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# WOMEN AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF WORKING SINGLE MOTHERS BALANCING FAMILY AND WORK

Casheena Atari Stephens
*Southern Illinois University Carbondale*, she_oc@hotmail.com

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WOMEN AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF WORKING

SINGLE MOTHERS

BALANCING FAMILY AND WORK

By

Casheena A. Stephens

B.S., Southern Illinois University, 2004
M.S. Ed., Southern Illinois University, 2009

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy degree

Department of Workforce Education and Development
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
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DISSERTATION APPROVAL


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Approved by:

Dr. Cynthia Sims, Chair

Dr. Crystal Caffey

Dr. Barbara Hagler

Dr. Keith Waugh

Dr. Melinda Yeomans


Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
April 12, 2017

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

CASHEENA A. STEPHENS, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in WORKFORCE EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT, presented on April 5, 2017, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE:  WOMEN AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE:  A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF WORKING SINGLE MOTHERS BALANCING FAMILY AND WORK

MAJOR PROFESSOR:  Dr. Cynthia Sims

The purpose of this study was to explore working single mothers' work-life balance in order to better understand how employers can assist them.  Role theory, role conflict theory, and spillover theory were utilized to examine how working single mothers experience work-life balance and how they perceive it.  In this study, the researcher sought to discover, analyze, and report work-life balance experiences of working single mothers through extended narrative accounts, which answer the following research questions:

1.  In what ways do working single mothers strive to attain work-life balance?

2.  What challenges do working single mothers encounter that affect their ability to obtain work-life balance?

3.  How do working single mothers believe their employers' policies, practices, and attitudes impact their ability to balance work and family responsibilities?

Narrative inquiry was the best research approach for this study because it allowed the individuals to narrate their own stories.  The methods of collecting data for this study consisted of a basic demographic questionnaire and in-depth, semi-structured interviews.  The data analysis revealed four main themes and several subthemes highlighting the strategies, challenges, and employers' contributions to the work-life balance of working single mothers.

# DEDICATION

For my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave everything for me, is the one my heart truly adores, and through whom this work is even possible. I know that "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13, ESV).

For my late grandmother Eula B. Moore, who taught me to seek God first and that he would take care of the rest. The scripture she lived by was Proverbs 3:5–6: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths" (ESV).

For my mother, Carolyn Bates-Harris, and late father, Roger Harris, for always believing in me and instilling from the very beginning an *I can do anything* attitude. Thank you for choosing to shape my strong will instead of breaking it. I'm sure we'd all agree that it paid off in a big way!

For my sister, Shawn Owens, and brothers, Bryian Harris and Zachary Johnson, for always pushing me to be great in our "special sibling rivalry way."

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For my four beautiful children, Michael Jr., Jalen, Gabriel, and Jasmine, who I pray will pursue their dreams and value education as much as I do.

For my dearest friends, Terry Kessinger and Amanda Paull thank you for your constant support and prayers. Special thanks to my dear friend Margaret Pappoe for reviewing multiple versions of my dissertation. Your contribution was invaluable.

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Thanks to all the research participants for their time and sharing their amazing life experiences with me.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

# LIST OF TABLES

## LIST OF FIGURES

**CHAPTER 1**

**INTRODUCTION**

Over the last century, the demographics and culture of the workplace have significantly

changed.  One demographic change in the workplace has been its rapidly growing population of

single parents, specifically single mothers.  The percentage of single mothers in the labor force

increased during the late 1990s, while the presence of married mothers with preschoolers

declined (Hoffman, 2009).  The U.S. Census Bureau (2016a) reported that "out of about 12

million single parent families in 2015, more than 80% were headed by single mothers" (p. 1).

The Bureau also reported that there were "9.9 million single mothers living with children

younger than 18 in 2015, up from 7.7 million in 1985" (p. 4).  The trend of this increasing

population has altered the face of the workplace while presenting a new set of challenges to be

addressed.

**Challenges for Working Mothers**

One of the main challenges that working mothers, particularly working single mothers,

face is the lack of access to resources that promote the attainment of "economic self-sufficiency"

(hooks [*sic*], 2000, p. 49).  According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015a), "the median income

for families led by a single mother in 2013 was about $26,000" (p. 1).  The Census Bureau

(2011) also reported that the "median income for single mother families is only one third of the

median for married couple families ($84,000)" (p. 1).  The income discrepancy is significant

considering that single mothers, also known as *breadwinner moms*, made up 8.6 million (63%)

of primary provider households with children under the age of 18 (Wang, Parker, & Taylor,

2013).  These statistics indicate that economic self-sufficiency is a dream deferred for many

working single mothers.  According to hooks (2000), economic self-sufficiency is needed to

liberate women from male domination, and it is achieved through "better-paying jobs with comfortable time schedules" (p. 49).  Increasing the single mother's opportunities to achieve economic self-sufficiency would be a starting point to overcoming some of the financially binding challenges.

The development of child support through family law and public policy was to ensure maintenance and financial provision for children at the end of a marriage or other relationships. Solomon-Fears (2016) reported that "of those who were actually due child support payments (5.7 million), about 74% of them received at least one payment and almost 46% received all that they were owed" (p. 5).  The average amount these mothers receive is only about $430 a month (Solomon-Fears, 2016).  These statistics are alarming, considering that the average cost of raising a child equates to roughly "$12,800–$14,970 per child per year for a two-parent family with a median annual income between $61,530 and $106,540" (Thomas, 2014, para. 1).  In addition to the cost of raising a child, a significant number of working parents incur the massive expense associated with daycare.  According to the National Association of Child Care and Resource Referral Agencies, "The average cost of center-based daycare in the United States is $11,666 per year ($972 a month), but prices range from $3,582 to $18,773 a year ($300 to $1,564 monthly)" (as cited in BabyCenter, 2016, para 3).  Research further indicates that single parents, both mothers and fathers, struggle to remain above poverty level and to successfully raise their children to become healthy, respectful, and well-adjusted adults (Hill, 2011).

Beyond the financial demands, working single mothers face additional challenges in their efforts to achieve work-life balance.  Balance refers to "the capacity of those in the labour force to maintain involvement in friendships, activities, sports, participating in a religious community, and volunteering" (Lee, Reissing, & Dobson, 2009, p. 75).  Essentially, it is one's ability to

handle multiple roles, which may include that of employee, wife, student, friend, and mother. A balanced work and family life incorporates all aspects of wellness, including mental, physical, social, emotional, financial, and spiritual health. Challenges to work-life balance for working single mothers include, but are not limited to, household labor demands, child-rearing responsibilities, child care, inflexible work schedules, and an overall lack of support both inside and outside of the home (Bianchi, 2011; Ciabattari, 2005; Hill, 2011; Lockwood-Rayermann, 2000; Mather 2010; Robbins & McFadden, 2003).

**Decline of the Traditional Family**

Over the last 40 years, the traditional family unit has undergone considerable transformation due to the increasing number of families headed by single mothers. Moss (2009) highlighted how the erosion and potential extinction of the traditional family was a concern raised by educators, lawmakers, and religious leaders. In the past two decades, the government sought to address these issues by promoting healthy marriages and by passing the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996. The goal was to "encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families by providing states with funds to promote healthy marriages" (Blau & Ferber, 2006, p. 73). The Act was developed with good intentions; however, it was not successful in terms of decreasing divorce rates. Therefore, upheaval of the family foundation has increased the need for women and mothers to receive and rely on government-issued welfare and medical assistance and enter, or for some, return to, the workforce (Mather, 2010).

Bianchi (2011) indicated that the biggest changes in the family are that more women are engaging in paid work. Bianchi also discussed how the instability of the family structure contributed to issues of balance, such as housework and childcare. Beyond the shifting roles

among men and women lies another historical change within the marital and parental statuses in the home.  Bianchi (2011) reported the following:

> Between 1975 and 2009, the labor force rate of mothers with children under age eighteen increased from 47.4 percent to 71.6 percent.  Mothers today also return to work much sooner after the birth of a child than did mothers half a century ago.  High divorce rates and a sharp rise of births to unmarried mothers mean that more children are being raised by a single parent, usually their mother.  (p. 15)

The deterioration of the traditional family structure is causing mothers with children of all ages to return to and commit to the workforce in order to support their families.

**Employability of Single Mothers**

The type of employment and advancement opportunities available to working single mothers also has a major impact on their ability to achieve economic self-sufficiency and any hopes of successfully attaining work-life balance.  Enrollment in higher education institutions and career and technical programs can ensure long-term financial security for women and their children; however, this education does not lead to high-paying jobs (Blau & Ferber, 2006). According to Mather (2010):

> Three-fourths of all single mothers are in the labor force, and single mothers have slightly higher labor force participation rates than women in married-couple families.  However, single mothers are more than twice as likely to be unemployed (13 percent), compared with mothers in married-couple families (5 percent); and the majority of employed single mothers—62 percent—are working in lower-wage retail, service, or administrative jobs that offer few benefits.  (p. 3)

The high number of single mothers in the workforce working at jobs with subpar wages and benefits while being the primary caregiver to their children points to a need to investigate the challenges these single mothers encounter. The U.S. Census Bureau (2016b) stated that "across all income levels, single parents are the group who are more likely to lack health insurance. Nearly a quarter (22%) had no health coverage in 2013" (p. 1). Mather (2010) also reported that of those who had health insurance, "two-fifths are covered by public insurance programs" (p. 3). Adequate health insurance coverage for both working single mothers and their children is critical. These households operate on a single income, and studies have indicated that single mothers experience "high levels of stress" (p. 1) that may adversely affect their health, thus increasing their need for health insurance coverage (Robbins & McFadden, 2003).

Several recent studies have highlighted the challenges that single mothers face in the home and workplace. Bakker and Karsten's (2013) study indicated that single mothers experience a high level of conflict in combining the responsibilities from the work and home-care domains. They propose that acknowledging that work-life conflict exists for single mothers is the first step to understanding the challenges they may encounter. Hill (2011) reported economic factors as affecting "the cognitive development of their children, poverty-level living conditions, and quality child care" (p. 3). In addition, Hill revealed other challenges as "little or no support from fathers, children's behavioral problems, and society's misconceptions about single mothers" (p. 3). These issues have also been identified as some of the social factors affecting the single mother population.

Ciabattari (2005), who studied single mothers, social capital, and the work-family conflict, found that low-income women reported higher levels of work-family conflict than women with a higher-income. The study indicated that of three specific work-family conflict

items, low-income women were mostly affected by "lacking flexibility at work to handle family needs" (p. 17). Ciabattari also suggested the following as barriers to employment for low-income unmarried mothers, "low levels of education, limited work experience, and poor health," along with the occupational factors of "more work hours, low levels of autonomy, lack of flexibility, and working non-standard shifts" (p. 6).

Other studies found that financial strain leads to depressive symptoms among single mothers, which can affect their parenting skills and consequently their children's behavior (Jackson, Brooks-Gunn, Huang, & Glassman, 2000; Lockwood-Rayermann, 2000). The mothers in the study by Jackson et al. reported that they experienced several factors associated with economic hardship, including little or no monetary support from fathers, low wage jobs, and no education beyond high school. The study by Hofferth, Smith, McLoyd, and Finkelstein (2000) concluded that children reared by single parents, specifically by low-income single mothers, exhibited more problem behavior than other children. Robbins and McFadden (2003) suggested the following ramifications for children of single parent families: "less support, greater high school dropout, less parental attention and supervision at home, and less money for their needs" (p. 1).

Hofferth et al. (2000) also argued the importance of having an effective family structure and noted its impact on children's behavior at home as well as at school. The children raised in single mother–led homes will make up a significant portion the next generation of employees that may present issues with competing in the future global workforce. Hill (2011) stated, "Single mother is a phrase that conjures poor, lazy individuals unwilling to be self-sufficient, and society should be especially wary of her children because they will never amount to anything"

(p. 6). A strong statement like this is a clear indicator that continued research of this population is necessary.

Robbins and McFadden (2003) studied the impact of work on home and home on work for single mothers and found that "working single mothers identified single parenting, financial problems, major changes in work and family, and problems with children as the situations causing stress in their lives" (p. 1). This study illuminated the importance of creating educational programs for lower-income and lesser-educated single working mothers focusing on "parenting and employment skills, time and financial management, health and nutritional information, and ways to cope with change" (p. 8).

**Social Supports**

Ciabattari's (2005) study highlighted the importance that social supports such as living with relatives, free child care, and income support provide to unmarried mothers thereby increasing their ability to fulfill their multiple roles. Social supports have been credited as the resources that ease work-family conflict and facilitate employment stability, especially for the women who have many children. Allen (1993) recommended that "many employed mothers, especially those who are single, need a variety of support systems if they are to successfully balance family and work" (p. 119). Ciabattari (2005) also suggested that women should have access to support resources in the workplace.

<div align="center">

**Statement of the Problem**

</div>

Many working single mothers encounter difficulty balancing family and work. Multiple challenges affect a working mother's ability to balance work and family successfully. Some of these challenges include household labor demands, child-rearing responsibilities, economic hardship, lack of child care, inflexible work schedules, and a lack of support (Bianchi, 2011;

Ciabattari, 2005; Hill, 2011; Robbins & McFadden, 2003). In addition, the issues of economic hardship, including financial strain, low-paying jobs, and lack of support from fathers, along with the potential for depression among working single mothers, have the growing potential to create a national crisis (Hill, 2011; Lockwood-Rayermann, 2000). Widespread unemployment and underemployment of the single mother population present additional ongoing social and economic problems (Lemmon, 2012). Mather (2010) stated that "the number of children in single-mother families has risen dramatically over the past four decades, causing considerable concern among policymakers and the public" (p. 1). The social issues include absent fathers, below-level socioeconomic status, and possible behavioral problems for children (Hill, 2011).

Although many of these issues have been identified throughout the literature (Bianchi, 2011; Ciabattari, 2005; Hill, 2011; Lockwood-Rayermann, 2000; Mather, 2010; Robbins & McFadden, 2003), a need exists to transform the knowledge gained into strategies that employers can utilize to address the necessities of working single mothers seeking to achieve and maintain a healthy life balance between work and family. Working single mothers face definite challenges in achieving a healthy work-life balance and maintaining a fulfilling, productive employee role.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore working single mothers' work-life balance in order to better understand how employers can assist them. More specifically, the researcher collected data directly from a number of working single mothers in their natural setting in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of their lives. The researcher took this approach in order to provide participants a safe environment in which to respond naturally and honestly.

In this study, the researcher sought to confirm and discover challenges that single mothers are encountering at home and in the workplace. Other goals were to identify the

workplace support resources that could most benefit working single mothers in their pursuit of achieving work-life balance and to gain insight into potential employer policies and programs. Last, the researcher explored how working single mothers perceive the role that the employer plays, which may be the key to addressing their needs.

## Research Questions

This study explores working single mothers' approach to work-life balance and was guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways do working single mothers strive to attain work-life balance?

2. What challenges do working single mothers encounter that affect their ability to obtain work-life balance?

3. How do working single mothers believe their employers' policies, practices, and attitudes impact their ability to balance work and family responsibilities?

## Significance of the Study

Single mothers in the workforce encounter a slew of challenges that working mothers in dual-earning households may not. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015b), "Out of about 12 million single parent families in 2015, more than 80% were headed by single mothers" (p. 1), and those parents are responsible for raising a total of about "17.4 million children" (p. 1). In addition, 79% of custodial single mothers are gainfully employed. These statistics are sobering, and call for research that will highlight strategies to empower working single mothers to better balance their lives. Exploring working single mothers' roles inside and outside of the home will help shape our understanding of their work-life balance.

Addressing the needs of the working single mother population has the potential to benefit the workplace in multiple areas, including increased job satisfaction, high employee morale, and

higher productivity, thereby increasing the overall quality of employee performance.  Some researchers believe that if employers take care of their employees, they will get a greater return on their investment in terms of productivity, positive work climate, high employee morale and other factors (McDermott, 2010).  Companies should work toward creating family-friendly environments that will allow talented women to remain in the workforce without sacrificing their marriages and children (Affrunti, 2011).  Family-friendly work environments could provide single mothers with timesaving options that would enhance the quality of their family and work life.  The economy would benefit by keeping women working, especially as globalization shifts continue to occur within the workforce (Sum, 2008).

