, or reviewing the family calendar. One principal described “me time” in the morning:

I wake up, look at the [paper], see the headlines, see if there is [a] school related issue that I should be aware of ... [and] have breakfast. I kind of enjoy that time, Kirk. That is kind of my one time when I am by myself because that is it for the rest of the day. You are constantly around people at school and when you get home you are with your kids and your [spouse] so I kind of relish that time.

All participants acknowledged the value of a healthy lifestyle; however, they found it challenging to cope with work stress through wellness activities. One participant mirrored the understanding of many others.

I know that exercise keeps me healthy...When I am physically at my best it helps my endurance, it helps me with my stamina...Clearly there are studies done on what physical exercise does for stress...It just helps me be more relaxed and feel better about myself.

Nevertheless, participants placed others’ needs above their own which led to difficulty in maintaining a consistent exercise routine. One participant characterized their exercise routine as a series of starts and stops, “I will say, ‘I have got to do it’ and I will start, and I will make it about a month.”

Participants in this study recognized the need to develop coping strategies in order to diminish the effects of stress. Two types of coping strategies were utilized: problem-

focused and emotion-focused. Problem-focused strategies attempted to find solutions, while emotion-focused strategies tried to balance the emotions activated by a stressor. Problem-focused strategies included: scheduling work tasks, self-reflection, developing professional relationships, and, in the case of dual-educator relationships, visiting with their spouse. Emotion-focused strategies involved: developing friendships outside of work, finding “me time”, and calling on family members for support. It is important to note that although principals understood the benefits of diet and exercise, they were unable to maintain a healthy wellness regimen.

### **Summary**

Eight elementary principals involved in dual-career relationships with children were interviewed for this study. The interview data were coded to determine themes. Three themes emerged, each with several sub-themes. The three main themes were:

1. Participants expressed a gap between their actual and perceived values.  
Subthemes relating to this were prioritizing values of faith, family, work, and self; work as the highest priority; values of novice and veteran principals; and aligning actual and perceived values during the summer.
2. Stress developed from an inability to complete tasks during the working day causing work to spill over into the home domain. Subthemes relating to this were work stress, family stress, and effects of stress on personal health.
3. Principals employed a variety of coping strategies to manage daily stressors. Two major subthemes emerged: problem-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies. Problem-focused strategies included email management, self-

reflection, professional relationships, and dual-educator relationships. Emotion-focused strategies involved developing personal relationships, family support, “me time,” and the challenge of a healthy lifestyle.

These three themes and sub-themes are interrelated and help shape my understanding of the lived experience of elementary principals involved in dual-career relationships with children. Each of these themes will be analyzed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION, AND SYNTHESIS

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of elementary principals who were involved in dual-career relationships with children. The intention was to better understand how the lived experiences of elementary principals involved in dual-career relationships would provide insight for novice and veteran principals alike who strive to improve the balance between work and home.

A qualitative approach to this study presented rich descriptions of the elementary principals' lived experiences to accurately describe the phenomenon. Each elementary principal was involved in a dual-career relationship with at least one child living in the home. Data were collected through in-depth, audio-recorded interviews of eight elementary principals, four women and four men, from within a 30-mile radius of Morgantown, a Midwestern urban area. The protocols utilized during the in-depth interviews with participants can be found in appendices A and D of this study.

The data were coded, analyzed, and organized using the philosophical phenomenological method comprised of four intertwining steps: 1) the epoche, 2) phenomenological reduction, 3) imaginative variation, and 4) synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). The following describes Moustakas' four steps. The first step, the epoche, involved writing down predispositions and prejudices in an attempt stay away from the familiarity of everyday happenings, events, and people, which allowed the researcher to see things for what they were. Phenomenological reduction, the second step, has several

phases. Initially, all preconceived notions were set aside. Next, equal value was given to each statement and irrelevant statements were deleted. Then, the statements were grouped into themes. Finally, a textural description was developed by repeating a pattern of looking and describing. The third step, imaginative variation, sought the fundamental meaning of the phenomenon by constructing structural themes. The final step synthesized all of the textural and structural descriptions together into a combined statement of the essences.

The study was based on the following four overarching research questions:

- 1) What aspects of a dual-career marriage with children did participants perceive were the most challenging/rewarding?
- 2) To what extent did participants perceive their day-today life as an elementary principal impacted their family life?
- 3) What strategies did participants perceive might help them cope with the stresses of participating in a dual-career relationship with children?
- 4) What did participants perceive helped them balance their work and family lives?

Analyzing the data from these four overarching research questions yielded three interrelated themes presented in Chapter Four. The overarching theme in this study revealed that elementary principals involved in dual-career relationships with children in the home expressed a gap between perceived and actual values. Two additional themes surfaced. One was that this gap between principals' actual and perceived values was held apart by persistent stress from a high quantity of work tasks that frequently spilled over

into the home. The other was that principals developed coping strategies in an attempt to manage the stressors and shrink the gap between actual and perceived values. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of these themes.

### **Interpretation**

Four theories informed the analysis of the themes from the lived experiences of elementary principals who were involved in dual-career relationships with children. Chris Argyris and Donald Schön's theories of action, espoused theory and theory-in-use, provided insight into the difference between what people claim they do and their actualized behavior. Symbolic interactionism, a term coined by Herbert Blumer, helped bring forward the truth of the situation from the perspective of the actors. Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony explained how the power of society can impact one's beliefs and practices. Finally, authentic leadership theory offered understanding of how leaders use self-regulation to align values with actions.