Rectifying the issues that affect work-life balance can increase the quality of the home-life for working single mothers due to its direct correlation to the quality of their work-life (Baruch, Biener, & Barnett, 1987).  Additionally, the overall health of working mothers is critically important in rearing healthy families (Baruch et al., 1987).  Exploring each of these issues may illuminate strategies to address the needs of the growing population of working single mothers in the United States.  Research concerning the issues of working single mothers is lacking, and the variations of the concerns that infiltrate their world are in need of discovery. Understanding working single mothers' work-life balance will have a significant impact on the workforce, economy, and families.  The workplace may see a decrease in absenteeism, reduction in employee turnover, savings in recruitment and training budgets, increased productivity, employee retention, and an increase in the overall return on the employer's investment.  Keeping single mothers gainfully employed will allow them to contribute financially to the economy while being able to successfully manage their families.

This dissertation research will expand current knowledge of the issues that single mothers encounter while increasing our understanding through deeper exploration using a qualitative methodology. Acknowledgment of these concerns may influence or change the nature in which employee policies are formulated and implemented. In addition, in order to establish change within the workforce for working single mothers, identifying their specific needs, desires, and expectations from employers is crucial.

### Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to a small sample of working single mothers representing only two states within the United States. Therefore, it did not determine all of the strategies or the challenges that this population encounters while balancing family and work. The findings of this study cannot be generalized to the population of working single mothers in other areas.

### Definition of Terms

*Balance*: "The capacity of those in the labour force to maintain involvement in friendships, activities, sports, participating in a religious community, and volunteering" (Lee et al., 2009, p. 75).

*Negative impact*: Stressors that may result in "increased health risks, poorer performance of the parenting role, decreased productivity, absenteeism, turnover, poor morale, reduced life satisfaction, and lower mental health" (Robbins & McFadden, 2003, p. 3).

*Positive impact*: Positive enhancement or spillover that occurs between family and work life, that is, flexible work schedules, child care referral services, paid leave, etc. (McDermott, 2010).

*Strategies*: Methods or opportunities that may enhance one's ability to balance family and work life, that is, equal pay, job sharing, flexible time schedules, and the like (Stone, 2007).

*Work-family balance*:  Satisfaction and good functioning at work and home with a minimum of role conflict (Clark, 2000).

*Work-family conflict*:  "A form of interrole conflict in which role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77).

*Working single mother*:  An unmarried woman working at least 20 hours per week with at least one child under the age of 18 living at home (Robbins & McFadden, 2003).

*Work-life balance*:  Allows the fulfillment of work roles without the loss of personal life; the self-perceived satisfactory integration of personal time, family care, and work with a minimum of role conflict (Clark, 2000; Ungerson & Yeandle, 2005).

*Work-life imbalance*:  An occupational stressor based on lost resources of time, energy, and feelings toward work and personal life (Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996).

## Personal Statement

My personal experiences and life goals have motivated me to conduct this study.  My parents got a divorce before I was born, and I did not meet my biological father until I was 12 years old.  Unfortunately, he decided not to be involved in my life, nor did he provide any financial support for my siblings and me.  My mother was amazingly resilient and shielded us from feeling the impact of the challenges associated with raising three children alone.  She encouraged me to believe in myself, telling me that with a positive attitude I could do anything I put my mind to and that greatness was in me.  Being raised by such a strong, independent single mother solidified my interest in addressing concerns of the working single mother population.

In recent years, I found myself encountering both married and single mothers who admitted to struggling regularly in this area.  That is how this study originally began to take

shape.  These women were from various backgrounds but shared a common thread in balancing family and work life.  Their heartfelt stories are what drove my interest and commitment to conduct this research for my dissertation.  As a wife and mother of four children, I am completely aware of the pressures and stress that may arise while striving to maintain a healthy work-life balance.  Therefore, my personal goal is to contribute to the literature surrounding women's issues, particularly single motherhood, which may provide insight and strategies to overcome the challenges of balancing family and work life.

**CHAPTER 2**

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this study was to explore working single mothers' work-life balance in order to better understand how employers can assist them. In order to explore work-life balance among working single mothers, the researcher completed an exhaustive literature review. The types of literature reviewed included scholarly and non-scholarly journals, websites, census reports, and books. The Morris Library at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, the Internet, and other libraries were utilized to conduct literature searches in the following databases: Academic Search Complete, ERIC, EBSCO, and OmniFile Full Text Select. The majority of literature reviewed was published between 1964 and 2016. The literature reviewed primarily began in the 1960s due to the deep cultural changes of that time that were altering the role of women in American society. The key words used to research the topic included, but were not limited to, *single mothers*, *work-life balance*, and *work-family balance*. The following words were searched along with the aforementioned topics: *challenges*, *strategies*, and *family-friendly policies*.

The following literature review included articles and dissertations that have investigated the multifaceted roles of single mothers as they contend with the demands of the workforce. The literature review has been structured into sections that include women, family, and work; work-life balance challenges and strategies; and the roles and responsibilities of the employer. All the sections included in the literature review support the purpose of the study, which is to understand work-life balance from a single mother's perspective.

**Research Questions**

This study explores working single mothers' approach to work-life balance and was guided by the following research questions:

1.  In what ways do working single mothers strive to attain work-life balance?

2.  What challenges do working single mothers encounter that affect their ability to obtain work-life balance?

3.  How do working single mothers believe their employers' policies, practices, and attitudes impact their ability to balance work and family responsibilities?

**Theoretical Underpinnings**

Several theories lend pertinent insight into the experiences of working single mothers as they strive to achieve balance between family and work. The theories relevant to this study are role theory, role conflict theory, and spillover theory. Each of these theories speaks to Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) concept of work-family conflict.

**Role Theory**

Role theory addresses the personal conflict that arises as an individual performs multiple roles such as spouse, parent, and employee. This theory also includes the underlying pressures and expectations that society imposes on role involvement. Nabavi and Shahryari (2012) stated, "Role theory predicts that multiple life roles result in interrole conflict as individuals experience difficulty performing each role successfully because of conflicting demands" (p. 112). Role theory has been used to understand traditional gender roles, which assumes that women would be domesticated child bearers and men would fulfill the role of the breadwinner (Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005). Traditional gender roles have become gender-neutral as the dynamics of the family have changed. Many households function with dual-earning partnerships where both

parties work and contribute. This structure prevents one person from being solely responsible for assuming traditional gender roles. Other households are made up of same-sex couples that completely disrupt the male-female traditional roles. Then there are the households managed solely by single parents, completely lacking another individual to share the burdens, both domestic and financial.

Findings suggest that women perform the majority of household and childcare tasks in spite of their growing participation in the workforce (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000). Research has also indicated that women struggle more with maternal instincts and feelings of guilt concerning competing priorities with their work and family roles (Hochschild, 1997). Nabavi and Shahryari (2012) indicated:

> Role theory is especially relevant because it takes into consideration the individuals' perceptions while acknowledging that their view is affected by their own as well as others' role expectations. This is especially important in work and family research where attitudes and behaviors are clearly impacted by societal expectations. (p. 113)

Role theory links work and family conflict to the amount of time an individual spends in each arena (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). McElwain, Korabik, and Rosin (2005) indicated that when women enter the workforce, a compromise occurs in their aptitude to focus on family and home life.

**Role Conflict Theory**

Role conflict theory is a follow-up to role theory that can be applied to work-family conflict, both in the context of work-to-family and family-to-work (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Collins, 2001; Netemeyer et al., 1996). Role conflict is defined as the "simultaneous occurrence of two (or more) sets of pressures such that compliance with one

would make more difficult compliance with the other" (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964, p. 19). Work-family conflict exposes the degree to which participation in one role affects the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Nabavi and Shahryari (2012) stated that "work-family role strain is the result of the combined influence of demands and coping resources derived from individual, family, and work-related sources" (p. 112). This indicates that these demands may have an impact on one's ability to achieve work-life balance if the proper resources are not available to reduce role strain. Van Steenbergen, Ellemers, and Mooijaart (2007) found that women specifically were subject to role conflict and strain, resulting in feelings of guilt. A main cause for work-family stress is not having sufficient time to dedicate to both domains (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The concept of role overload, described as a perception of having too many things to do and not enough time to do them, is another source of stress (Caplan, Cobb, French, Harrison, & Pinneau, 1975).

Therefore, role conflict theory predicts that women will experience conflict in combining career and family (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Whitmarsh, Brown, Cooper, Hawkins-Rodgers, and Wentworth, (2007) indicated that "women who combined work responsibilities with the demands of motherhood experienced various personal challenges while attempting to creatively construct a lifestyle that integrated their two personal spheres of work and home" (p. 232). This is an example of role conflict. The theory of role conflict indicates that one role will take precedence over others and that there is a direct correlation between energy transfer from one role to another (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Therefore, an increase in the family role indicates there will be a depletion of energy to assume the responsibilities for the work role. Thiagarajan, Chakrabarty, Lueg, and Taylor (2007) conducted a quantitative study to identify whether there

was a positive relationship between work-family role conflict and role strain for single parents. Research concluded that the hypothesis was not statistically significant.

**Spillover Theory**

Spillover theory is the transfer of positive and negative experiences from one role to another (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). It describes the impact of work on family life either as an enhancement/opportunity or as conflict/loss (Kiecolt, 2003). Tiedje et al. (1990) stated that spillover theory suggests that skill sets in one realm enhance those in the other, increasing the ability to have high satisfaction both at home and at work. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) indicated that work-family enrichment is the relationship between life roles, emphasizing that one life role can positively affect the experiences in other life roles. According to King, Botsford, and Huffman's (2009) study, "Individuals reported that they experienced both conflict and enrichment between work and home, suggesting the presence of positive spillover" in their lives (p. 880). Acknowledging the potential existence of both positive and negative spillover is critical in understanding family and work-life experiences of working single mothers.

Robbins and McFadden (2003) indicated that "work is the cause of conflict and many and various types of stress among single working mothers" (p. 2). Identifying the specific stressors presented by conflict in the workplace may be beneficial in providing support for working single mothers. Robbins and McFadden also stated that this stress "is associated with long, irregular, rigid working hours, travel away from home, and 'spillover' of fatigue, preoccupation, and irritability from work to family and family to work" (p. 2). These are some examples of the types of negative spillover that working single mothers may experience in their attempt to obtain work-life balance. A study assessing the relationship between family and home satisfaction and job satisfaction in single mother families identified the following stressors: single parenting,

financial problems, major changes in work or family, and problems with children (Robbins & McFadden, 2003).  Greenhaus et al. (2001) also found that single mothers experienced low career involvement because their sole purpose for working was centered on their need to support their families financially.

**Empirical Research**

Most of the previous research on work-life balance has explored different types of interactions of various demographic groups using census data, questionnaires, and surveys (Bhowon, 2013; Blanch & Aluja, 2009; Edley, 2001; Gaffey, 2007; Robbins & McFadden, 2003) rather than individual interviews to discover the experiences that working single mothers have in their pursuit of work-life balance.  Quantitative inquiries investigating work-life balance have examined the levels of anticipated work-life conflict, role salience, self-efficacy, and negative affectivity of male and female undergraduate college students (Gaffey, 2007).  Lindfelt, Ip, and Barnett (2015) conducted a quantitative survey to assess the career satisfaction, lifestyle, and stress levels of U.S. pharmacy school faculty, revealing the risk factors that attributed to their decreased job satisfaction and suboptimal work-life balance.  The Annual Labor Force Survey (2016) investigated the work-life balance and job satisfaction of professionals in the female-dominated field of obstetrics and gynecology.  Another study explored employees' perception of work-family balance after the implementation of an alternate work schedule that yielded a positive and significant impact (Wadsworth & Facer, 2016).

Other studies have assessed the relationships between family/home satisfaction and job satisfaction of working single mothers to identify stressors and factors that contributed to home and work satisfaction (Robbins & McFadden, 2003).  Bhowon's (2013) study explored the relationship between work-family role salience, work-family conflict, and satisfaction with work

and family among married couples.  Blanch and Aluja (2009) examined married or cohabiting individuals' work-family conflict, analyzing the interaction effects between work and family situational variables with individual personality dimensions in the prediction of work-family conflict.  Another study examined how employed mothers use technology to achieve work-life balance while creating corporate colonization (Edley, 2001).

Furthermore, qualitative studies have investigated the work-life balance perceptions and interactions of employed mothers (Malone, 2011), married mother executives (James, 2010), midlife men and women (Emslie & Hunt, 2009), separated parents (Bakker & Karsten, 2013), and graduate students (Krymis, 2011).  There is, however, a lack of qualitative studies that specifically examine the experiences of working single mothers balancing family and work.

**Work-Family Conflict**

The majority of adults are involved in multiple roles that require an allotment of their time, energy, and commitment.  Work and family are the two domains that many adults identify as being essential to their lives.  Work-family conflict is "a form of interrole conflict in which role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77).  The potential for work-family conflict for the single parent is great because they carry the sole responsibility "for reconciling the competing demands of work and family" (Thiagarajan et al., 2007, p. 82).  Cinamon and Rich (2005) indicated that negative consequences resulted when family and work roles collide with one another.  Nabavi and Shahryari (2012) pointed out that "conflict between work and family roles alters employee's perceptions of the quality of work life and the quality of family life" (p. 115).  High levels of work-family conflict have been related to health risks for employed parents (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992), poor parenting, decreased productivity at work, increased turnover (Nabavi &

Shahryari, 2012), and decreased life satisfaction (Higgins, Duxbury, & Irving, 1992). Conversely, research suggests that low levels of work-family conflict result in increased energy and self-esteem (Grandey, Cordeiro, & Crouter, 2005).

Thiagarajan et al. (2007) stated that "inadequate attention to work-life concerns of single parents has been identified as a crucial gap in work-family research" (p. 82). Burden (1986) indicated that single mothers are at high risk of strain and decreased emotional and physical well-being due to the demands of work and family roles. In addition, single parents encounter problems beyond being an employee, including lack of support in managing their homes and children (Burden, 1986). A study examining conflict between work and family among New Zealand teachers found that occupational task overload, their children's behavior problems, hours of employment, and work experience increased conflict between work and family (Palmer, Rose, Sanders, & Randle, 2012). This same study of these teachers also revealed that the availability of work-life balance programs for working parents ranged from important to very important. A comparative study examining single parents' and co-parents' ability to balance work, care, and leisure indicated that single mothers experienced more work-family conflict, stress, an increase in paid work with no change or relief in the care giving domain, and very little leisure time (Bakker & Karsten, 2013).

**Women, Family, and Work**

There are only a few qualitative studies to date that investigate work-life balance somewhat related to this study. Emslie and Hunt's (2009) qualitative study explored experiences of work-life balance among men and women in midlife and the ways in which respondents with different ways of "doing" gender perceived and experienced work-life balance. Doing gender is described as "creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that

are not natural, essential, or biological" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 137). West and Zimmerman's study found that participants who were parents indicated that they performed traditional gender roles when their children were young. It also revealed that most of the women participants experienced difficulty combining their roles and expressing current problems with work-life balance. James (2010) conducted a qualitative phenomenological study that examined the experiences of executive women and their choices in balancing work with marriage and children. The women in her study reported consciousness of making some sacrifices and some feelings of guilt for failing to make time for themselves and for being absent from their children's events, while others expressed no regrets regarding their decision-making.

Krymis's (2011) phenomenological qualitative analysis explored the experiences of women's life course, including how it is shaped, the impact of work-life balance on decisions, and the role of faith. The goal of Krymis's study was to understand the work-life balance issues of women pursuing graduate degrees. The study found that the women who valued faith believed that their purpose in life, hence vocation, was defined by God, allowing them to derive meaning from that work. The study also found that professional and personal relationships with others who shared their faith and values were a coping strategy. Malone (2011) examined the relationships between employed mothers' work-family conflict, positive parenting, and parental satisfaction. That study used nationally representative cross-sectional data from the National Survey of Parents and found that family sacrifices had a greater impact on mothers than career sacrifices. Although there are similar components, the purpose of this present study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lives of working single mothers and their approach to work-life balance. More specifically, the researcher collected data directly from a number of working single mothers in their natural setting in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of their lives.

**Women and Work**

A number of factors influence the relationship between women and work to include perceptions shaped by society, the economy, spouses, children, and companies.  Many of the ideas behind the relationship between women and work have been informed by feminist theory, along with Hochschild's (1989/1997) concepts of the second and third shift (Edley, 2001).  That is, due to continual working throughout the day, it has been said that a woman's work is never done (Davidson, 1982).  Flax (1987) noted, "A fundamental goal of feminist theory is (and ought to be) to analyze gender relations:  how gender relations are constituted and experienced and how we think or, equally important, do not think about them" (p. 622).  According to Mattingly and Bianchi (2003), "Different expectations of women and men based upon their dissimilar positions in the family and the market may also create gender differences in the experience of time that is not committed to paid market work or unpaid domestic work" (p. 999).  These expectations include both men and women workloads on the job and their household workload.  Hochschild's (1989) ideas about emotion were applied to the American family in her book *The Second Shift*.  In this a qualitative study, 50 couples were interviewed and families were observed in their homes; the book focused on "marriage in a stalled revolution" (p. 11) by exploring the couples' division of labor and "a scarcity of gratitude" (p. 110) for each other's contributions.  Hochschild discovered that women were more deeply torn between the demands of work and family than their husbands.  As described in Edley (2001), there are four different shifts that may be worked by both men and women.  The first shift consists of paid work during the day; the second shift includes child-rearing and housework in the evening; the third is what Edley called "damage control" in maintaining or repairing relational issues with spouses and children; and the fourth shift becomes late night e-mails and reports (p. 29).  The multiple shifts

described are time consuming and affect women physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Carli (2010) stated that "women. . . sacrifice leisure and sleep in order to meet the needs of their families and jobs" (p. 696).

Thompson's (2000) magazine article compiled excerpts from the lives of engineering faculty highlighting their struggles and tactics in striking a right balance between work and family. The article focused on the challenges of working women from dual-earning households in fulfilling the requirements for tenure while balancing family life and managing the demands of both their and their spouse's careers. Many of the women surveyed expressed that they felt that it was important for their children to see their work ethic and their contribution to the world. The article merely scratched the surface of answering the questions that guided this study.

Women also carry a sense of responsibility for their children, particularly that their daughters would see them working and be encouraged to pursue professional careers themselves. Some women recalled feelings of guilt in returning to work and indicated that not having a choice made going back easier (Stone, 2007). Part of these feelings stem from the changes in the family structure that have resulted in an increasing number of single parent homes and fluctuations in the economy. A survey by Ellen Galinsky "found that only 34 percent of working mothers felt they did a really good job of giving their children enough of their time and attention" (Thompson, 2000, p. 32). In spite of how these mothers felt, an additional survey of more than a 1,000 children found that the children "thought their mothers did a terrific job of balancing responsibilities, and were proud of her job as well" (p. 32). This study offered hope for the psychological and emotional well-being and future of women who remain in the workplace and continue to struggle with balancing life. Elliott (1980) suggested that "they are feeling [,] in addition to guilt, a sense of loss. . . This sense of loss cannot be assuaged by

demonstrations that the children are doing well while the mother works, because the issue is not how the child feels but how the mother feels" (pp. 26–27). The researcher's hope is that this sense of loss and guilt is recognized by employers, family, and friends and is addressed. Managing these emotions will also help women embrace satisfaction with their life balance once it has been established.

Moe and Shandy (2010) conducted a study that incorporated their own original surveys, labor force statistics, and interviews of hundreds of married professional women who were part of a "100-hour couple," defined as a professional couple "where the husband and wife work extremely long hours for a combined total of well over one hundred hours per week" (as cited in Barker, 2013, p. 1). The study explored what post–civil rights era college-educated mothers who left their jobs can teach us about the intersection of gender, work, and identity in America. Moe and Shandy (2010) introduced concepts like the "maternal wall" and the "glass ceiling" that professional women encounter as a form of gender-based discrimination (p. 46). These barriers limit the advancement of women and minorities in the workplace.

Bracken, Allen, and Dean (2006) stated that "results from the U.S. Survey of Doctorate Recipients by the National Science Foundation (NSF) indicated that family obligations are named most frequently by women as the reason for women not entering tenure track positions" (as cited in Lee et al., 2009, pp. 74–75). In another study, a woman describes her job interview experience after asking a male manager about his views on family, "The thought of me with a child apparently altered his 'vision' of who I was" (Schwanbeck, 2006, p. 20). This mother's observation of the employer's perception of her, based on her parental status, related to this study's purpose to highlight the working single mothers' perceptions of what the role and responsibilities of the employer are for achieving work-life balance. This woman's experience is

an unfortunate indicator of the impact having children has on the treatment of women in the workplace, which in turn renders limitations on women.

Stone (2007) reported that many women are "opting out" of successful careers due to the lack of choice and accommodations for mothers (p. 115). According to Michaels (2009), the workplace offers little to no room for mothers by having:

No genuine flexibility in work hours and structure; a culture of extreme work hours; a gap between workplace policies on leave and flexibility and the actual, idiosyncratic, boss-or-manager-dependent application of those policies; lack of meaningful part-time work; absence of female role models and female managers; insufficiently sophisticated telecommuting technologies; and high demands for travel. (p. 318)

An inflexible workplace perpetuates working mothers' inability to achieve work-life balance. Stone (2007) studied the "objective circumstances" and the "subjective motivations and meanings" surrounding the reasons why women really choose to leave their careers and head home (p. 239). The qualitative design of Stone's study relied on in-depth, semi-structured interviews of 54 women from a broad spectrum of professions, which uncovered that "opting out" is not an option for 75% of working mothers in the workforce today (p. 66). Only a very small number of women had the option to quit working, due to their financial obligations.

Some women have chosen not to have children altogether in order to cultivate the career they desire. Moe and Shandy (2010) stated, "Given the right structure, women who are opting out altogether or who are settling for positions that underutilize their talents could more fully realize their potential to the benefit of themselves, their families, their communities, and the economy" (p. 10). Implementing strategies to achieve work-life balance is critical for women, especially to protect them from feeling as if they have to do it all and ending up resentful.

Working single mothers will share both similarities and differences among working mothers as a whole; however, there are specific challenges to this population such as lacking the option to share financial, childrearing, and household labor responsibilities.

### Work-Life Balance:  Challenges and Strategies

Balancing work and family life has its pros and cons; identifying and understanding potential challenges may provide insight and aid in developing key strategies that ease tension between these two roles.  Researchers' inquiries (Bianchi, 2011; Ciabattari, 2005; Hill, 2011; Lockwood-Rayermann, 2000; Mather, 2010; Robbins & McFadden, 2003) have revealed many of the challenges that individuals face when roles conflict, such as lack of help at home, a non–family friendly work environment, and financial strain.  Strategies have also been highlighted that serve as an avenue paving the way for attainable work-life balance.  Some of these strategies include building connections with colleagues, honing organization skills, and developing healthy coping mechanisms.  Challenges and strategies are discussed further in the following sections.

**Challenges**

Work-life balance is a goal that both women and men work toward daily as they seek to find long-term, livable solutions.  According to Lee et al. (2009), "Work-life balance allows the fulfillment of work roles without the loss of personal life" (p. 75).  This defines an ideal balance; however, the problem it creates is whether or not it is a realistic goal.  Researchers specified that "there is much emphasis on WORK and very little emphasis on LIFE in this very familiar sounding balancing act" (McKinney & Hillebrand, 2015, p. S168).  McKinney and Hillebrand (2015) emphasized the importance of incorporating techniques to overcome challenges, including the management of projects, time, daily systems, performance, and resources to achieve fulfillment in both one's professional and personal life.

Reed-Woodard (2007) indicated that "a recent Career Builder.com survey found that one in four working moms said they were dissatisfied with their work-life balance" (p. 18). Reed-Woodard (2007) and Lee et al. (2009) realized that work and family present balance issues, so identifying and involving the appropriate personnel is essential to begin to address the issues these working mothers have and start making changes. Lee et al. stated that "work-life balance is facilitated not only by workplace policies, but also by support from partners, family, and friends as well as by individual attitudes and choices" (p. 74). These authors suggested that it is a team effort and that everyone has a critical role to play in order for work-life balance to be attainable.

Work-life balance has also been referred to by many as a juggling act, which implies that balance may be a fictitious goal. "Employed mothers often think they can be Super Moms; however, this concept is a myth," Edley (2001) has warned (p. 29). Working mothers perhaps ought to caution other working mothers to realize that they cannot have it all at once and that tailoring life to meet their personal needs is necessary. "The key to learning how to juggle career and family and doing it the way that suits you the best" is critical (Schwanbeck, 2006, p. 19). Reed-Woodard (2007) suggested that as more women enter the workforce, the more family-friendly the environment will become, especially as women continue to climb the corporate ladder and land in positions of upper management. Edley (2001) stated:

> After all, employed mothers negotiate the day-to-day tensions of balancing work and family in a paradox of conflicting messages and dual identities of employee/full-time student and mother. They are exhausted from working two full-time jobs of paid work and unpaid work of childrearing and housework while trying to "have it all." (p. 28)

In addition to exhaustion, working mothers were also more likely to experience anxiety that heightens stress and impacted their ability to grasp work-life balance (Hochschild, 1989).

**Strategies**

There have been many suggestions to help working women develop and maintain a balanced work life—for example, prioritizing life by importance and timelines, communicating priorities, sticking to the plan, focusing on the present, creating a support network, and taking "me time" are some ways that have been prescribed in achieving a balanced work life (Reed-Woodard, 2007, pp. 19, 22). Lindfelt et al. (2015) recommended that administrators and stakeholders identify strategies to improve lifestyle factors such as "mandatory time off, job sharing, optional decreased or part-time appointments, and the ability to work from home one or more days a week" (p. 1577), which would decrease potential burnout and improve retention. Another researcher proposed that working single mothers seek to have low- to no-cost fun such as picnics, library visits, and community events while finding their niche within an organization that connects single parents (Aragona, 2016).

Lee et al. (2009) suggested that "it is important to build connections with colleagues who share the same values about the importance of work-life balance. These relationships can provide validation of the challenges faced, sounding boards in discussing options, and sources of information" (p. 80). Creating these networks should provide potential solutions to problems that women have and not only but also act as a means to vent frustrations. Research also recommends that women in academia utilize mentor programs early on in their careers to communicate work-life balance issues with an experienced mentor (Lee et al., 2009).

Karosas and Myrick (2013) described the components of their mentorship initiative to employ and retain nurse practitioners as overseeing socialization to the institution/program,

reviewing their work responsibilities, and providing information and strategies for managing workload, practice, and expectations. Additional components included having frequent meetings to review organization and time management and negotiating their schedules to ensure time was allotted for both scholarship and practice. Many researchers believe that this strategy can be useful for women in all types of careers. In addition to a mentor relationship, relationships with other people in the same phase of life, acting as a network of support, would be beneficial for working single mothers.

Fuegen (2010) described the following coping strategies to reduce stress: "engaging others in active problem solving, exercise, relaxation and benefits and policies [that] organizations can adopt to lessen stress among employees (flexible work schedules, on-site child care and exercise facilities, zero tolerance for harassment, improving social support, and reducing isolation)" (p. 147). Another strategy may include having a backup plan that incorporates individuals you can insert into your daily routine at a moment's notice to keep things going (Aragona, 2016). Carli (2010) indicated that:

> *Women at the top* gave multiple recommendations for working mothers, including develop self-efficacy, find mentors, integrate work and family, stay in contact with your family and participate in important family events, find people who can provide emotional support, outsource everything that does not require your input, deal with discrimination, and develop a transformational leadership style that empowers and supports others. (p. 697)

Unfortunately, the majority of working women with considerably fewer resources and less prestigious positions, especially single mothers, are not always able to implement Carli's

recommendations.  Women with access to more resources may utilize these coping mechanisms or strategies to obtain work-life balance.

Another useful strategy identified by Thompson (2000) is setting realistic career goals and expectations.  In order to achieve a healthy work-life balance, women have to be reasonable with what they can do and must be okay with saying 'no' to projects and other tasks that will overextend their already tight schedules.  Nappo-Dattoma (2015) suggested that individuals "eliminate activities that sap time or energy," "rethink errands," "track and manage time," and "leave work at work" (p. 14) in order to achieve work-life balance and avoid burnout.

Some mothers have chosen to work part-time hours or from home, while others have relied on freelance jobs to provide income and flexibility.  Other working women have taken advantage of stay-at-home dads to care for their children.  One woman whose husband has chosen that role stated that "the two hardest issues for them are dealing with the public reaction and guilt" (Schwanbeck, 2006, p. 19).  Such issues may have an impact on families like these from being able to accept a stay-at-home dad solution to obtain work-life balance.

## Work-Life Balance:  Employer Responsibility

Many employees of the 21st century find themselves in the challenging position of balancing the demands of work and family.  McDermott (2010) reported that "for millions of working Americans today, balancing work and life has become very challenging during these tough economic times" (p. 6).  More women are employed than ever before and currently make up 57.2% of the paid workforce (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014a, Chart 1).  McDermott (2010) pointed out:

Today women, hourly workers, minorities, and mature workers are an undeniable force

defining the current labor market.  They are also increasingly juggling work with caring

for children or the elderly, continuing their education, volunteering in their communities, managing multiple jobs to make ends meet, or with retirement. (p. 2)

This is just one of many examples of employers seeing the impact on individuals struggling to find a suitable work-life balance. Therefore, it is imperative that employers identify their role and responsibilities in the work-life balance attainment of their employees.

Employers are making strides to address these issues by creating and implementing family-friendly initiatives that are solid investments with many rewards to follow. Sensenig (2011) cited information that supports this point, indicating that "companies that have a strong work-life balance are optimized for success, and that top-performing life balance organizations have an atmosphere that produces happier employees who are retained longer and tend to be more productive over the long term" (p. 25). The return on this form of investment will catapult companies ahead of their competition by recruiting, retaining, and developing engaged loyal employees who in turn increase their overall production and profits. McDermott (2010) explained that "work-life balance policies make good business sense, and. . . they are powerful recruitment, retention, and talent development tools for all workers" (p. 2). Businesses that are committed to the advancement of work-life balance for working families in turn impact our nation's economic prosperity and global competitiveness (McDermott, 2010). Technology and global competition are two of the main challenges for attaining work-life balance, and it is to their advantage for companies to get on board with addressing the implications of an unbalanced work-life. The return will be far greater than the initial investment given that the phases of program development are completed thoroughly with checks and balances in place. "Taking a life-cycle approach to work-life balance is essential in recognizing that practices such as flexible work arrangements affect individuals throughout all phases of their lives," noted McDermott (p.

2).  This life-cycle approach would provide a win-win situation for both employers and

employees.  Employers would benefit in various ways through ensuring long-term employee

satisfaction.

Fuegen (2010) indicated that "women value institutions that value employees' goals and

their desire to find satisfaction in their work. . . women's work satisfaction is more closely tied

with collegiality and an inclusive work environment than resources" (p. 147).  Resources and

other fringe benefits are useful tools that can serve as motivators for working single mothers.

Michaels (2009) asserted that "paid leave, flexible hours, job sharing opportunities, or consistent

child care arrangements would allow mothers to integrate the demands of the workplace with the

demands of child rearing" (p. 318).  Sensenig (2011) wrote that the future of work-life balance

hinged on the fact that "organizations will have to do more than give lip service to work-life

balance if they expect commitment, dedication and increased productivity" (p. 26).  Mattock

(2015) suggested that "leaders . . .  need to have a sound understanding of what work-life balance

means and set an example of a healthy work-life balance for those they lead" (p. 306).

Many pieces of literature reveal the important role that businesses play in creating a

flexible work environment for women to manage all aspects of their lives.  Work-life research

has emphasized the important role that employers have in creating an environment conducive to

families and that actions clearly speak louder than words.  The evidence supporting working

single mothers concerns with achieving work-life balance and the role of the employer are

precarious issues that need to be addressed urgently.

**Summary**

Working single mothers will continue to permeate the workforce while carrying the full

responsibility of raising children.  It is critical to study the challenges and strategies that impact

their attempts to balance family and work. This study was needed because the literature on balancing work and family life does not adequately depict the experiences of working single mothers. Current research explores multiple facets of women, work, and family; however, there is a gap in the research on working single mothers experiencing work-family conflict. This study attempts to discover themes outlining working single mothers' work-life balance experiences.

**CHAPTER 3**

**METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

In this chapter, the researcher focused on the study's design and the reasons a qualitative approach was selected. The researcher began by discussing the choice of narrative inquiry and how and why it best suited the purpose of the study. Then, the researcher discussed the ethical considerations for the study. This is followed by an explanation of the data collection methodology including the participants, procedures, and instruments that the researcher used for the study. Next, the researcher described how data analysis was conducted. Finally, the researcher explained how the issues of reliability, validity, and ethics in the study were addressed.

This study explored working single mothers' approach to work-life balance and was guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways do working single mothers strive to attain work-life balance?

2. What challenges do working single mothers encounter that affect their ability to obtain work-life balance?

3. How do working single mothers believe their employers' policies, practices, and attitudes impact their ability to balance work and family responsibilities?