### **Participants Expressed a Gap Between Their Perceived and Actual Values**

The first research question asked participants about which aspects of a dual-career marriage with children they found most rewarding and challenging. As a follow up to this question, participants were asked about how they kept their values prioritized. A gap existed between values they perceived as important and their actualized behavior. Although values were prioritized as faith, family, work, and self, participants most frequently spoke of work demands consuming their time, yet rarely described faith's impact upon their lives. One principal subtly admitted the influence of work on priorities:



When the kids were young we always did family game night and I'd always have to put a time limit on it because I had to get back to work. I never try to say that to them, but in my mind I've got 'this much time' and then I have to move on from there.

Elementary principals involved in dual-career relationships often misperceive their hierarchy of values. Their own expectations are transformed into beliefs about how their lives should be. In their book *Theory in Practice*, Argyris and Schön (1974) developed two theories of action, espoused theory and theory-in-use. These theories described the imbalance between what people say and what people do. Espoused theory explained the actions someone would communicate when asked about how they would behave under certain circumstances.

A majority of the participants espoused faith and family as their top priorities. One principal prioritized their values, "We have always tried to live by 3 F's – our faith, our family, and then the funds, which is why we work." Another principal proffered, "My family comes first and then school comes second and then I exercise." From these statements, principals led others to believe that faith and family were the top priorities in their lives. Faith and family were given allegiance through espoused theory.

Theory-in-use, however, controls the actions that are actually realized, which may or may not be congruent with espoused theory (Argyris and Schön, 1974). Although principals claimed faith and family as their top priorities, they really spent much more time involved in work or thinking about work. The following principal's statement is evidence of how elusive priorities can be. "[I] take an interest in what [the children] do

and sometimes the job has to take a back seat to my kids' needs." Since the interest of children is the subject of the preceding quote, one might suppose children are the highest priority, which may be the case at any given time; however, upon closer examination, this principal proffered the job as priority which only "sometimes" takes a backseat to the children's needs. The participants' focus on work above faith and family maintained the gap between the perceived values and actualized behavior and supported Argyris and Schön's (1974) theory that one's behavior is frequently mismatched with the theories-in-use they espouse.

The participants' lack of comments about faith as a top priority throughout the hours of interviews further supported the incongruence between Argyris and Schön's (1974) espoused theory and theory-in-use. Although interviewees proclaimed faith as the highest priority, only a few comments were uttered. Comments included praying at meals, attending regular church services, and giving monetarily to the church. From the lack of faith-based comments, it seems that faith is unlikely to be the top priority in their lives.

A principal's continued gap between espoused theory and theory-in-use may be evidence of a need to adjust leadership practices. Authentic leadership theory is based upon confident leaders of high moral character who have a keen awareness of how they think and behave as well as being perceived by others as recognizing their own and others' values and moral perspectives (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). Avolio and Gardner believed a key element of authentic leadership is embedded in a deep sense of self, an understanding of one's beliefs and morals and the setting in which they operate. A

significant gap between these principals' espoused theories and theories-in-use was held apart by continued comments that placed faith and family above work. A principal's admission that, "80% of what I do is work" while also claiming faith and family as a top priority, was evidence that priorities were misaligned. Therefore, an indication for a need to adjust leadership practices was a missing deep contextual understanding of how they think and behave regarding values and morals.

Nonlinguistic symbolic communication supported the divide between perceived and actual values. Principals often shared that while they were physically present with their families, they were frequently mentally distant. This included typing evaluations during children's activities or running off to answer emails on a smart phone. By acting this way toward work tasks and distancing themselves from family, principals unconsciously assigned meaning to what they valued - work over family. These actions are consistent with theory-in-use, which govern actual behavior. As further evidence of this, principals consciously made conflicting comments. On one hand, principals expressed linguistic aphorisms regarding family, "It is everything! It is who we are!" and "Whatever is best for kids." On the other hand, principals also verbally expressed work interference as, "Time taken away from your family" and "You cannot always be there [for your family]." Symbolic interaction helps interpret this by attempting to understand what is going on through what the actors themselves think about their environment (Charon, 2004). Although principals consciously made these comments about family, they may not be consciously aware of the meaning that family members may potentially be making of their behaviors – work over family. This is potentially how families view

the interaction with the principal and yet the principal may not. This is probably evidence of a gap between actual and perceived values as the principal says that family is everything, yet they also claim that time must be taken away from family.

The gap may be widened even further through the consistent use of technology within the home, which could lead to conflict between employee, parental, and spousal roles. One principal accused modern technology, such as email and smart phones, of creating interference amongst work and family, “We constantly get email and people want answers right now. With smart phones it is like you never leave work. So a lot of times when you are at home with family you are still distracted by work.” Principals commonly admitted sneaking away from family to respond to emails on their smart phones. Once again, symbolic interaction helps to interpret this by explaining how humans act toward things based upon the meanings they assign to those things. It is likely that work-related messages received and sent by principals on an electronic device while in the presence of family sends an unintentional message to those family members who are present – you are less important than this non-human, electronic communication device. The focus on electronic communication over family is another example of how the gap between perceived and actual values can widen.

With regard to principal experience, the gap varied widely between espoused theory and theory-in-use. Novice principals, with less than seven years of experience, had less of an opportunity than veteran principals to develop meaning through life-experiences and thus, were less sure of their development toward authentic leadership. Shamir and Eilam (2005) argued that authentic leadership strongly depends on the

internal meanings leaders attach to their life-experiences developed throughout the construction of their life-story. Furthermore, Avolio and Gardner (2005) added to the description of authentic leadership, “The leaders’ espoused values/beliefs and their actions become aligned over time and across varying situational challenges” (p. 330). The uncertainty of novice principals was evident through phrases such as “I hope” and “I think.” In addition, novice principals admitted sneaking away during family events to complete work tasks. Since authentic leaders’ actions are based on their values and convictions, it is evident that novice principals had yet to establish a strong value-base from which to act. It may be that veteran principals have had time to develop meaning through their life-experiences and better understand the importance of leaving work at work. The following comment reflected a veteran principal’s experienced understanding of, yet continued struggle with, the reality of work demands:

Now it is time for me to say the door is closed at work and it is time for me to be mom and switch my hat. At some point you just have to develop a comfort level because you never feel like your day ends at work. You can always take things home, but if you do that is where it interferes with that other aspect of your life [home]. It is not easy and you never feel satisfied that you are doing justice to all parts.