Role theory, role conflict theory, and spillover theory were used as the framework to examine how working single mothers experience work-life balance and how they perceive it.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore working single mothers' work-life balance in order to better understand how employers can assist them. More specifically, the researcher

collected data directly from a number of working single mothers in their natural setting in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of their lives.

## Research Design

The researcher believes that every individual makes sense of the world through his or her own life experiences. Therefore, as a researcher, it is only natural to adopt a qualitative approach, wherein the researcher is "interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). Merriam (2009) asserted that the first characteristic of qualitative research is to focus on meaning and understanding, not just on how people make sense of the world but also on "delineating the process of meaning-making, and describing how people interpret what they experience" (p. 14). Qualitative research is utilized to gather detailed descriptions to permit a deeper understanding of a context-sensitive issue. The key purpose of a qualitative study is also to bring to light the emic or the insider's perspective on a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative studies are inductive in approach (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009). Patton (2002) described inductive analysis as "immersion in the details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes, and interrelationships" (p. 41). Qualitative research also involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher employed a naturalistic approach in several ways. First, by definition the study seeks to research a "real-world situation" that the researcher allowed to unfold naturally without manipulating or controlling the outcome (Patton, 2002, p. 40). This was accomplished through narratives captured in speech through interviews focusing on the experience of working single mothers. Second, the researcher was careful not to disclose her views/beliefs regarding work-life

balance to the participants to ensure that their responses were not influenced; this step also eliminated the possibility of the findings being biased.

One fundamental aspect of qualitative research is to understand a particular situation at a particular time and in the natural setting, prior to trying to explain it. For this reason, the researcher went into the field interviewing working single mothers in their natural setting to capture what is happening because "this makes possible description and understanding of *both* externally observable behaviors *and* internal states" (Patton, 2002, p. 49). Maxwell (2005) stated that, "observation can enable you to draw inferences about this perspective that you couldn't obtain by relying exclusively on interview data" (p. 94). This was accomplished through recording extensive field notes that incorporated the researcher's thoughts and feelings regarding the participant's verbal and non-verbal behaviors throughout the interview process. Creswell (2007) stated:

> Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a nature setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflectivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem. (p. 37)

Creswell's qualitative concepts outlined above were incorporated in the researcher's approach and understanding of the protocol to conduct this study.

In contrast, quantitative research consists of research in which the data can be analyzed in terms of numbers (Best & Kahn, 2006). Therefore, a quantitative research design would not capture detailed descriptions of the lived experiences of working single mothers striving to obtain work-life balance, and hence would fail to address the research questions outlined in this study. By its natural design, quantitative research could quantify the experiences of this population; however, it would be limited in providing the in-depth details that would be possible by utilizing narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry "revolves around an interest in life experiences as narrated by those who live them" (Chase, 2011, p. 421). Thus, narrative inquiry was the best research approach for this study because it allowed the individuals to narrate their own stories. Some of the common characteristics of narrative approaches are that the researcher focuses on the individual stories of one or a few participants, uses their stories, allows for flexibility in how participant stories and meanings may change the inquiry, and writes in a way that conveys complex and multilayered meanings in literary form (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Best and Kahn (2006) have stated, "Narratives are used to study people's individual life stories" (p. 269). As Merriam (2009) noted, these "stories are how we make sense of our experiences, how we communicate with others, and through which we understand the world around us" (p. 32). Particularly, narratives are "sequential and meaningful" descriptions that relate to individuals' experiences as they make sense of themselves and the world (Squires, 2008, p. 42). Through this study, the researcher brought to light the perspective of working single mothers on balancing their family and work lives.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) define narrative analysis as "the ways humans experience the world" (p. 2). Narrative analysis (synonymous with narrative inquiry) can also be used to

acquire a deeper understanding of the ways individuals organize and derive meaning from events (Polkinghorne, 1995). According to Wells (2011), "narrative analysis takes stories as its primary source of data and examines the content, structure, performance, or context of such narratives considered as a whole" (p. 7). Wells' exposition of narrative analysis informed the researcher on how to approach and analyze the interview data collected. Therefore, the researcher sought to discover, analyze, and report work-life balance experiences of the working single mother population through extended narrative accounts with the understanding that there is no absolute truth or one experience to be had by all working single mothers concerning balancing family and work life. Therefore, each account was "treated analytically as units, rather than fragmented into thematic categories" (Riessman, 2008, p. 12).

In addition, "narrative analysis is useful when the interest is in how and why a story is constructed as it is, what it accomplishes, and how the audience affects what may be told" (Wells, 2011, p. 7). This study incorporated these fundamental concepts in theory and practice as the researcher utilized narrative inquiry to capture and analyze the voices that might not otherwise be heard of working single mothers as they spoke of balancing family and work (Creswell, 2007). Definitions of qualitative research and the tenets of narrative inquiry support the notions of interpretation and constructing meanings that each individual associates with his or her lived experiences.

### Ethical Considerations

A qualitative researcher is likely to encounter ethical dilemmas regarding collection and analysis of data and dissemination of findings (Merriam, 2009). The researcher followed the guidelines set by the American Psychological Association (2010) and the Institutional Review Board of Southern Illinois University. The researcher submitted complete application materials

to the Human Subjects Committee through the Office of Research Development and Administration to obtain approval to conduct the research study. The application materials included the demographic questionnaire, interview guide, cover letter, and consent form for taping and participation, along with the standard application (See Appendices A–D). The researcher initiated contact with the participants only after the university's Institutional Review Board had cleared the research process. On receipt of the board's approval, the researcher sent a consent form to all identified potential interviewees. The form was attached to an e-mail that established the nature and purpose of the study, how they had been identified as potential participants, and the process they needed to cooperate with, if they were willing. The e-mail also clarified issues of confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. The researcher asked those who were willing to participate in the study to complete the consent form and return by e-mail. The researcher's contact details and those of the dissertation chair were provided on the e-mail to enable participants to establish contact or clarify queries.

There were no identifiable physical or emotional risks to the participants of this study; however, the researcher was aware that interviewing, as one of the primary methods of data collection in qualitative research, could be an invasion into the private spaces or the world of the participants (Stake, 2005). In an interview, participants could potentially be in a situation where they are forced to reflect upon situations that they may never have wanted to recall or reflect upon. The participants may reveal certain emotions or thoughts unintentionally in the course of the interview. Although the interview process could be beneficial to participants in certain circumstances, their willingness to allow the researcher into their private world of values, opinions, experiences, and feelings typically helps the interviewer (satisfying his or her intellectual curiosity) more than the participants. In the interaction between the

interviewer/researcher and the interviewee, the interviewee gives more than he or she receives. Therefore, the researcher is ethically bound to respect the relationship and maintain as much reciprocity as possible (Lincoln, 1995).

Most important, the researcher was conscious of the unequal power equation that existed in the interview process itself.  As the interviewer, the researcher had the power to ask questions that the participants might have felt the pressure to answer, despite finding the questions too sensitive or invasive.  Even though the participants had the right to decline to answer questions, the researcher was fully aware and noted that even their refusal was a statement they were forced to make.

### Data Collection

A qualitative researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Maxwell, 2005).  However, this form of inquiry requires collaboration between the researcher and person(s) being studied.  There are advantages and disadvantages of the researcher being the instrument of data collection.  Some advantages are that the researcher is present at the moment of data collection, is sensitive to the process that is unfolding, and can respond immediately and adapt to the situation.  Moreover, by being part of the data collection process, the researcher can enhance the understanding by being attentive to nonverbal cues and observing the participant or the source of data, clarify and summarize to ensure accuracy, and explore unanticipated responses (Merriam, 2009).  A disadvantage of the researcher being the instrument of data collection is that one must identify and monitor one's biases and subjectivities, as they may shape the collection and interpretation of the data (Merriam, 2009).

The collection of oral narratives in this study was "produced within the context of qualitative research interviews" (Wells, 2011, p. 24).  A narrative inquiry approach enabled the

researcher to explore how single mothers make sense of the definition, challenges, strategies, and employer responsibilities surrounding balancing family and work and allowed the researcher to present the findings in the form of themes around work-life balance.  As a primary instrument of data collection, the researcher was present at the moment that the data emerged and was able to record the information, respond to it, and verify it firsthand and on the spot.  Therefore, utilizing this type of methodology enabled the researcher to build the context of the study and the findings in greater detail and depth.

**Participants**

Maxwell (2005) stated that one goal of purposeful sampling "is to ensure that the conclusions adequately represent the entire range of variation, rather than only the typical members or some" (p. 89); therefore, the methodology for this study were convenience and snowball sampling.  Convenience sampling involves the selection of individuals "based on time money, location, availability of sites and respondents and so on" (Merriam, 2009, p. 79).  Snowball sampling is a subset of purposive sampling, which mainly is used when it is difficult to contact individuals from a specific population (Patton, 2002).  According to Merriam (2009), "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 77).  Therefore, Merriam's explanation justified the researcher's belief and decision that this form of participant sampling was the best method to utilize for this study.

Participants for this study were drawn from a wide population using various methods for recruitment, including flyers, e-mails, and social media.  A sample of 10 working single mothers was selected for interviews (see Appendix E).  These women were selected based on the following criteria:  they were single, they were at least 18 years old, they worked at least 20

hours per week, and they had at least one or more children in the home full-time under the age of 18. The U.S. Department of Labor (2014b) indicated that the employer determines part-time and full-time classification. Therefore, 20 hours, typically considered by employers as the minimum hours for part-time employee classification, was selected. The initial participants for this study were recruited from the Non-Traditional Students Program at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

After Institutional Review Board approval, the recruitment process began immediately by contacting the coordinator of the Non-Traditional Students Program to explain the study and request that the research participation letter be sent through its LISTSERV, the program's student electronic mailing list (see Appendix C). The researcher posted tear-off flyers at various locations (such as daycare centers, churches, public aid offices, and the like) to attract other potential participants. The social media forum Facebook was also utilized as a means to recruit participants. Additional participants were enlisted through network referrals, also known as snowball sampling. This was accomplished by asking current interview participants for assistance in identifying other single mothers who met the criteria for this study.

After recruiting efforts were complete, eighteen working single mothers had expressed interest in participating in the study; however, only ten were interviewed due to various reasons. Five of the potential participants no longer responded to requests for participation after the initial contact, two cancelled their interviews due to unexpected life events including an emergency surgical procedure and custody-related court hearings, and the final participant was informed by the researcher that data saturation had been reached and the interview was cancelled. The basic demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A) was distributed to each participant through e-mail prior to scheduling an interview. The e-mail provided the participants with a link directing them

to complete the questionnaire utilizing Survey Monkey. The questionnaire ensured that each participant met the criteria outlined above and was used to select participants. The Survey Monkey data confirmed that the participants met the criteria and interviews were schedule immediately. The content of the questionnaire is described in further detail in the instruments section.

**Procedures**

    **Interviews.** Interviews provide richer descriptions of the lived experience of an individual than what a quantitative survey would offer. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) observed that "in-depth interviews use open-response questions to obtain data on participants' meaning—how individuals conceive of their world and how they explain or make sense of the important events in their lives" (p. 355). Narrative inquiry was used to conduct an extensive study of a sample of working single mothers, to obtain an in-depth understanding of their unique experiences. The semi-structured interview suited the purpose of allowing flexibility to gain an understanding of the experiences of the participants. The interview guide provided a basic outline to follow and, at the same time, permitted the researcher to keep the questions open and flexible enough to accommodate issues to be explored in different sequences (Maxwell, 2005).

    An in-depth, semi-structured interview also enabled the researcher to respond to varying worldviews of participants, which tend to unfold during the process (Merriam, 2009). The researcher would ask follow-up questions to probe as needed, particularly if the interviewee mentioned a new idea or concept that had not been explored. The interviews were semi-structured to give the respondents the opportunity to voice their opinions on what they thought about the topic being discussed. In addition, it allowed the researcher to be sensitive to the different ways in which individuals chose to respond to the same prompts. Wells (2011) asserted

that researchers could choose to design their interviews in a fashion that encourages narratives to be developed. Therefore, an open-response format was used to collect data from the participants using a predetermined interview guide to provide some structure and direction to the interview, while leaving room for follow up questions and natural conversation that may be initiated by the interviewee, hence the premise of semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B).

After participants agreed to meet, the researcher used interviews to inquire about these working single mothers' experiences in balancing family and work. The researcher began by conducting face-to-face interviews with an initial sample of 10 working single mothers. Additional interviews with new participants would have been added until data saturation was reached; however, that was not necessary for this study. After completing the tenth interview, the researcher determined that data saturation had been reached because the transcript revealed that, "no new themes, findings, concepts, or problems were evident in the data" (Francis et al., 2010, p. 1230). Eight of the interviews were conducted face to face and the remaining two were conducted utilizing Facebook calling in May and June 2016 and lasted approximately one hour each. Prior to each interview, participants were asked to verify their signed informed consent form (Appendix D) and were assured confidentiality using a numbering system to organize their interview data. The consent form included information about the purpose of the study, participant criteria, confidentiality and anonymity precautions, and procedures for the interview process. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that discontinuing the study at any time was an option. Participants were also informed that they would be given a pseudonym to allow their identity to remain anonymous for data reporting purposes.

Narratives are directly linked to the interview questions that prompt them; therefore, careful construction of these questions is crucial (Wells, 2011). The researcher used the six basic types of interview questions as suggested by Patton (2002) to collect data from the participants. These questions were what Patton refers to as "truly open-ended" to ensure that the responses were in the interviewees' own words, which supports the concept of a narrative. In addition, the researcher incorporated Merriam's (2009) type of interview questions believed to be productive in encouraging participants to elaborate on their responses and describe a situation or an experience in more detail. The interview strategy treated the narratives as having objective and subjective components by including questions that inquired about the interviewees' life history and life story (Wells, 2011). The interview guide was outlined by the research questions to aid with organizing data during the analysis phase (see Appendix B). Additional follow-up questions were added as needed, according to each individual interview. The researcher designed the interview guide to allow space for prepared and unplanned follow-up questions. During each interview, the researcher took field notes to document key verbal and nonverbal communication cues that might have suggested the need for further investigation. These notes were written directly on a copy of the interview guide. Each interview was digitally recorded using a Voice Record app on an iPad mini and iPhone and were later transcribed. The interviews occurred in the participants' natural setting, allowing them to respond naturally and honestly (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The recordings and transcripts provided material for member checking.

**Observations.** Kvale (2007) has asserted that "during analysis, verification, and reporting, the work journal will then provide the researcher with a frame for understanding and reflecting on processes and changes of the knowledge production throughout an interview

inquiry" (p. 43). Therefore, in addition to recording field notes during the interview, the researcher kept a journal to record both field notes and reflex records. According to McMillian and Schumacher (2010), "reflex records are [the] researcher ['s] comments and interpretations immediately after leaving the [interview] site" (p. 354). The journal was a standard notebook that also served as a place to bracket the researcher's thoughts about the study to ensure that the voices of the participants were heard as their meaning was being understood. The researcher also included personal observations, thoughts, feelings, questions, and other information drawing on each of the five senses. Prior to and after each interview, the researcher jotted down field notes in the journal to identify the context of the interview. The purpose of the reflex records was to build in a self-monitoring system to control for potential biases (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Following each interview, the researcher recorded reflex records, including her comments and interpretations. The information recorded in the work journal and on the interview guide was used during data analysis to assist the researcher with identifying and interpreting the themes that surfaced from the interviews.

**Instruments**

The methods of collecting data for this study consisted of a basic demographic questionnaire to ensure participation criteria were met and in-depth, semi-structured interviews to answer the research questions. In addition, the researcher utilized a work journal to record extensive field notes and reflex records including the researcher's observations, thoughts, feelings, and so on. Basic demographic information was collected from each participant using a questionnaire that consisted of 10 questions (see Appendix A). Other demographic information, including (but not limited to) level of education, income, and race, was also documented. An interview guide was used to assist with gathering data to answer the research questions (see

Appendix B). The interview guide was divided by research question and consisted of several initial questions with potential follow-up prompts to gather sufficient data. Additional questions were added and initial questions were altered as needed for clarification as the study progressed.

## Data Analysis Procedures

An inductive approach was used to analyze the qualitative data collected from the in-depth interviews. "Inductive analysis is the process through which qualitative researchers synthesize and make meaning from the data, starting with specific data and ending with categories and patterns" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 367). Therefore, broader themes framing each research question along with coinciding conclusions emerged from chunking pieces of related interview data using thematic analysis procedures. In addition, the researcher employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendations when conducting thematic analysis, which are to familiarize myself with the data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define and name themes, and produce the report. The steps in the data analysis process also included organizing, transcribing, coding, categorizing, and developing patterns from the data to provide explanations of working single mothers' approaches to work-life balance.

### Data Organization

The analysis process began by organizing the data from notes on the interview guide and work journal by research questions. The transcription process included transcribing each interview recording verbatim. The coding process included assigning shorthand designations to make retrieving specific pieces of data easier. Each interview transcript was coded line by line, placing the codes in the margins (Charmaz, 2006). This process was the beginning of category construction, which entailed creating the master list of recurring regularities or patterns of individual units of data from the interview transcripts. Following this process, codes and

categories were converted into themes, which are the "unifying or dominant idea in the data" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Maxwell (2005) noted that "the experienced researcher begins data analysis immediately after finishing the first interview or observation, and continues to analyze the data as long as he or she is working on the research" (p. 95). Therefore, the researcher devoted ample time to the data analysis process, being mindful that it would be ongoing even during the data collection phase. Merriam (2009) stated that "without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of the material that needs to be processed. Data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating" (p. 171). Therefore, the researcher conducted this form of analysis during and between data collection activities.

**Data Transcription**

The complete analysis process consisted of the data collected from the face-to-face interviews, being fully transcribed, coded, analyzed for themes, and strategically reported. The researcher personally completed each step of the analysis process. During the initial phase of data analysis, the researcher listened to the interview tapes before the initial transcription. Several transcription procedures suggested by Creswell (2008) to facilitate the analysis process were also incorporated; these steps included using large margins for additional comments, leaving space between interviewer questions and participant responses, and highlighting as appropriate to show headers, questions, different participants, and comments.

During the final step the researcher recorded comments about what was occurring during their particular season of life that could be important (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). After transcribing the interviews, the researcher thoroughly read each transcript, completing a master set of notes and memos on what was seen or heard in the data, and developed tentative ideas

about categories and relationships. During this phase, the written notes were reviewed from the interview guide and work journal to look for additional themes and make connections to the interview data. The transcription analysis occurred in phases of sorting and categorizing transcription themes, studying the themes, and organizing the key themes using supporting data from the interview transcripts. Finally, the researcher coded the individual interviews and then looked across the interviews for broad categories.

**Data Coding**

The coding process began with pulling out data segments and assigning a code to each segment. The steps outlined in McMillian and Schumacher (2010) were used to identify and refine the data codes. These steps included getting a sense of the whole, generating initial codes from the data, comparing codes for duplication, trying out the provisional coding, and continuing to refine the coding system. After the coding process was complete, the identified themes were documented and organized into refined coded groups. Merriam (2009) defined the themes and patterns that emerged from the data as categories and data analysis as the process of category construction. The process of category construction begins with coding or "making notations next to bits of data" that strike the researcher as relevant to answer the research questions (p. 178). The notations made by the researcher are based on his or her understanding of what is happening or what is being spoken about, reflected upon, or not spoken about. Categories were then labeled major, minor, and outliers as necessary. Next, patterns were sought to identify relationships among categories. The researcher discovered these patterns by adopting a deductive mode of thinking, "moving back and forth among codes, categories, and tentative patterns for confirmation" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 378).

**Theme Development**

Once the themes were identified, the researcher analyzed them to discover the perspectives they provided on the theoretical framework and how they spoke to the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The data was presented as themes that emerged from the transcripts initially and then grouped under the appropriate research question. The themes were interpreted to uncover meaning and thoroughly discussed and supported using specific quotations and the shared experiences from the interview participants. The researcher utilized several indicators to identify meaning strategies for doing interpretation, including recognizing organizing principles, oppositional talk, and examining subtext (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The data analysis report is a descriptive presentation of the themes that emerged from the data, followed by interpretation of the themes to answer the research questions. The researcher provided a rich and accurate description of the experiences of the participants so that the reader could understand how working single mothers interact with the concept of work-life balance (Geertz, 1973).

<div align="center">

**Trustworthiness**

</div>

Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that in qualitative research, concepts such as internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity are substituted with credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Trustworthiness establishes credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability of a study. Validity and reliability of any research study depends on "the study's conceptualization and the way in which the data are collected, analyzed, interpreted and the way in which the findings are presented" (Merriam, 2009, p. 210). The following concepts were highlighted in this study: credibility, transferability, and reliability.

**Credibility**

Internal validity in any research is about ensuring that the findings of the study match reality (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) stated that validity "must be assessed in terms of something other than reality itself" (p. 213), which Lincoln and Guba (1985) called "credibility." In qualitative research, internal validity and credibility are interchangeable terms whose purpose is to guarantee that the findings are "credible given the data presented" (Merriam, 2009, p. 213). Since the purpose of a qualitative study is to represent how the participants see and make sense of the world in general or of a phenomenon or experience in particular, what is important here is a holistic interpretation of what is unfolding in the interaction with the participants—what they say or do not say, feel or do not feel (Merriam, 2009). Member checks and reflexivity are the strategies that have been identified to make certain that the interpretation of participants' experiences is credible.

To ensure the credibility of this study, the researcher used the process of member checking. Maxwell (2005) identified member checking as the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say or do and the perspective they have on what is going on; it is also an important way for researchers to identify their own biases and misunderstandings of what they have observed. Member checking, according to Merriam (2009), is seeking validation for the findings from the participants themselves. In this study, the process involved checking the preliminary analysis of data with a few of the participants to ensure that the interpretation and findings matched their perceptions (Merriam, 2009). This was accomplished by sending completed interview transcripts, profiles, and data interpretations to each participant for review and consent.

The researcher also used reflexivity, or what Lincoln and Guba (1985) have defined as "the process of reflecting critically on the self as a researcher, the human instrument" (p. 183). "Reflexivity reminds the qualitative inquirer to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one's own perspective and voices of those one interviews and those to whom one reports" (Patton, 2002, p. 65). This involved identifying, articulating, and clarifying the researcher's subjectivities, biases, assumptions, and dispositions regarding single mothers' approach and understanding of work-life balance in their daily lives. Reflexivity, enabled the researcher to understand and demonstrate how her values and assumptions have or could have influenced the process and findings of the study (Maxwell, 2005). Writing reflex records and field notes were strategies that helped the researcher perform critical self-reflection.

**Reliability**

Merriam (2009) has suggested that the next significant question to consider in research is the extent of replication: Will the findings be identical if the study is repeated? However, the purpose of a qualitative study is not to "isolate the laws of human behavior but to understand, describe, and interpret the perspectives of participants" (Merriam, 2009, p. 221). A qualitative researcher does not set out to ensure that fellow researchers get the same results when they replicate the study; rather the researcher intends to ensure that fellow researchers consider his or her results to be "consistent with the data collected" (p. 221). Therefore, ensuring reliability in qualitative research is a process of ensuring consistency of findings for a given data set, thereby guaranteeing that the study is dependable.

Dependability is the extent to which a study can be repeated by other researchers and the findings would be consistent (Merriam, 2009). One aspect of triangulation is collecting data

from a diverse range of individuals and settings, utilizing a variety of methods (Maxwell, 2005).

Triangulation can be used as a strategy to ensure consistency and dependability or reliability of a

study (Merriam, 2009). Maxwell (2005) encouraged triangulation methods of data collection

because it, "reduces the risk that your conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or

limitations of a specific source or method, and allows you to gain broader and more secure

understanding of the issues you are investigating" (p. 94). This was accomplished by collecting

data from the basic demographic questionnaire, the in-depth semi-structured interviews, and

incorporating observations from the researcher's field notes.

Merriam (2009) identified four strategies to ensure consistency or dependability of a

study. For the purpose of this study, the researcher used the audit trail strategy. Audit trail,

suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to enhance a qualitative study's dependability, is a

process by which researcher's document in detail how they arrived at their findings. Using an

audit trail allows fellow researchers or readers to understand how the researcher collected the

data, arrived at categories or themes, interpreted the themes, and culled findings from the data

(Merriam, 2009). As suggested by Merriam (2009), the researcher kept a personal reflection log,

written memos, and personal questions, thought processes, and subjectivities that led to the

results in the work journal as described previously.

**Transferability**

External validity (also known as transferability) of a study refers to the extent to which

the findings can be generalized to other situations; in essence, can the findings of a study be

considered to hold in other situations (Merriam, 2009)? It has been suggested that in qualitative

research, the results are situation- or context-specific or localized and offer guidance only on

how the results could be applied in other contexts (Cronbach, 1975). The focus of a qualitative

researcher is to enable the transferability of the findings to other settings, not for generalizability (Eisner, 1991).  One of the most common strategies to enhance the transferability of a qualitative study is to provide a "rich or thick description" of the setting, participants, process, and findings of the study (Geertz, 1973; Merriam, 2009, p. 227).  In addition to implementing this strategy, the researcher used quotes from participants, field notes, and reflex records to give the reader a clear idea of the process followed to derive the results.

This chapter described the study's methodology, including the research design, population and sample, data collection instruments and procedures, and data analysis procedures. The researcher explained the research design, how the study was conducted, the population sampled, and the data collection process.  In addition, the researcher discussed the data analysis techniques and how the findings were presented.

# CHAPTER 4

# FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore working single mothers' work-life balance in order to better understand how employers can assist them. More specifically, the researcher collected data directly from a number of working single mothers in their natural setting in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of their lives. The study findings offer a way of understanding the complex lives of working single mothers and how they interact with the concept of work-life balance. Successful data collection depended on the researcher's ability to establish relationships and to build rapport and trust with the participants.

The research questions that this study aimed to answer include the following:

1. In what ways do working single mothers strive to attain work-life balance?

2. What challenges do working single mothers encounter that affect their ability to obtain work-life balance?

3. How do working single mothers believe their employers' policies, practices, and attitudes impact their ability to balance work and family responsibilities?

The narrative inquiry approach involved open-ended questions to engage 10 participants in conversations to describe their experiences as single mothers pursuing a career and education while balancing childrearing and managing a home without a spouse/partner. In order to gain a better understanding of the findings, this chapter is divided into three sections: (a) demographic summary, (b) participants' information, (c) results and (d) research questions.

**Demographic Summary**

Data for this qualitative study were collected through 10 individual interviews with working single mothers from a variety of backgrounds and industries within the United States. Each participant completed a demographic questionnaire via Survey Monkey to ensure that the criterion to participate in the study were met (see Appendix A). One goal of the study was to incorporate working single mothers with varying education levels (see Figure 1). All of the participants had some level of postsecondary education, although not all had completed a college degree. It is important to note that many of these single mothers had attained higher education while striving to balance work and family life.
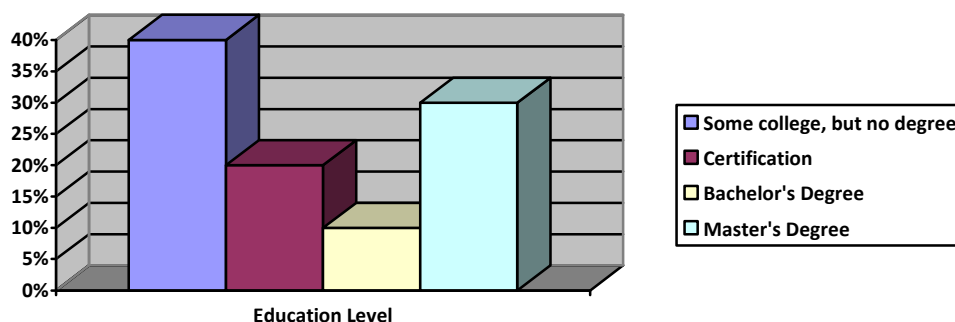


*Figure 1*. Education level.

The demographic survey results revealed that the participants' household income was varied; however, the majority of the participants were in the lowest income category (see Figure 2). Several of the participants indicated financial concerns as a hindering factor to achieving work-life balance.
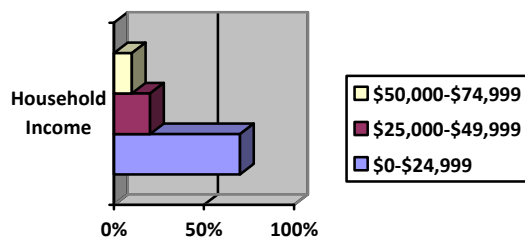
*Figure 2*. Household income level.

Responses to the questionnaire also indicated that more than half of the participants were single and had never been married. The other participants had been divorced, widowed, or separated from the father of their children when they were younger. Demographic information further revealed that three out of the 10 participants had other individuals residing with them and their children. One participant was currently living with a friend after separating from her incarcerated spouse; another was receiving parental support with housing and childcare; and the third was cohabiting with her boyfriend. The compiled demographic data revealed that among the sample of working single mothers, there were 17 children—10 boys and 7 girls. The majority of the study participants had only one child.

Another goal was to incorporate women from various races/ethnicities (see Figure 3). Interestingly, none of the participants identified as Native American, Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, or biracial or multiracial. Surprisingly, neither race nor ethnicity appeared to have an impact on the participant's work-life balance experiences in this study.
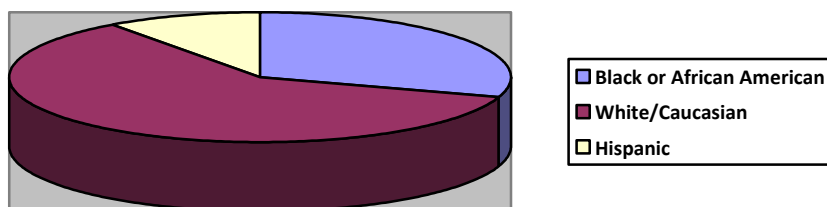
*Figure 3*. Race/ethnicity.

The number of hours worked by each participant varied each week. Several of the participants indicated working only 20–30 hours per week, which may correlate with the low income levels previously mentioned. However, the work status of the majority of the participants was classified as full-time by their employers. In addition, most of the participants indicated that they had family that lived within 30–50 miles. The participants who did not have family nearby indicated that their family members were more than 300–800 miles away.

**Participant Information**

During the in-depth interviews, study participants described their work-life balance experience from the working single mother's perspective. The participants also identified and discussed the work-life challenges they encountered, as well as the roles and responsibilities of employers in helping working single mothers attain work-life balance. The participants in this study were 10 single mothers, currently employed with at least one child under the age of 18 in the home. Additional information was collected during the semi-structured interviews with the participants, the demographic questionnaire, and field notes (See Table 1). The participants are listed in the order in which their interviews took place. In order gain insight into the lives of these working single mothers, the participant information section includes their: (a) profiles and (b) stories.

Table 1

*Representation of Interview Participants*

| Participant | # of Children | Ages | Job Title/Status | Approximate Gross Salary* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vivian | 1 | 15 | Teaching Assistant Part-Time | $19,000 |
| Veronica | 1 | 9 | Graduate Assistant Part-Time | $16,000 |
| Zion | 2 | 11, 13 | Administrative Assistant Part-Time | $22,000 |
| Patricia | 1 | 3 | Dental Hygienist Part-Time | $16,000 |
| Michelle | 2 | 12, 16 | High School Teacher Full-Time | $57,000 |
| Heidi | 4 | 5, 7, 8, 12 | Dietary Aide Full-Time | $26,000 |
| Pam | 3 | 14, 15, 16 | Home Care Aide Full-Time | $20,000 |
| Sydney | 1 | 9 | Massage Therapist Part-Time | $21,000 |
| Gloria | 1 | 16 months | Customer Advocate Full-Time | $27,000 |
| Gina | 1 | 15 | Operations Manager Full-Time | $26,000 |

*Approximate gross salary includes all sources of income

**Participants' Profiles**

    **Participant Vivian.** Vivian is a 37-year-old doctoral student and part-time teaching assistant at a university. She is also the mother of a 15-year-old son and primary caregiver for her elderly father. Although she has never been married, she does not identify as a single mother due to the amount of ongoing family and financial support that she has always had. She believes the legacy of strength from her family's matriarch has played a huge role in her life. She said that she also feels blessed in each domain of her life and is grateful that she has not had to experience many challenges with balancing work and family life.

    *Vivian's story.* Everything is cool. I'm finished working. I'm going to pick up my son. . . I may be somewhere working on my research, the house is taken care of, and I have food on the stove or in the crockpot. . . Things are in line, everything is done, or either everything has been prepared for. . . Everything has gotten the amount of time required.