Although veteran principals’ understanding of balancing work and home may have improved over time, this was not always carried through into practice. The same veteran principal admitted bringing work home:

Sometimes you are spending a lot of extra hours on the weekend trying to catch up and I think it is pretty normal to have some things to do. Whether you are reading professional articles or a book or you are finishing an evaluation that you did not get written up.

The previous comment illustrated that although veteran principals may have developed a better understanding of their values, they are still not immune from the onslaught of an abundance of work-related tasks. However, Shamir and Eilam (2005) maintained that development of self-awareness regarding one's values and convictions is an important step toward authentic leadership development, which may help close the gap between perceived and actual values throughout the school year.

The gap between espoused theory and theory-in-use widened for principals during the school year and shrunk during the summer break. Principals claimed summers were about "total family time" – a time when espoused theory and theory-in-use became aligned, or congruent. Congruence, as defined by Argyris and Schön (1974), occurred when one's theory-in-use matched their espoused theory of action. In other words, congruence transpired when inner feelings were allowed to be expressed in actions. A principal explained, "In the summer...it is just you and your time and you can schedule your time as you need to and make time for more family things." This comment was actualized through interviewees' descriptions of spending time with family in the summer while on vacations, at parks and swimming pools, exercising, and simply enjoying time at home with each other. A reduced focus on work allowed faith and family to regain the top positions on the values hierarchy, restoring balance, at least during the summer, to an

all too often out-of-balance life. Congruence was evidenced through the following comments, “In the summer I try not to do much work. I really try to give myself a break because by the spring I am burnt out. I need that break.” The principal continued, explaining how she floods this time with family, “The time is all spent with my kids. We go to [the waterpark] all of the time. [I] take them to a movie and haul them to the golf course.” Congruence during the summer break may indeed provide principals with a needed break and an opportunity to align values with actions.

This analysis resulted in identification of the gap between principals’ perceived and actual values in order to expose the myth behind the hierarchical values. This insight provided understanding for the espoused theory, what someone communicates how they want you to think they behave, and the theory-in-use, someone’s actualized behavior. Regardless of a principal’s espoused or actualized behavior, data suggest that stress developed from principals’ inability to complete work tasks during the school day, causing work to spill over. Novice and veteran principals alike can reduce the gap between perceived values and actualized behavior by developing self-awareness, a component of authentic leadership theory (Shamir and Eilam, 2005). Furthermore, summer vacation is a time when Argyris and Schön’s (1974) theories find more congruence, aligning inner feelings with expressed actions.

### **Stress Develops From a High Number of Work Tasks**

The school environment is situated within the broader context of human social life. A variety of stakeholders play a part in shaping the educational experience. These stakeholders include students, parents, faculty, administrators, policymakers, and

community members. Each of these stakeholders works to mold their vision of education. The principal is situated at the center of this educational milieu and, subsequently, under a great amount of pressure. Vincent Ferrandino (2003), former Executive Director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), commented on the position:

It has been said that there is no hotter seat in all of education than the one in the principal's office, and few principals working today would disagree with that observation. School leaders catch it from all sides, contending with the sometimes competing interests of teachers, parents, central-office administrators, school boards, and community members. (p. 70)

Overwhelming expectations, long hours and extreme workload of the principalship produce incredible stress for school leaders (Lovely, 2004). A principal's inability to complete a large number of daily tasks, combined with long hours generated from work spilling over into the home domain, continually added pressure to a widening gap between what they say and what they do.

Peterson (1982) described a principal's day as a series of many one to two minute rapid-paced exchanges. It was entirely possible for principals to face 50-60 interactions within an hour, many latent with follow up tasks to be accomplished. Peterson found support from others who wrote about little time flooded with many tasks. Swent and Gmelch (1977) reported that 5 of the top 10 stressors were related to administrative constraints. The stressors included: complying with federal, state, and local policies; too many meetings; report deadlines; feeling of a workload that cannot be completed by the



end of the day; and frequent telephone call interruptions. Patti Kinney (2003), an administrator in Phoenix, OR, described how budget cutbacks have driven principals to lead with fewer resources. Kinney (2003) noted that principals were being asked to do more with less, transforming a job from “a 24-7 commitment into one that at times feels like it needs a 36-8 work week” (p. 44). Principals in this study frequently mirrored the previous research through comments such as, “There is not time and there is a lot of pressure and there is a deadline.” Another principal added, “Something new comes up daily and those things are challenges for the most part that make you just say, ‘Well, jeez, that was something new again.’ It makes your life interesting.”

In light of the constant stress, all principals spoke favorably about their educational role. One principal proclaimed, “I do very much enjoy my job. I do very much enjoy the challenge of it and I would not want to do any other work.” Brookfield (2005) would argue that a principal’s pride in their profession is an example of cultural hegemony that works to enslave them under the prevailing system of beliefs and practices. Furthermore, Brookfield (2005) spoke of education’s veiled hegemony, “Vocation becomes hegemonic when it is embedded in institutional culture and interpreted to mean that one should be willing to sacrifice one’s mental and physical well-being to the cause of student learning” (p. 2). One principal exemplified Brookfield’s comment:

I try to put in as much time as I need to in order to make sure the students at school are successful. At times that takes away from things at home, but that is just something you do because that is the position you are in...When you are in

this position there are expectations and you are going to do what you need to do one hundred percent because the future depends on that – society depends on that.