    *The participant described the conflict she experienced in her role of being a mother, employee, and student.* Getting things done and making sure things are balanced. Not giving so much into one thing and neglecting the other. That's totally a challenge. . . It may be that work doesn't get finished, or your son is sick and you have to keep him home today, so I can't work on my research today. . . They (the challenges) mostly come from academia from school/work. It is the most challenging thing in my life right now. On the home front I feel very secure, but this school stuff/research is giving me the flux lately. . . When I get something thrown in my day and everything has been planned out and in order and something gets thrown in. . . Honestly, that happens a lot and I find myself having to make snap decisions. I'm a pretty organized person. . . I have to weigh it and I have to be ok with saying I can't do that tonight or let me do it tomorrow.

. . I try not to allow so many things to come in and throw me off and I don't know if that's bad or good but I'm pretty crazy about time and stuff.

*The participant described the positive spillover she experienced in her workplace.* They're great. They understand. Thank God I work with a lot of women and men in our department and everybody has a family. . . They're very pleasant. . . In our department, they understand that in life, we all go through things and so it makes it easier to work with them and to communicate when things aren't ok.

**Participant Veronica.** Veronica is a 33-year-old graduate student who is also the mother of a 9-year-old son. She has never been married. She proclaims God as her rock and credits her faith in Jesus as the reason she is able to balance work and family life. She also described her extensive community of support and how important it is to keep things in the right perspective. She is dedicated to cultivating a life of joy and happiness for her son, which she believes influences her own personal happiness.

*Veronica's story. The participant described her experience related to role theory highlighting her roles of mother, student and employee.* There's a wonderful thing when you're really on top of your tasks within your academic life, work-life, and your kid is taken care of, and you have a clean house and clean linen. That is the most refreshing thing that I can do for myself. . . The best thing I have done is investing in an agenda book/calendar. . . It helps me stay on task and gives me an overview of my week, month.

*The participant described her experiences as it relates to role conflict theory and the potential for conflict between her role as a mother and student/employee.* I'm often challenged with finding balance, because I can only be in one place. . . It's becoming more challenging raising a child in this generation and being a single mom. . . [There is] a lot of fear and

uncertainty wanting to have the best resources and mentors to surround your child. I was talking to the coordinator from non-traditional student programs. . . I'll never forget she said the one thing you always have to. . . Ask yourself, "Is that taking time away from my son?" That helped me a lot.

*The participant described her experiences that are an example of negative spillover.* My son has had behavioral issues at school and there were times when I had to be called while taking an exam. . . They [challenges] (expressing frustration through her body language) would arise mostly when we had sleepless nights. . . I think the busyness brought a lot of challenges and of course some of the behavior issues. . . "Me time" is foreign. . . [I had] a lot of negative emotions and I was overwhelmed. . . I would get frustrated. . . I always wanted to meet my child's needs but there were so many things environmentally that I couldn't change like being a single mom and him not having a male role model. . . That has been a huge source of guilt for me. . . The biggest struggle is being ok with the things that I can't or couldn't change. . . Just feeling helpless, being discouraged, being tired a lot and just feeling drained. . . I have to put my big girl pants on and be super mom. I don't think I complained too much. . . I think I dealt with it internally.

*The participant described her school and work experience that is an example of positive spillover.* I was truly blessed with my academic team [and] the role of support they provided was surreal. . . That was probably the least stressful thing. . . Which helped me out a lot. . . I couldn't have had it any other way. . . So, I couldn't be more thankful to have had the position that I had and the support that I had to get me through graduate school.

**Participant Zion.** Zion is a 38-year-old full-time administrative assistant at a university and the single mother of two. She has never been married but leans heavily on her large

extended family and significant other for support. She is pursuing her bachelor's degree with her sights on future advancement opportunities within the institution. She believes that shared responsibility is the key component to finding work-life balance.

   ***Zion's story.*** Organization is huge. It has to be. . . When my kids get home they do the dishes, clean up, and take out the meat or we don't have food to cook for dinner. . . Family is key. . . If it's a game or something they all [extended family members] show up. . . I like to plan girl's nights or anything to relax.

   *The participant described the challenges that cause conflict in her role as mother and employee.* Health issues with my children and not having enough money. . . As far as health issues it's an anxious feeling when you don't know what to expect. . . When there's an unexpected bill I get extremely frustrated. . . Home life is where I'm challenged because you never know when somebody is going to get sick. . . right now, the intensity is very high because I'm worried about my son's health and the stuff I have going on with my daughter.

   *The participant described negative spillover from her son's ongoing health issues and lack of advancement opportunities.* My son's health issues are causing so much anxiety because you don't know what to expect. . . If somebody is sick, my day is going to be hectic. My son has all the health issues known to man. It depends on like if we have to go to St. Louis, come back here. . . Negatively, I find that it's hard to move up to another level. You have to test for things or you have to have a degree.

   *The participant described positive spillover with the flexibility and her positive work environment.* My job is flexible. They understand what's going on and if you need to take off, you take off and handle family business. That's a big, big support. . . Yes, I get sick leave and vacation time, which is very helpful when you need it.

**Participant Patricia.**  Patricia is a 24-year-old part-time dental hygienist and divorced mother of a 3-year-old daughter.  Co-parenting with her parents is her main strategy for making things work as a single mom.  She expressed that life without her support system would be "pure chaos."  She also believes that a healthy family unit, routine, and organization are key to achieving her desired rhythm.

*Patricia's story.*  *The participant described her roles as a mother, daughter, and a Christian.*  Routine. . . Especially having a schedule.  I'm a schedule and organized kind of person.  I want to have a plan. . . If it wasn't for my support system and all the people that I have in it balance would not be possible. . . It would be chaos everyday trying to figure it out. . . If it wasn't for them I don't know what I would do. . . Daycare is super expensive anyway so and then finding the time and money.  If my mom didn't work at daycare to take her and pick her up it would just it would be chaos. . . My small group [church]. . . People who really know me and know what I'm going through helped out tremendously. . . Moral support from people who aren't my family.

*The participant described conflict that occurred between her roles of mother, student, and employee.*  It's not so much the schedule, it was trying to balance externship hours, school, and work and being at home. . . Trying to get home at a certain time to actually spend at least a couple of hours with her before I had to do homework and all of that. . . When I got home and my daughter had already eaten and she had already played herself out and she was dead asleep and so I didn't get to see her hardly at all that day. . . She's like mom I missed you so much. . . So it kind of sucked, but I mean you got to do what you got to do right now to have a better life later.

*The participant described negative spillover from relational and work conflict.* When my daughter was younger her dad and I split up, she was only 15 months. . . There for a while her dad and me weren't really getting along and that was super stressful. . . But that's pretty much been the only struggle. . . I had that set [work] schedule in my head. . . [Then] I was asked if I could work over. I have to get this done too and then I'm like wait, how am I going to get all this done? I could do this the next day instead of us just having fun all day and playing. Now I have to run errands all day. I don't like to do that with a 3 year old anyway, it's just not fun.

**Participant Michelle.** Michelle is a 34-year-old Texas high school teacher and mother of two sons. She has never married. She believes that focusing on timesaving techniques and being super-organized are the keys to her success. She also expressed the importance of taking care of oneself first before caring for others. Her commitment to achieving work-life balance resulted in a career change after she recognized the impact that her previous workload had on her children.

*Michelle's story. The participant described her roles as a mother and employee and a conflicting situation that arose between the two roles.* My family is first and there have been several occasions where I have told administrators at the school that when it comes down to it we have 3,000 students but there is not one student here that is more important than the children I have at home. . . A particular instance my son had a specialist appointment. . . They call you with the next available appointment. . . I requested to be off for that day. This particular day the state was coming in. . . The principal said no one is going to be out this day. . . I didn't want to take the whole day because I didn't want to put my coworkers in bind, but I'm taking my son to his appointment. . . Once he learned my seriousness about my children he was able to go ahead and make arrangements for me to have a sub for the second half of the day. . . I've sent my youngest

son to school when he's not feeling great. . . If he didn't have a fever, he wasn't vomiting or anything I'd send him to school. . . I don't want to use my sick time because he just kind of has a sore throat. . . I also want that time to be available if he really is sick or if I just want to be off to be with my family.

*The participant described positive spillover from her work-life into her home life.* My current position has less of an impact and that's why I changed careers because my last job I had no work-life balance at all. It was just crazy. They are very understanding and accommodating whenever it's necessary. Missing work is a non-issue. We have a good system and great administrators. They make my life so much easier. . . It helps a ton that the principal is very family-oriented. I am extremely fortunate.

**Participant Heidi.** Heidi is a 29-year-old full-time hospital dietary aide and single mother of four. She has never been married. Although they reside separately, Heidi and her sister had arranged their schedules to work opposite shifts in order to provide constant care for their children. She exclaims, "God bless support systems," giving credit to her family for making the load she carries as a single mother a lot lighter and manageable. Her mantra is "Happiness doesn't pay the bills." Her future plans are to continue to work hard to support her children, and has plans to get a second job once her youngest goes to school.

*Heidi's story.* Striving to find that perfect schedule is a must. The schedule I have now is the closest thing to balance that I've ever known. Where you have the weekends and the holidays off is ideal. My support system is amazing. . . So you're in a pinch. . . There is almost always someone that you can call. . . They (family) are the people you couldn't live without.

*The participant described conflict between her role as mother and employee and the resulting negative spillover.* Having to say no when work calls and say we have extra hours and

you know you need it, but you promised five kids that were going to go to the science center today. . . Whether the situation itself is intense the feelings are intense, that's what gets you. It's hard to break your kid's heart, because you have to miss you know 75% of the things you know that they do. It's hard, it's rough to know that you have to have your job and you're dependent on it, because that's how you provide for everybody.

*The participant described positive spillover from her employer's attitude towards her when her son was ill.* There was a time where my son got the chicken pox shot and broke out with the chicken pox. . . So I did take a couple days off. . . For the most part, they're like hey how's your kid? I hope everything gets better. But I also believe that a lot of that's what you put into your job. They know that I put a lot into my job. They know if I didn't come to work today somebody's dying. . . They understand.

**Participant Pam.** Pam is a 42-year-old widow and mother of three teenage children. She is a home care aide and is pursuing an associate's degree to assist in making ends meet with hopes of finding a true balance. She tearfully expressed feeling as if her balance was lost with the passing of her husband more than ten years ago. She wholeheartedly believes that being a mom is the most important role in her life and trumps everything else besides her faith in Jesus.

*Pam's story.* If I know there is something that needs to be done, I do it. I can't say there's a plan. I'm constantly going over things in my head like this kid has this and this one has that. . . I'm not really the kind of person that has everything written down on paper. . . Having a good support system is important. They're (her in-laws) always available anytime I need the kids to be watched. . . Of course, then friends are also emotional support.

*The participant described how role conflict impacted her life.* Financial mostly. . . Like when my kids would love to take a big vacation, but I can't afford that. . . It's midterms, you're

behind in your classes, instructors are piling on stuff and there's no way that you can possibly have enough hours in the day to get everything done. . . When my job calls me at 6a in the morning to go cover a client whose "high risk" and you know you can't because I have to get the kids to school.

*The participant described her experience with negative spillover.* I try to remember what's important. . . Because being a parent is more important that being a fabulous employee or good student or anything that I could put in there other than my faith. . . The place where I have the tendency to let things go is the house. To me I don't care if it's dirty, if my kids need me. I feel like I'm not spending enough time with the kids. . . There's no way that you can possibly have enough hours in the day to get everything done.

**Participant Sydney.** Sydney is a 32-year-old part-time massage therapist and divorced mother of a 9-year-old son. She treasures every moment she has with her son, repeatedly expressing that her job is simply a means to take care of him. She also believes that it takes a village to raise a child and is grateful for the village that she has in her parents and church family. Her goal in life is to raise a godly man who loves Jesus, and her heart's desire is to be a stay-at-home mom someday.

*Sydney's story.* I do a little bit of scheduling, planning, and preparing ahead of time. . . But I'm not super depended on that though. . . I've been a control freak my whole life and that's just something that God has been trying to heal in me so it's like it doesn't really matter to me. *The participant described the role conflict she experienced from being a mother and employee.* I think because I'm at work on Saturdays my son doesn't always get to play sports that he wants to like soccer because they always have games on Saturday morning. . . It's happening to either my son or something personal of mine. . . Of course when I first come to a challenge I try to do it on

my own and then it's like wait God is here for me so that makes it, once I put it in perspective it always slides down more on the scale of intensity.

*The participant described the negative spillover from her home life.* He gets a little frustrated for not getting to participate in everything that he wants to which is probably good for him. . . Although I feel guilty about that. . . I definitely feel I don't want to say like a failure because I'm not really responsible obviously for like my car breaking down or my son's health issues but it definitely makes me feel like I'm inadequate. I would say definitely anger because it's like this is not what I signed up for. I put a lot of pressure on myself to do things correctly the first time, to keep my house the way it's supposed to be so if it's not then I put a lot of stress on myself and it's quite intense.

*The participant described the positive spillover she experienced from her two jobs.* He understands the importance of family and he's an amazing boss. He knows that I treasure the time with my kid and I'm putting him first and so he understands that working is just a means to take care of my kid and my job is not my life. . . If my kid is sick and I can just call him and he's like ok, we'll find someone else to come in today or we'll just reschedule your clients. . . And so he understands that and I think he even encourages everyone that works there to put family first. . . So I'm really blessed to work at two places that are amazing. . . Everyone is super understanding and just really loving and kind.

**Participant Gloria.** Gloria is a 28-year-old full-time customer advocate and mother of a 16-month-old son. She attributed several challenges, including lack of support, finances, and time constraints, to being a single mother and striving to attain work-life balance. However, in spite of these challenges, she is a huge proponent of "doing what has to be done." Her recommendation to other working single mothers is to build a strong network of support because

it is the main thing that she lacks and feels would be most beneficial in her pursuit of balancing work and family life.

*Gloria's story.* I'm finally comfortable I have a place to stay. I've moved up because we were sleeping on the floor in my friend's closet and now we finally found a bed and we are up off the floor at least. So I mean things slowly get better but it seems like two steps forward one step back. But at least were still moving forward. I don't have anybody to call it's just I have to deal with it myself. . . Honestly, I have one friend, his godmother and that's pretty much it. I do have a roommate. . . So, I'd say he is support by the fact that I have some place to sleep. . . But other than that, those are pretty much it. . . His father's incarcerated and my family is the reason he's incarcerated. . . So, there's not really much support there at all. I guess once you get past the emotional part of it [being a working single mother] it's like now I have to make my plan. . . Solve the issue and then I start working towards that and make that my goal and I get it done. I'm a positive person and try not to let things bother me.

*The participant described conflict between her role of mother and employee and the negative spillover she experienced.* One of the things that stress me out at work is that they are so strict on if you're paid to be on the phone you have to be on the phones. If there's a phone call I need to take I'm going to take it and it affects my stats, promotions, raises, it affects everything. That in turn makes it hard to balance because I have to decide whether or not it's important enough for me to miss time at work. . . So if it's something personal I have to handle it between 8a and 9:30a before I go to work. I haven't encountered what the consequences of that are. . . That's something I have to worry about as well, so that impacts every decision that I make.

*The participant described her positive spillover experience with her employer.* The employer I have right now is a little more understanding. . . Everybody's more family-oriented. . . They're pretty great and they do understand. I work for a pretty much woman ran company right now. . . So, I feel like they are more understanding than I expected.

**Participant Gina.** Gina is a 41-year-old full-time operations manager at her family's business in Texas. She is the mother of a 15-year-old daughter, who is her number one priority. She has never married. Her favorite quote is, "Don't ever get so busy making a living that you forget to make a life." She strongly believes that work isn't everything and that her daughter is more important than any amount of money that she could ever make. She also felt that having emotional support from family was crucial to her work-life balance.

*Gina's story.* I just try to plan in advance and not be so spontaneous and know I'm going to go do this today or I'm going to do that. . . Just being more organized. . . My mother, she's always there when I need her regardless. . . I mean really there's not anyone in my family that I couldn't call to come help me if I needed it. . . If I could sleep I'd do that too (laughs). . . The opportunity to go somewhere whether it's for 30 minutes or for an hour to just be by myself, with my own thoughts.

*The participant described her experience parental and work roles were conflicting.* My biggest challenge is basically feeling like I'm not there enough. I'm constantly beating myself up and having the reminder that I feel bad that my daughter doesn't have her father in her life never has and probably never will. I'm always trying to overcompensate for that. Sometimes I'll wear myself a little thin with trying to do too much. . . I think I get a little frustrated and stressed out from time to time when I know that we have a big obligation at work and I have to work a little bit late and well your kid doesn't understand that. . . It bothers me that I have to

work a little later simply because I don't get that time with her but at the same time I understand that it's something that needs to be done. . . At the same time I have to make sure that all of my daughters needs are cared for and met.

*The participant described the negative spillover that she experienced from her work-life.* My challenges mostly come from the work side. My home-life is pretty normal and stable . . . I'd say they are pretty intense. . . Because I think I put a lot of pressure on myself. . . It's because I take pride in being able to deliver what we (family business) committed too. . . I do try for instance to schedule none emergency procedures such as dental visits and those types of things as late in the afternoons as I absolutely can so I don't have to miss work and jeopardize what we having going here. There are sometimes I mentioned we have bigger obligations that I have to work a little later in the evening.

*The participant described positive spillover from her work-life into her home life.* To balance my work they let me leave early when I got things to do, the least I can do is work a little late when they need me to. . . Being able to come to work for my family's business is such a blessing. . . One of the things that I've learned over the years is how to become more vocal about the things that are acceptable to me and aren't acceptable. . . But you just have to be able to make the decision of what's most important. . . Prime example 4 out of the 6 weeks of having to work closer to those 55 hours rather than 40 hours and taking time away from my daughter they (the owners) showed up on a Friday and gave me an extra $300 dollars to take my daughter to do something nice.

Overall, the participants provided detailed accounts of their lived experiences related to work-life balance. In addition, their detailed accounts included experiences with their children, families, and employers. The data collected provided several examples that these working single

mothers experienced confirming the theories that framed this study. The data collected also identified their work-life balance approach, challenges, and expectations they had of their employers.

## Results

The participants were asked questions about their approach to attaining work-life balance, the challenges they encountered, and the roles and responsibilities of their employers (See Appendix B). The participant's experiences differed; therefore, all participants' views are represented in the data analysis of this study. The participants described their approaches for balancing work and family life using a life management system and taking care of themselves. The sacrifices were described as financial concerns and time constraints along with the need to manage their emotions. The roles and responsibilities of the employer were described by words such as "understanding," "supportive," and "flexible." Reiterating the thoughts of McDermott (2010), if employers are taking good care of their employees, they will reap the benefits of high employee satisfaction and morale, positive productivity, and commitment. Therefore, the data collected in this study resulted in four themes: (a) utilization of strategic planning, (b) value and role of support, (c) sacrificial mothering, and (d) organizational support (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Interview Data Analysis Results:  Themes with Subthemes*

| Research Questions | Themes with Subthemes |
|---|---|
| 1. In what ways do working single mothers strive to attain work-life balance? | • Utilization of Strategic Planning:  (a) life management system implementation and (b) deliberate self-care<br><br>• Value and Role of Support |
| 2. What challenges do working single mothers encounter that affect their ability to obtain work-life balance | • Sacrificial Mothering:  (a) financial concerns and (b) time constraints |
| 3. How do working single mothers believe their employers' policies, practices, and attitudes impact their ability to balance work and family responsibilities? | • Organizational Support:  (a) organizational care and concern and (b) organizational benefits |

**Utilization of Strategic Planning**

The majority of the participants indicated that their daily preparation and scheduling required strategic planning, which was a key component enabling them to attain work-life balance.  The concept of "being an organized planner" evolved as a necessary habit for working single mothers to manage their work and family life.  Participants also discussed the importance of focusing on what was most important in life and making sure their actions aligned with their values.  Therefore, this theme is discussed under two subthemes:  (a) life management system implementation and (b) deliberate self-care.

**Life management system implementation.** The majority of the participants explained how a management system was necessary for balancing their work and family life. Life management systems described by participants were an intentional method of managing their work and family lives and their attempt to keep all of the balls in the air. Some of those methods included keen oversight of a traditional or electronic planning system designed to create and manage their work responsibilities, personal lives, and children's schedules and activities. Participants also used words such as "scheduling," "organization," and "planning" when describing their work-life balance approach. A few participants stated that "we have a routine and we stick to it," while others described organization was how they were able to fit everything in. Surprisingly, Veronica became emotional when she shared her approach to work-life balance and how it required a routine and structure:

> I think balance requires a routine. Having a strong routine like knowing that my son is taken care of academically. . . He is well rounded at home. . . Balance for me is having that routine of being able to manage all of the things that are important. So making sure that when he [my son] comes home he's taken care of. . . There's a wonderful thing when you're really on top of your task.

The tears streaming down Veronica's cheeks appeared to be full of joy and gratitude as she smiled brightly describing with pride how she had successfully managed her work and family life through graduate school. After chasing her 16-month-old son for the fifth time, Gloria exhaustedly shared her evening routine and what she did to prepare for the each day during the workweek and stated, "At night that time is getting his lunch ready for the next day, getting my lunch ready. . . Washing bottles, cups." Her entire Saturday morning interview though rich with detail and a unique perspective reeked of shear tireless effort from Gloria trying to balance her

son and participating in the interview let alone life alone on a daily basis. These participants highlighted having a consistent routine and its benefits in their pursuit of work-life balance.

Zion explained the role and importance of organization in her life as she described her "monthly planning sessions" and how members of her extended family share an electronic calendar and utilize group chat and e-mail to keep track of appointments and receive reminders. Several other participants expressed a similar strategy that involved detailed scheduling incorporating activities from both their home and work-life domains. The participants also described their need to have a plan in advance and how they purposely avoided being spontaneous. Michelle mentioned how identifying with the Type A personality assisted her as she shared her detailed approach:

> Keeping a schedule. . . I have to remain organized. I have to know what time appointments are; make arrangements for the upcoming school year, sports, etc. . . Those are all the different things that I need to think about in order for me to be able to schedule our lives. . . For me it's a lot of scheduling and just keeping account of everything in my phone and calendar. . . I am very organized in everything that I do; I'm a to-do-list person. . . For instance we go to church early, eat dinner, and I'll let the boys watch football while ironing their clothes for the week. Those are things that I make sure that we do on a regular basis.

Michelle responded with such poise and confidence and seemed to have life as a single mother all figured out and was eager to share her experience.

Physical and mental preparation was also highlighted as characteristic of a successful work-life balance approach. These forms of preparation are further discussed in the self-care section where participants described approaches to manage their overall well-being. Some of the

participants described utilizing prioritization skills to determine and organize their daily lives by what was most important. The participants also indicated the importance of developing proper time management skills to manage their life and the unexpected.

In contrast, a few participants indicated that their approach to achieving work-life balance was not as regimented and systematic; however, it worked for them. Pam, Vivian, and Sydney were the participants who described their lack of approach with phrases like "flying by the seat of my pants," "going with the flow," and having "loose daily goals," respectively. Pam confidently described getting through her day-to-day activities with "running mental lists" and claimed to have the mental capacity to keep everything straight, just like her mother. Sydney displaying pain on her face as she reminiscently expressed the need to avoid the disappointment and feelings of failure when scheduling, planning, and preparing ahead of time does not go as she expected. Their practical approach to achieving work-life balance involved addressing work or family needs as they were presented.

Strategic planning through the implementation of a life management system was discovered to be an important strategy for the work-life balance of working single mothers. The participants in this study described the necessity of a tailor-made life management system in order to meet their daily needs. They also explained how their system supported their goal of attaining a balanced work and family life.

**Deliberate self-care.** The majority of the participants explained how prioritizing time for self-care was an important component in their approach to achieving work-life balance. They listed various types of activities that they participated in to revitalize themselves and for peace of mind. Several described how exercise served as a way to manage their stress and was a form of rejuvenation, while others enjoyed such physical activities as running, hiking, and lifting

weights.  Gina calmly described the purpose of her walks and occasional alone time and said,

"just to be by myself. . . I can get a grasp on my thoughts. . . That really helps me get back on

track and focus on what I need to be doing."  Gina fervently expressed how important her time

alone was to collect her thoughts internally and process the events of her life.  Michelle

described her intentionality in incorporating regular exercise in her daily life and its benefits and

stated:

> My gym time is definitely the one thing that I won't compromise.  So that's usually "me
>
> time," so I do that almost every day no matter what else is going on.  I typically make
>
> sure I have time to do that. . . If I don't go for a few days I feel it, I feel the stress, I feel
>
> the anxiety.  I definitely make sure I take care of myself.

Her strong dedication to her own personal health and stress management was evident as she

sternly described making decisions to have her youngest son even attend the afterschool program

so she could get her workout in.

Pampering was also highlighted as a method of self-care with massages, manicures, and

bubble baths as the preferred forms.  Zion expressed difficulty about not being able to regularly

afford her preferred leisure activity and said, "I like massages, so when I can afford it I get

those."  Visibly frustrated by her financial struggles, Zion sorrowfully described having to utilize

self-care activities that were free that she also enjoyed like Facebook and Twitter.  The

participants also described cherishing time alone reading, writing, and napping whenever

possible.  Pam explained her cost-effective self-care method, "I read; it seems to be my escape. .

. I'm a writer, so to me it's very relaxing to put myself in a fictional place."  Identifying low to

no cost self-care activities were important for the participants that had little to no disposable

income.  Several of the participants described days that were free from appointments, hectic

schedules, and tasks, as true relaxation days where they could choose to "just do nothing" if they desired.

Several participants described how consistent self-care contributed to their social and emotional well-being. Sydney shared her approach by stating, "I always try to find time to hang out with girlfriends"; Vivian echoed this with, "I love going places with my friends." Participants used words such as "recharged," "loved," and "rejuvenated" to describe their feelings from sharing their lives with friends and family. Other participants mentioned spending time with family and friends during happy hour, vacationing, and the occasional staycation (also known as a vacation at home) as their desired respite. Heidi expressed similar thoughts and she said, "Family Sunday is nice because it's relaxing, even if you're the one doing all the cooking and all the work; you know everybody is there and you're not rushing." These participants highlighted the value and benefits of how relationships with others enhance their overall wellness.

The majority of the participants stressed the importance of having adult time, even if that was in the evening after their children had gone to bed. Other participants described their adult time as "running errands," "doing household stuff," and "relaxing in front of the TV." Gloria explained how she managed time for herself and having an 18-month-old child:

> I do like to have "me time" right after he goes to bed. Where I just sit and do something adult-like. Whether it's watching an adult TV show like Game of Thrones or something or just sitting outside with the baby monitor in hand and enjoying the quiet for a little while.

Although it was not the ideal "me time" scenario, Gloria had figured out a way to steal away and make the best of her situation.

Patricia with a sign of relief described her down time when her daughter spends time with her ex-husband as an opportunity to, "get the house back in order and just relax in front of the TV if I want to and not have a toddler yelling mom every thirty seconds." However, Veronica was the only participant who indicated that "me time" was currently nonexistent in her life and that she was simply refreshed by what she did with and for her son, "I think I can probably count on one hand how much *me time* I've had, but I don't regret it at all." Although her words expressed contentment with her sacrifice, her body language loudly exclaimed the opposite as she shook her head side-to-side and grimaced. However, she did explain that her current situation was a temporary sacrifice and that she expected things to be different once she completed graduate school.

The importance of self-care by creating "me time" through strategic planning was highlighted as participants described that they had rejuvenating methods that contributed to their ability to balance their family and work lives. Although the participant's methods varied, they had identified the rejuvenating habits that were vital for them to deliberately incorporate into their daily lives in their pursuit of work-life balance. In addition, the participants identified the individuals that assisted them in their pursuit of work-life balance.

**Value and Role of Support**

The value and role of support emerged as a theme when participants were asked about what helped them balance their family and work responsibilities. The majority of the participants immediately identified who helped them and described the types of assistance they had received. Most of the participants highlighted their families, both their immediate and extended relatives, as their main source of support, while others described non-related individuals who served as an adopted pseudo family of support. They were not remiss to

recognize the diverse roles these individuals played in their lives and the lives of their children. Several participants explained how the presence of family and sharing home-life responsibilities enabled them to achieve some semblance of work-life balance. Several participants indicated that their faith in Jesus and their church involvement was a necessity to being able to manage their work and family lives in a positive and peaceful manner. The participants' collective sentiments were, "Family is key!" and "God bless support systems." The participants also expressed how difficult they imagined their lives would be without their network of support.

Most of the participants expressed their reliance on family, friends, church, and community for various means of assistance to make their lives work. Veronica tearfully expressed that "having a good support system, whether it was people from within my community or people at church," was crucial and she said, "God is what helps me balance because I feel like there are many days where I know I get through because of him." She also indicated how she had received support from academic mentors and other campus professionals. Vivian described the benefit of having a close-knit family of support, specifically about her relationship with her dad and she said:

> No matter what. . . I've always had security with him. . . I've always known that I had
>
> people like my mom and dad and I have sisters and we were brought up really tight, my
>
> entire family. I have a lot of cousins. . . We call them our extended family, but I feel like
>
> I have a butt load of sisters and brothers. . . We are just really a tight family.

Vivian was full of visible pride as she straightened up in her chair and chuckled expressing how she was fortunate enough to not need to rely on anyone other than her family that had her back to the point of not even needing anything from her son's father.

These participants realized the importance of the people that were supporting them during their life journey as a working single mother. In fact, several of the participants became emotional when describing those who provided unwavering support and their gratitude toward those individuals. Specifically, Sydney tearfully shared the role of her parents and the men, who were role models for her son and said:

> My parents are amazing. . . They're both retired, and they are huge on family and refuse to have anyone else watch their grandbabies. . . They get dinners prepared. . . Sometimes they wash my dishes; sometimes they'll go grocery shopping. . . It's never me telling them I'm struggling with something; they can just see it. They are just really good at helping out. . . I know I would not be able to do this on my own without them. . . One of the guys at church is a huge influence on my son's life. . . There are two other guys that really have invested in my son as well. . . That is my core.

Expressing gratitude through tears coupled with laughter, Sydney expressed not expecting to be choked up as she talked about her support system and how blessed she truly was.

Patricia described the role her parents played in her daughter's life and said, "I often refer to my mom and dad as my co-parents. . . We are all on the same page. . . We all have to be this functioning unit." Patricia momentarily reminisced on her childhood as she gazed off and expressed how she wants her daughter to be raised the same way and were grateful to have her parents alongside her to help with raising her daughter. Heidi explained the role that her sister, who is also a single mother, played in her kids' life and said she is "their other mother" and chuckled as she stated, "I feel like I cheat the system a little because I have a good support system." She also described how she and her sister arranged their work schedules to make sure one of them were available to be with their kids at all times.

As already noted, the participants described varying amounts of support, from large, encouraging families to a few dedicated friends.  A few of the participants who did not have family nearby were forced to create a support system from those around them.  Michelle was instrumental in creating her own support system due to her geographic location and described her support system:

> I don't have direct support from my family. . . They live so far away.  However, I do know that having a support system is very important. . . Even if your support system is made up of friends, it's good to have one.  My support comes from my best friend who is also my neighbor.  She is a single mom too, so we help each other. . . She offers an emotional outlet.

Michelle remorsefully described as her voice quivered the difficulty and loneness from being so far away from family.

The participants explained the different types of support they received, including financial, emotional, and spiritual.  Other ways they received support was through carpooling, childcare, and household chores.  Pam thankfully and tearfully stated, "My in-laws are a huge help. . . I haven't had to pay for any child care since my husband passed away ten years ago." Although thankful for the support she received from her in-laws, it was obvious that Pam was still mourning the loss of her husband and sickened by her single mother status and situation.  When Pam described the devastating loss of her husband and how life has been without him it felt as if the air was sucked out of the room and there were several breaks to allow Pam to gather herself.  Zion described the type of support she received and said, "If one person has band and the other has a game the ride situation is pretty much taken care of. . . My mom is my ultimate help. . . If the car breaks down I get her other vehicle and she is always here to help."  Regardless

of whom their support system was comprised of or how they offered help all of the participants agreed that support was a critical component to their ability to balance their work and family responsibilities.

Gina indicated that she had support available but would only implement it if it was "absolutely necessary" due to her own admittance of pride. Gloria indicated that she did not currently have a support system in place; however, she fully understood the role and functions of a support system and was hoping to rectify that very soon. However, she described a unique quasi-support system that she had developed because of being disowned by her biological family and she stated:

> Honestly, I have one friend, his godmother and that's pretty much it. . . I call her when I'm stressed out. . . She'll talk me down. . . She has helped financially before, but she can't do that too often. . . She's there if I need her and she's my best friend.