That is why people go into education, because they want to make a difference.

It appeared that this principal had exerted full effort at work by living up to established cultural norms possibly formed by observing others in the same position. Brookfield (2005) explained that vocation becomes hegemonic when one begins to think they have done unsatisfactory work if they are not completely exhausted at the end of the day. Energy left for family, friends and personal pursuits is often regarded as a failure to fully meet the needs of those they serve.

Principals also expressed bringing a certain level of determination and energy to their profession. It is unlikely that one's ability to complete tasks by the end of a working day was a result of principal lethargy. Principals sat tall as they described their enduring passion for the position. The internal "drive to excel" seemed to be innate for one principal who shared, "I always knew that I wanted to have a successful career." Another principal also expressed a desire for success:

I have that need to feel that I am the best at what I do or [at least] in the top echelon. I do not necessarily have to be better than somebody, but I want to know that I am in a top echelon with a group of people who are at the top of their game...I need that piece. I need to feel like I am doing things well.

Due to the high number of tasks, it was not surprising to hear about participants in this study charging forward each day giving maximum effort to complete the tasks, strengthening the hegemonic culture. Additionally, it could be surmised that participants'

feelings toward the profession, combined with the weight of tasks to be completed, may negatively affect their ability to be present with family, thus widening the gap between their espoused theory of action and their theory-in-use.

Principals themselves symbolize the essence of what it means to be a nostalgic, hard-working American. Just as railroad workers built a foundation for the American economy through blood, sweat, and tears; principals also expend a great deal of time and energy to help build America's future – the children. This effort has not come without a cost. The large amount of tasks to be completed within a given period can push people beyond their stress capacity. This was evident as principals frequently complained of working around the clock and feeling they were always on call. This perspective was evident when one principal conceded, "I feel like for 10 months out of the year I disappear." This is yet another example of Gramsci's (1971) theory of cultural hegemony as principals never questioned their workload – it was simply accepted. Sadly, just as the railroad workers of yesteryear physically left their families to help shape America, contemporary principals symbolically abandon their families to improve student achievement. The time, effort and stress principals in this study endured through their job finds support from the literature on principal stress (Langer & Boris-Schacter, 2003; Lovely, 2004)

The data suggest that elementary principals are exposed to a variety of demands throughout the day. The demands overload their system preventing them from completing work tasks within the confines of a school day. This finding is consistent with others (Lovely, 2004; Langer & Boris-Schacter, 2003; Ferrandino, 2003) who have

written about the amount of time required for principals to meet the needs of many constituents. Principals expressed a desire to expend maximum effort throughout the school day as well as a need to sneak in work outside the school day in an attempt to keep up with the litany of tasks and, consequently, fueling the hegemonic culture. With pressure building and demands increasing, principals began developing coping strategies to manage the stressors and attempt to shrink the gap between their espoused theory and theory-in-use.

### **Coping Strategies Utilized to Manage Daily Stressors**

Principals are embattled with numerous stressors each day that stem from a multitude of circumstances and constituents. It is not surprising that participants would report coping strategies that targeted management-related work stressors. This seemed to make sense as it was apparent participants invested a majority of their time on school-related tasks. Work-related coping strategies included attempts to efficiently organize, prioritize, and manage their schedule. At the same time, participants speculated that it would be unrealistic to expect all tasks to be completed within the school day. The accepted hegemonic culture forced principals to adjust their schedules outside of the working day to maximize family time. One principal described moving work to the weekend in order to spend more time with family,

I just make a deal with myself, “Okay, I am not going to be working on this Thursday night. I have until Monday to get this done. We will use Thursday for family and then I will commit early Saturday morning [to the project] before anybody else is up.”

Another principal explained shifting work to the morning while his family slept in order to free up the dinner hour, “I try to get as much done in the morning as I can so I make sure that at the end of the day I can come home and cook supper.”

All participants confessed to working on tasks outside of the work environment. Conversely, all participants also prioritized faith and family above work. Thus, in light of these contrasting opinions, it is likely that few principals, if any, are aware of the incongruence between their espoused theory and theory-in-use. In addition, current coping strategies used by participants, such as scheduling time to check e-mail, may be ineffective. There may be several reasons that participants were unable to complete work tasks at work. For many, the demands placed on them from the central office can be overwhelming; hence, principals may not always have the time during the day to meet expectations.

It is also plausible that, since principals are in a social environment, they may spend a majority of their time with people solving problems. Further, technology provides a quick and easy direct link to the principal. It would be all too simple for hundreds, if not thousands of people to fire off messages with the click of a button. Therefore, principals may find completing daily tasks within the allotted timeframe next to impossible. Reflection may provide a helpful perspective to cope with the stressors.

Participants spoke of reflection as a critical strategy to help them cope with the demands of the position. Reflection is an important component of growth, especially when focused on personal values (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). One principal shared a reflection, “Everything [work-related] seems to creep up into things that I think I know

are more important [family].” This participant identified the encroachment of his theory-in-use on his espoused theory of action. From an authentic leadership position, this principal is taking a first step toward growth through self-awareness of values and convictions. A leader’s heightened levels of self-awareness are fundamental to authentic leadership development (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). Principals model authentic leadership when they reflect upon their experiences and decisions in relationship to their values and morals.

Principals sought collegial perspectives to help solve problems when self-reflection had been exhausted. They claimed it lessened anxiety when other principals could be summoned to sort through difficult decisions, as explained by one principal, “I think that relieves some stress when you know you have talked to someone and you find out that you are not the only one going through that.” A second principal added, “I get together with a group of principals and we meet to collaborate. That usually helps relieve some stress.” Desiring this collegial support affirms Whitaker’s (1996) view that principals yearn for support systems to help them cope with the pressures.

Collaboration also took place between husbands and wives involved in dual-educator relationships. Due to the nature of their relationship, dual-educator couples may find comfort from each other since they have a defined understanding of each other’s professional role. The benefit of dual-educator collaboration was described by one principal:

That is one nice thing about Charlotte being in the same career...because anything that I think of she can be a great sounding board from the teacher perspective –

How would this be taken in your building [by] your teacher colleagues? We are able to talk through all of that.

Outside of work, principals found respite through the help of their extended and immediate families. Extended family support was evidence of coping strategies that provided critical assistance to busy parents. Extended family members included the participants' parents and siblings. Support focused on watching children and providing transportation. One principal commented on the support her children's grandparents provide,

My parents were a big help when my husband and I were busy. They would pick up the kids from school and a lot of times they would spend time with them.

They would take them out to Dairy Queen or something like that if we need to get stuff done. Like when I was finishing a project they would take the kids to the pool for the afternoon. That is when they were younger and now they are really good about picking up the kids from school and bringing them home for me until I get there. They are pivotal.

This coping strategy could be considered espoused neutral if it did not occur on a regular basis as children would be able to benefit from increased relationship opportunities with extended family members while away from their parents.

Principals scheduled events with their immediate family as a diversion strategy to relieve stress and develop stronger familial relationships. Interviewees described the diversions as taking place at restaurants, movies, sporting events, and during local family

activities as well as extended family vacations. One participant generalized escaping from stress with family,

We will go out and run or play tennis or play basketball or we will go to the drive-in theatre in Luverne as a family. [We will] try to get outside, out of the building, and just get away from it (stress) for a while.

This principal also added enjoying time with family at a restaurant, “We get to spend an hour together just sitting around talking. Nobody has to make anything and nobody has to clean it up. [We] just get that hour together.” From a symbolic interactionist’s point-of-view, principals used conversation, food, exercise, and location to create a necessary diversion from the emotional stressors.

Previously, the concept of self-reflection was described under the context of work. The focus will now shift to a principal’s self-reflection within the home domain, referred to as ‘me time’ throughout the interviews. One principal described ‘me time’ as, “shutting the door, shutting the lights off for two minutes...just being able to collect yourself.” Participants confessed this time was valuable, but very difficult to find. Some principals found solace in the morning with a newspaper, while others preferred to drink an alcoholic beverage or two prior to bed. Regardless of when or where the introspection took place, all principals acknowledged the importance of reassessing priorities during this moment of ‘me time’. Since Shamir and Eilam (2005) argued that “authentic leadership rests heavily on the self-relevant meanings the leader attaches to his or her life-experiences” (p. 395), it could be surmised that a principal’s introspective coping



strategy during ‘me time’ aligned with authentic leadership theory in that greater self-awareness was developed.

The principals in this study reported a variety of coping strategies that targeted management-related work stressors generated from a multitude of circumstances and constituents. The high number of tasks and constant accessibility made it difficult for principals to implement coping strategies. It is apparent that work-related tasks may continue to spill over into the home forcing principals to cope with work demands by adjusting their schedules. Principals also coped with the stressors by soliciting extended family members to help with the children. Immediate family members provided relief from stress through vacations, activities, and restaurant dinners. Reflection, whether self or collegial, is an important coping strategy utilized to increase one’s self-awareness of values and convictions, strengthening a principal’s authentic leadership (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). This is an important first step in reducing the gap between one’s espoused theory and theory-in-use.

### **Synthesis of Interpretation**

This chapter depicted the lived experiences of a sample of eight elementary principals involved in dual-career relationships with children. Overall, the discussion reveals that the gap between espoused beliefs and actualized behavior is held apart by frequent stressors that build a principal’s tolerance for the amount of work to complete, distorting the perspective necessary to balance work and home. The distorted perspective is an example of how cultural hegemony is embedded in the beliefs and actions of an elementary principal’s viewpoint of the school’s culture. It offers an explanation as to

how a high number of daily tasks generate stress and spill over into the home domain, crippling a principal's ability to break from their work role and thus, contributing to this gap. In addition, the discussion exposes coping strategies employed by principals in an attempt to reduce this gap. One of these coping strategies, self-reflection, has the ability to develop improved self-awareness of espoused personal values. Self-awareness, a key trait of authentic leadership, may help reduce the gap by increasing one's consciousness of the gap. Although a variety of coping strategies were implemented to reduce the effects of stress, principals continue to accept the inevitable flood of tasks that unrelentingly consume their lives and drive a wedge between espoused beliefs and actualized behaviors. The principals' acceptance of this culture of work environment is but another example of the entrenched hegemony. Unknowingly, principals become submersed in an institutional culture they interpret as selfless and, therefore, are convinced they must sacrifice their physical and mental well-being, symbolically acting as a savior, for the betterment of education.

## CHAPTER SIX

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

This chapter begins with a summary of the research and then discusses the conclusions that have been reached as a result of interviewing eight elementary principals who were involved in dual-career marriages with children. The conclusions are organized by the three major findings: (a) participants expressed a gap between their actual and perceived values; (b) stress developed from an inability to complete tasks during the working day causing work to spill over into the home domain; and (c) principals employed a variety of coping strategies to manage daily stressors. Next, I will describe the study's limitations. Then, I will make recommendations for elementary principals, district level administrators, and further research. The chapter culminates with concluding thoughts.

This phenomenological study was designed to investigate the lived experiences of elementary principals involved in dual-career relationships with children. The study was qualitative in an effort to understand the nature of a setting and the experiences others have in this context (Merriam, 1998). I used phenomenological inquiry through personal memos-to-self and in-depth interviews (see Appendix A) to understand the lived experiences of eight elementary principal participants, four women and four men. Through the use of qualitative methodology and analytic theory I found meaning in the interviewees' narratives that provided understanding of the principals' lived experiences.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The conclusions from this study follow the research questions and the findings, addressing three areas: (a) a gap exists between participants' actual and perceived values; (b) stressors contribute to the gap between actual and perceived values; and (c) various coping strategies are utilized to shrink the gap.

The results of this study are situated within the analytics of Argyris and Schön's (1974) espoused theory and theory-in-use, Charon's (2007) symbolic interactionism, Gramsci's (1971) cultural hegemony and George and Sims' (2007) authentic leadership. The theories help interpret the meaning of the participants' experiences involved in the study. Theory-in-use is the actual theory that governs one's actions, whereas espoused theory of action is conveyed by someone to announce how they would behave under certain circumstances (Argyris and Schön, 1974). Within the framework of symbolic interactionism, Charon (2007) provides meaning and understanding of what is happening around participants. Gramsci's (1971) theory of cultural hegemony explains how participants enthusiastically embrace the beliefs and assumptions that end up harming them. George and Sims' (2007) theory of authentic leadership is helpful to understand how leaders are guided by their own self-awareness to know where they stand on important values, issues, and beliefs, which allows them to stay the course during difficult challenges.

Following is a discussion of the major findings and conclusions based on this research. This discussion is followed by the study's limitations, researcher's recommendations and concluding thoughts on this study.

### **A Gap Exists Between Participants' Perceived and Actual Values**

The first major finding of this research is that principals in this study expressed a gap between their actual and perceived values. A conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that principals involved in dual-career relationships are often unable to recognize the gap between their perceived and actual values due to a strong commitment toward both their profession and families. On one side, principals evidenced a passion for their position by claiming to be driven for excellence and striving to have a successful career. On the other side, principals also spoke emphatically about their families. One principal proclaimed, "It is everything! It is who we are!" Balancing work and home is an experiential adventure that requires constant attention; however, although veteran principals have gained perspective through experience, it may even be difficult for them to balance work and family lives due to the sheer number of work-related tasks to be completed. In this regard, it also can be concluded that work-related tasks dominate principals' lives. The cultural hegemonic concept controlled the principals' lives as they became accustomed to a commonly held notion that daily work-lives are embedded with numerous tasks. Principals, novice or veteran, frequently commented about the pressure to meet the daily needs of the many constituents in addition to maintaining a culture of effective teaching that educates and prepares each student to succeed in a changing world. The pressure leads to stress which makes it difficult to balance work and family.

### **Stressors Contribute to the Gap Between Perceived and Actual Values**

The second major finding was that stress developed from an inability to complete tasks during the working day causing work to spill over into the home domain. Principals

are constantly embattled with demands from students, parents, staff, central office staff, and the broader community. The demands are latent with tasks that may require a great amount of time, energy and focus to complete. A conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that a high number of time intensive work-related tasks contribute to increased stress and an imbalance between work and home roles. The gap is held apart by the perception of the immediacy of work task completion in comparison to the perception of less immediate family needs. Principals use mobile technology in an attempt to reduce stress by completing work task efficiently when outside the work environment. An attempt to efficiently complete work tasks remotely to reduce stress may, in effect, actually increase stress and widen the gap between perceived and actual values. A related conclusion is that principals need to monitor time spent on mobile technology outside of work when around family.

### **Various Coping Strategies are Utilized to Shrink the Gap**

The study's third major finding was that principals employed a variety of coping strategies to manage daily stressors. A conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that principals use reflective coping strategies (i.e. self, colleagues and dual-educator spouses) to gain introspection, a key aspect of authentic leadership. Introspection provides an opportunity to evaluate one's perceived values and actualized behavior. Other coping strategies, such as responding to emails while around family, can have a negative effect on reducing the gap. Therefore, it can also be concluded that not all problem-focused coping strategies are effective at reducing the gap between perceived and actual values. A final conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that in an effort to reduce stress and

close the gap between perceive and actual values, no one strategy was identified to be solely responsible for reducing the gap. Rather, the use of several strategies seems to provide the best chance for success at reducing stress and closing the gap.

### **Limitations**

This study was limited by several factors. First, all of the participants were of the same ethnicity and from the Midwest. Because of the great diversity of school districts in the United States, a different demographic of ethnicity or geographic location would expand the scope of this study. Second, the experiences of only elementary principals limited the study. Middle and high school principals involved in dual career relationships with children may also have experiences that may extend the breadth of this study. A third limitation of this study is that it looked at principal self-perception and thus the data could not be triangulated. Fourth, since all of the participants in this study were elementary principals from the Morgantown School District, it is likely they may have known of each other personally and professionally. In addition, I have been an administrator in the Morgantown School District for seven years and have built close personal and professional relationships with several administrators. Furthermore, it was likely that some participant anecdotes could have been recognized by other administrators; therefore, administrators may not have been willing to voluntarily share personal information for fear that someone might identify them through their stories. These limitations are likely to impact the findings and any application of these findings should be done with great care. Finally, despite my best efforts to be aware of my biases,

it is possible that my own experiences as an elementary principal, husband and parent create a bias that place limitations on my analysis.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations have been developed from the data collected as part of this research. Recommendations are being made in three categories.

Recommendations for:

1. elementary principals,
2. district level administrators, and
3. further research.

#### **Recommendations for Elementary Principals**

Elementary principals involved in dual-career relationships with children should consider:

1. Consistently reflecting on their values, passions, and actions to determine the gap between espoused values and actual behaviors. Once established, they can begin to develop coping strategies to minimize the gap. Likewise, principals' spouses should be encouraged to take an introspective look into their own values, passions, and actions. Furthermore, spouses are encouraged to work together in order to seek a shared understanding of the balance between work and home.
2. Actively seeking effective strategies of principals who successfully balance work and family. Starting points include: books, DVDs, webinars,



conferences, or formal and informal networking with principals they admire for appearing to balance work and family well.

3. Establishing realistic expectations about the amount of time and effort available for each value: faith, family, work and self.
4. Minimizing distractions to maximize output by setting goals and making appointments with themselves to complete tasks.

### **Recommendations for District Level Administrators**

District level administrators should consider:

1. Developing a system of periodic review to help principals self-monitor the gap between their espoused beliefs and actual behaviors. In addition, once gaps are recognized, professional growth opportunities should be made available to help minimize the gap.
2. Managing resources to allow principals an opportunity to complete daily tasks a majority of the working days. Resources would include, but are not limited to assistance with the following: student behaviors, staff evaluations, professional development, and district-level programs when present in the building.
3. Determining a reasonable number of tasks to complete within a given period to minimize the potential for role overload.
4. Alternative school calendars, such as a year-round schedule, that provides principals with frequent breaks throughout the school year allowing them to balance work and family.

5. Providing principals with autonomy and flexible schedules.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Additional research is recommended to expand the scope of this study. Elementary principals need perspective and coping strategies to manage stressors and diminish the gap between their espoused and actual values. Due to this study's limited scope and methodology, I would recommend the following research topics to further develop and verify the findings of this research:

1. Eight elementary principals who were involved in dual-career relationships with children were the focus of this study. This study could be replicated with increased numbers of participants to compare findings.
2. This study sought experiences and perspectives of elementary principals through personal interviews. Experiences and perspectives of family and non-family members associated with elementary principals are unknown. The inclusion of others in the study such as spouses, children, extended family, and central office administrators would allow triangulation of the data..
3. The gender of elementary principals in this study was equally divided, four females and four males and, thus, not a focus in this study. Comparative studies targeting the perspectives of male or female elementary principals would add another dimension to this research.
4. The elementary principals' ages and years of experience were varied. The study of elementary principals within a certain age range or years of experience may possibly provide data on passages.

5. Elementary principals in this study led urban and suburban schools. Future studies may focus specifically on elementary principals either from rural, suburban, or urban schools.
6. The advances in technology seem to have significantly increased the expectation that principals will complete more work in less time. It is recommended that a study investigate how principals are reorganizing their work in light of the technological workload.
7. Interviews for this study took place in the late summer/early fall. This is typically a time when elementary principals are well rested as the stressors of the school year have yet to compound. It is recommended that interviews take place in the spring to capture perspectives of principals near the end of the school year.
8. Faith can come in many forms. It may be beneficial to study elementary principals' faith in relation to their dual-career relationship and professional workload.
9. A longitudinal study of the participants involved in the research could be done to learn how the principals continue to perceive their espoused and actual values in addition to managing stressors through various coping strategies.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

It has become clear to me that principals are under constant stress, which continually acts to separate espoused values and actualized behavior. My understanding is that the pressure on school principals is going to continue and I hope that the readers

find value from my recommendations, but, most importantly, to remember the importance of bringing espoused values and actualized behaviors into congruence.

Amidst all the work, amidst all the running, amidst all the chaos, one principal's comment rang resoundingly clear throughout all the interviews, "I think our family life is great!" Although the elementary principals I spoke with endured hurry-up-and-go lives loaded with emails, meetings, basketball practices, birthday parties, building and family emergencies, and on and on and on; principals continued to express a love of family.

In the end, when all is said and done, it becomes clear that principals must separate work from family in realizing that the work will never be done and that the family is what it is ultimately all about. Through continued efforts to minimize the gap between espoused values and actualized behavior, principals will improve the balance between work and home, which will ultimately lead to healthier families and more successful schools.

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**Table 1****Demographic Data of Elementary Principals and Their Families**

Name	# of years in education	# of years in admin	Spouse's occupation	Average # of hours worked per week		Ages of children	# of children at home
				You	Spouse		
Derek	11	6	Teacher Tutor	65	15	4, 7	2
Brad	22	4	Elem Teacher	55	45	16, 14, 10	3
Brian	16	7	Elem Teacher	70	65	18, 16, 10, 9, 8, 7	4
Brett	19	5	Trust Officer	60	50	15, 10	2
Peggy	20	11	Benefits Co. President	60	60	7, 7	2
Liz	28	21	Post-secondary teacher	70	40	18, 16	2
Kaye	25	20	Sales	55	45	23, 16	1
Rae	27	14	Psych	60	50	10, 13	2

**LIST OF APPENDICES**

Appendix A: Demographic Data of Elementary Principals and Their Families

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Appendix D: Biographical Sketch of the Dual-Career Questionnaire

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## APPENDIX A

### Guide Questions for Dual-Career Principals

Today's Date:

Place:

Time:

Interviewer's Name:

---

Participant's Name:

Birth (Maiden) Name:

Sex:

What aspects of a dual-career marriage with children do you find most challenging and why? What aspects do you find most rewarding and why?

Describe the areas of control you have over your life.

What conflicts do you experience between work and home demands?

What are the costs associated participating in dual-career marriage with children?

What systems do you have in place with your spouse to manage work-family roles?

What domestic responsibilities do you/your spouse have at home?

Do you hire services to ease your home responsibilities?

How would you describe your family life?

How would you describe your role as a parent?

What are your thoughts on your current child care arrangement?

Have there been decisions you delayed, modified or abandoned due to your dual-career status?

What do you do to foster a relationship with your spouse and children?

How does your day-to-day life as an elementary principal impact the family?

What aspects of your job do you work on outside of the school day and what do you do to minimize this time?

What are your most demanding tasks at work?

How do your experiences, or lack there of, contribute to your ability to perform daily tasks at work?

Tell me about your experiences of balancing home and work life.

How would you describe your physical, mental, and emotional stress?

How do you spend quality time with family and friends?

What benefits are derived from your dual-income?

If I were to interview your spouse, how would they respond?

**APPENDIX B**

## Letter to Principal

April 25, 2011

Principal  
Morgantown School District  
Morgantown, MN

Dear Fellow Principal:

I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. I am writing my dissertation to examine the lived family experiences of elementary principals involved in a dual-career marriage with children under the age of 18. I am defining elementary principals as those who administer a building of students within the grades of pre-kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I am also defining dual-career families to imply both partners' careers require high levels of personal commitment, advanced educational levels, the possibility of promotion cycles and are salaried employees. I believe that it is crucial for elementary principals, school systems, and leadership preparation programs to understand the requirements of this level of administration and to be aware of what it takes to maintain a successful balance between their work and family roles.

I will be contacting you by telephone within a week to determine if you agree/decline my request for a confidential interview with you. The interview will be focused on prepared research questions relating to school and personal related issues and the elementary principal's ideas for balancing the demands between work and home. I will also ask for names of other principals, within a 30-mile radius of Morgantown, whom you believe to be in a dual-career marriage with children under the age of 18. If you agree to participate, then I will send a follow up letter along with a Biographical Sketch for you to complete and a Consent Form for you to review. You will receive a transcribed copy of the interview to validate accuracy of its content. A pseudonym will be used for you and your school to help ensure confidentiality of information shared for this study. Once the project is complete, you will receive a copy of my research conclusions in an effort to make a contribution to your school district.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to contribute to the extension of the knowledge base related to educational administration and dual-career relationships.

Sincerely,

Kirk A. Zeeck  
Elementary Principal, Morgantown Elementary School  
Morgantown, MN

**APPENDIX C**

## Follow up Letter and Demographic Questions to the Principal

April 26, 2011

Principal  
Morgantown School District  
Morgantown, Minnesota

Dear Fellow Principal:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study to examine the lived family experiences of elementary principals involved in a dual-career marriage with children under the age of 18. I am confirming (time) on (date) at (location), as the time, date, and location we agreed to conduct the interview. Please complete the enclosed Biographical Sketch and review the Consent Form prior to the interview. At our meeting on (date) I will explain the consent form to you, respond to any questions you may have, and ask you to consent to participate in the study. Should you consent, I will ask you to sign the consent form before we proceed with the interview. You will be provided a copy of the informed consent form for your records.

Thank you,

Kirk A. Zeeck  
Elementary Principal, Morgantown Elementary School  
Morgantown, MN

Enclosure:

Biographical Sketch  
Consent Form



**APPENDIX D**

## Biographical Sketch of the Dual-Career Questionnaire

## (Demographics)

Number of years in education (total) \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years devoted to administration \_\_\_\_\_

Highest level of your education \_\_\_\_\_

Highest level of spouse's education \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse's occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Typical hours per week on the job for you \_\_\_\_\_, spouse \_\_\_\_\_

Type of school you currently administrate (circle one)    rural    urban    suburban

Number of years married \_\_\_\_\_

Number of times married \_\_\_\_\_

Ages of children \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

Number of children living in your home \_\_\_\_\_

Number of children living outside of your home \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX E**  
**CONSENT FORM**  
**UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS**

**Elementary Principals**

REFERENCE – Institutional Review Board #B11-355-02

I am conducting a study to understand the lived family experiences of elementary school principals who are involved in a dual-career marriage with children under the age of 18. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because of your family and elementary principal status.

This study is being conducted by Kirk A. Zeeck.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived family experiences of elementary principals involved in a dual-career marriage with children under the age of 18.

**Procedures:**

I will ask you to do the following if you agree to participate in this study: provide your perspectives through digital audio-recorded, 45-60 minute personal interviews and also review transcriptions to determine accuracy. An interview will be scheduled at a time and place of your convenience. I recommend a quiet, out of the way place such as your residence, a conference room, or a coffee shop. Further interviews will be determined after my analysis of the data.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The study has a couple of risks. First, the anecdotes you tell may be recognizable by others. I will use pseudonyms for you and your school. All taped interviews and journal recordings will be locked in a file cabinet in my home office for your protection. Second, an inaccurate portrayal of situations or participants may cause harm. You will be provided a copy of the transcripts to validate accuracy. Any risk to you will be minimal as you are only disclosing personal information that you wish to disclose and you may withdraw from the study at any time and have your data destroyed.

Talking through one's situation may have therapeutic benefits.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. Written and audio research records will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office. Digital audio-recordings will be uploaded to my personal password protected laptop computer and backed up on a secure external hard drive. Only my dissertation advisor, Dr. Thomas L. Fish, and I will have access to the data. Pseudonyms will be used throughout this research to help protect the anonymity of participants and their districts. Confidential information will not be shared with anyone outside of the dissertation committee.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether to participate or not will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. I will not use any of the data collected about you should you decide to withdraw from the study.

**Contacts and Questions**

My name is Kirk A. Zeeck. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 605-271-3496. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Tom Fish at 651-962-4436. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I give permission for audio taping during interviews.

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**Signature of Study Participant**


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**Date**


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**Signature of Researcher**


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**Date**