The majority of the participants described the value of tangible support through local relationships; however, all would agree that some form of support is better than no support at all.

Overall, the value and role of support was presented in various manners among the participants of this study. The critical need for a solid support system was major theme of this study and an important factor for work-life balance as participants described their intentionality in developing a network of support involving family, friends, and their communities. The participants also highlighted the challenges that they encountered in balancing their work and family lives.

## Sacrificial Mothering

Sacrificial mothering encompasses the consistent and difficult choices that working single mothers are forced to make daily. All of the participants indicated that they anticipated

and experienced challenges of varying types and degrees of intensity. The majority of the participants indicated that most of the challenges that they encountered were from issues that arose in managing their home life responsibilities and raising their children. Most participants either responded emotionally or described the emotions that were invoked from the challenges they had experienced through sacrificial mothering. Participants described the challenges presented in their home domain as ongoing sacrifices affecting their ability to achieve work-life balance. The sacrifices are further discussed under the following two subthemes: (a) financial concerns and (b) time constraints.

**Financial concerns.** Several of the participants identified finances as a form of sacrifice hindering the attainment of work-life balance. They highlighted their financial concerns and made statements such as "money is desperately needed" and "after I pay for stuff I'm still behind." The participants identified several obligations that affected their finances and sacrifices that they had to make to take care of their children. These obligations included daily living expenses, hospital bills, childcare, extracurricular activities, and vehicle repair and maintenance.

Several of the participants discussed the regularity of financial concerns as a part of their lives. Gloria's sentiments regarding the frequency of financial sacrifices were, "Honestly, here lately it seems like as soon as I get through one financial challenge there's another one." A few participants also explained feeling like there was an ongoing sacrifice between making a living as the sole provider and spending time with their children. Pam discussed her specific financial concerns and stated, "I feel like I have to work more hours to be able to make ends meet. . . So then I feel like I'm not spending enough time with the kids." Pam's desperation for a financial miracle could be was felt as she described feeling inadequate and unable to provide for kids and the impact it had on them in their younger years. The majority of the participants expressed that

their children were the number one priority and how the sacrifices they had to make between their children and work was emotionally taxing. Heidi described her unique struggle with having access to overtime to improve her financial situation but there being a seemingly immovable barrier due to her marital and parental status:

> There are many opportunities right now for overtime during the day at work, but I can't take any of it. . . It's stressful, like it's really stressful, because you know you need the money and it's there but you can't get it. . . I am the number one person they call when someone doesn't show up for work. . . They know you need it and you want it, but you can't take it.

Heidi visibly frustrated described that because she and her sister alternated work schedules that she was incapable of working during the day because that was when she was responsible for taking care of her children and nieces and nephews.

The participants also noted the financial burden caused from unexpected expenses, including but not limited to their children having unforeseen health issues. Sydney visibly shaken as she recalled and explained how her finances were impacted when she discovered her son had a health issue that had to be monitored and she stated:

> Last year my son had a heart condition, and we were going to the hospital quite often. The financial strain was extremely severe. . . I'm trying to pick up extra hours or figuring out a way to make a payment plan with the hospital. . . So on those days that I choose to work extra hours we try to do something a little bit more fun that evening or whatever just because he'll be like but mommy you don't usually work that day I miss you.

When working single mothers have described being faced with these types of situations immediate action is necessary and assessing the impact of the sacrifices caused by the situation are considered and addressed later.

Not surprisingly, the majority of the participants expressed a need and a desire for more financial resources and concluded with the thought, "It takes two incomes to run a household, but I only have one." The experiences highlighted by the participants indicated how lacking adequate financial resources resulted in sacrifices in other areas of their lives making work-life balance attainment seem impossible.

**Time constraints.** Time constraints were described by all of the participants as a challenge requiring sacrifice in their pursuit of work-life balance. Time constraints were discussed in three specific areas: participants were experiencing sacrifices in their daily routines, making sacrificial choices between their children and work, and sacrificing themselves. The majority of the participants also highlighted general time constraints affecting their work-life balance. Veronica exhaling deeply described how time constraints impacted her ability to balance work, school, and family life and said, "It was just this go go go, and you were running on empty." Other participants described these time constraints as "not having enough hours in the day," "not having time to even prepare a meal," "always feeling rushed," and "not having that time to bond with their children." The participants described their frustration with having to constantly make sacrifices because of time limitations.

Multiple participants described difficulty with the time constraints, especially when having to make decisions between their children and work. Participants expressed their decision-making with phrases like, "Honestly, I find myself having to make snap decisions" and "I have to weigh it and be okay with saying it can wait." Most of the participants believed that the

decision-making process of a working single mother was basically a choice of what area of life

to sacrifice. Some of the sacrifices included having to say 'no' to overtime offered by their

employers, for instance, or to attending their child's extracurricular activities or to having alone

time for themselves. Several participants discussed having to break promises to their children

due to finances and time constraints because they had to work to "provide for everybody." Heidi

described her difficultly with having to sacrifice supporting her children at various events and

working instead and she said:

> It's hard to tell your daughter you can't take her to family night because you have to go to
>
> work. It makes decisions really difficult. Ultimately, you're either making a decision to
>
> provide for your family, or you're making a decision to make them happy. This makes
>
> relationships really hard. It really stinks.

Her words exuded strength and decisiveness in choosing work; however, her body language

seemed saddened as she dropped her shoulders as if knowing her decision was not the right one.

Several participants also articulated their disappointment with having to work late and

sacrificing their already limited time with their children. Specifically, Michelle described her

significant sacrifices that resulted in choosing to walk away from a career and she said:

> Time management. . . Not having enough hours in the day is my biggest challenge. . .
>
> Between having to work, carpool, cook dinner, grocery shop, run errands, projects, and
>
> so on, [it] is overwhelming. I actually changed jobs because I saw the effect that my long
>
> hours and not being present was having on my boys. I remember one day my son walked
>
> into the room while I was working on case files and said to me "You're still working?"
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> He dropped his head and left the room. I made the decision that day that no one else's
>
> children could be more important than my own.

Disheartened by this experience, Michelle walked away from a career that cost her time, energy, and money from attaining a degree with no return on that investment as she shifted gears and pursued a degree and career path that was family-friendly, especially for her being a single mother. Sydney described the compromise that she makes when sacrificing time with her son and choosing to work more hours and she stated:

> I do try to find that balance because I do want to spend time with my son and I also know quality is more important than quantity. So on those days that I choose to work extra hours we'll try to do something extra to I guess make up for that time away from each other. That makes me feel better. I think that helps him to realize that everything I do is I'm hoping for his benefit. Otherwise, I would not make those decisions in the first place to work extra hours if I didn't think it would benefit him.

Many of the participants expressed their desire to choose what was in the best interest of their children. Gloria expressed her constant battle with deciding whether she should work more hours and sacrifice spending less time with her son and she said:

> It's a constant struggle if I'm spending enough time with him versus should I be going and making more money. . . That's a huge struggle for me, balancing that, because part of me wants the extra $150 a paycheck, which is a lot—it's almost a week of daycare.

In choosing her son over work, she felt it was the right thing to do but her fidgeting and uneasiness seemed to indicate uncertainty with the decision she had made. Sadly enough, Heidi shared her disappointment with the amount of time available to spend with her four children because of her time constraints and she stated, "There is almost zero one on one time. . . Because you have to go to work". Gina expressed this same sentiment:

When I have a big obligation at work, I have to work a little bit late and handle that.
Well, your kid doesn't understand that. Mom's not home, she's working again, and I
don't take those frustrations out on her, but it does build up. And I stress out trying to
figure out how to get a 12-hour day crammed into 10 hours. . . You just try to keep both
parties happy, but you learn to take a walk and release some of that stress and frustration
and then just start over again the next day.

Several participants described how they strived to get more done in less time being left
exhausted and still not having enough time to accomplish everything. Sydney described the
rationale for working overtime and said, "I would not make the decisions in the first place to
work extra hours if I didn't think it would benefit my son." Several participants indicated that
they no longer had difficulty with making sacrifices between their children due to their learned
ability to "just say no." Vivian described her experience with having to say no and why:

Sometimes I have to say no, when it comes to decisions that'll kind of throw off that
balance throughout the day, cause that may mean I'm late here or there. . . So if there are
things that come in the day that throws stuff off, I'm a great proponent of saying no.

The idea of 'saying no' seemed foreign to the majority of the participants; however those who
has grasped their inability to *do it all* seemed to be at peace with their limitations.

Many of the participants described how they made self-sacrifices for their children. The
participants shared thoughts like, "I know quality is more important than quantity" and "I don't
care if my house is dirty if my kids need me." Michelle nonchalantly described how she made
regular personal sacrifices and said, "I will often put myself on the back burner many times just
to make sure that their needs are met." Gloria explained her mindset when having to make
sacrifices between work and her son and she stated, "What's best for him comes first before

what's best for me" and "Time with him is valuable, and he's only small for so long." The participants were adamant about meeting the needs of their children even if they were the ones being sacrificed. Gina's thoughts summarized the majority of the participants' when she said, "Honestly, I'm just trying my best and praying every day that when stuff comes up I make the right decision."

As a result of the sacrificial mothering theme, emotional management was a huge concern as the participants explained the different types of sacrifices they frequently encounter. All of the participants indicated that they experienced a host of emotions when dealing with all that comes along with being a single mother and trying to balance everything. The participants described emotions surrounding personal and family health issues, financial support, time management, and disappointing their children. The emotions mentioned included fear, guilt, loneliness, anger, fatigue, frustration, and anxiety. Specifically, Michelle shared her emotions felt during her busiest season and said:

> I feel overwhelmed, especially during the sports seasons. All the running around is exhausting, and it sucks to not have anyone to lean on. . . It's just me. I'm stretched super thin. . . Sometimes I feel anger from having to do it alone. . . I quickly learned there is no time off and no selfish days allowed with being a single mom.

The participants seemed to all express a silent cry for help with balancing their family and work lives which would automatically address the emotional toll from sacrificial mothering. Pam tearfully expressed, "I feel inept. . . I feel like the weight of the world is on my shoulders. . . I have to be mom, dad, and try to juggle everything. . . I just don't feel like I'm enough, and I certainly don't have enough." Pam's verbal and non-verbal communication appeared as one who had been defeated and sought refuge from the hardship of single parenting.

Several participants also described having to push through their emotions and not having time to be stuck in their feelings. Vivian adamantly expressed the facts of life being a single mother and stated:

> You're going to be thrown curve balls, and what are you going to do? Cry about it all day, or are you going to start taking care of business? That's the mindset I have so when things do come my way it's like, okay, deal with it and keep moving; I can't stop.

Acknowledging the need to get things done no matter what was a consensus among the working single mothers in this study. Overall, all of the participants wanted what was best for their children and to make sure that their needs were met. However, they anticipated and understood that there would be financial and time constraining sacrifices along the way that they would have to make. The well-being of their children was the driving factor allowing them to manage their lives as sacrificial mothers. The participants also indicated the role that they believed their employers played in their ability to achieve work-life balance.

**Organizational Support**

Most of the participants indicated that they believed that their employers played an important role in their ability to achieve work-life balance. The participants expressed their desire for employers' to better understand them as individuals and show empathy for their situation and status as single mothers. They also described the desire to feel supported and having access to practical benefits that encourage work-life balance. Participants also mentioned the possibility of being negatively and positively impacted by their employers; however, most indicated that their current employers had a positive impact on their work life. This theme is discussed under the following two subthemes: (a) organizational care and concern and (b) organizational benefits.

**Organizational care and concern.**  The majority of the participants expressed the value and importance of being employed by an organization that is interested in the well-being of their employees.  Some of the words used to describe their employers' caring attitude were "they're great," "it's been positive," and "family-friendly."  Specifically, Gina expressed:

> I believe whether it's my current employers or any employers. . .  People need to understand that working isn't the only thing that somebody does in their life.  I'm very blessed now to have that type of employer whereas back in my telemarketing days that wasn't the case. . . I don't have any concern; I mean if I called right now and said, hey, my daughter is sick and I have to go, they'd be like, okay.  There wouldn't be conversation like, well, are you coming back, or when do you think you'll be back?  It would be, hey, how's your daughter doing?

Gina carefully constructed her words as she reflected on the poor experience she had with her previous employer that treated her as a producer and not an individual with a personal life.

Vivian described her thoughts about her employer and said, "I wonder if they give me leniency or favor because they know that I juggle a lot. . . They give me a lot of room; they're really lenient, they understand, they don't make it difficult at all."  Zion described her employer in a positive manner and said, "They are family-friendly. . . They understand life happens, and in order for you to do your job you have to make sure home life is taken care of."  Some of the participants also said how pleased they were to feel accepted as a single mother in the workplace. Patricia described the role her boss plays in her life:

> She supports the fact that I'm a single mom and trying to do it all, and she's really supportive in basically everything. . . I think they play an important role. . . She

understands sometimes we have to leave early or sometimes we have to do what we have

to do to help out what's going on at home.

The positive vibes that emulated when the employer's attitudes were being discussed were

displayed by constant smiles and laughter from the participants.

Michelle, Heidi, and Sydney collectively did not believe their employers played a

significant role in their ability to achieve work-life balance because they were in a confident

status with their employer.  Michelle quickly stated, "I don't believe they play much of a role

because I get to make decisions and have control over things."  Heidi believed that she was "Just

an employee to them. . . Our life outside of work is not their responsibility."  Sydney expressed

feeling secure in her job as she explained, "I don't ever feel pressure to go into work. . . I never

feel like if you don't come in today you don't have your job anymore."

Several participants described positive implications because of their employers' level of

support.  Veronica, who works in academia, joyfully expressed a positive experience and said,

"Being awarded a fellowship allowed me to have the flexibility that I needed," and although she

was challenged by her mentors and academic team, she stated that "It didn't impact me to where

it impacted my son."  Vivian stated, "I think they understand we all have families we are trying

to take care of and our outside stuff too."  Pam echoed this thought as she expressed, "I also

think that if they want their employees to be happy and have a home and work balance, then they

need to have policies that reflect their willingness to work with them, especially working

mothers."

Participants unanimously described the amount of positive support that they received

from their various employers and how it contributed to their ability to balance family and work.

The participants used phrases such as, "They understand what's going on" and "My boss is

pretty flexible" to describe their support. All of the participants indicated that they felt supported by their employers; however, the extent of that support varied among the participants. The types of support were presented in multiple forms, from words of affirmation, willingness to make exceptions, and making personalized accommodations. Patricia described how her boss accommodated her when her daughter was ill:

> There was a couple days where my daughter was incredibly sick and everybody was already at work. It was just one of those times when I'm like, sorry, I told you I had this support system, but right now everyone has something to do. It was just one of those times when the support system didn't work. . . My boss understands, she gets it, and she wants everyone to work as a team. If there is something that needs to be done and everyone else is doing something at the time, she has no problem with stepping in and doing it.

Patricia seemingly embarrassed because she had previously bragged to her employer about her extra supported and large family explained how no one was available when she needed it and how her boss choose to be compassionate and understanding of her situation.

Most of the participants described their employers' efforts to create a family-oriented work environment that resulted in them feeling understood and comfortable as an employee and as a single mother. Pam explained this effort as she said, "I have a job that allows me to tell them what hours I'm available, and they give me the schedule within that time frame." Vivian explained how her department head had gone beyond her expectations to provide her with a place she could go to recuperate from the stress she was experiencing from caring for her elderly father, who had recently suffered a stroke. Vivian expressed gratitude for her employer's kind gesture and said, "That was a sign that they cared and wanted to make sure I was okay." In

addition, several of the participants described the positive attitude and disposition of their employers toward them as individuals in spite of being working single mothers. Participants used phrases such as, "Everybody is so pleasant and their attitudes are great" and "They make my life so much easier." Other participants stated, "They are very understanding and accommodating whenever it's necessary" and "He is super-caring and goes the extra mile for his employees and does it all with a good attitude." Zion's supervisor actually allowed her to be interviewed for this study during her work hours.

Veronica provided information about the support she received from her academic team on campus:

> Their support and encouragement helped me a lot, and they really pulled through for me. . . They showed so much compassion not only for me as a student but [also for] my personal life in making sure that I was okay, and academically they were able to support me as much as they could. No matter how bad things got at times, they still came with a positive attitude, and I was like, wow, I want to be just like them.

The participants expressed receiving positive support that encouraged them as employees and spilled over into their home life.

Several participants described how their employers sought to assist all of their employees as they stated, "They don't treat any other employees any differently than they treat me" and "Everyone tries to help out everyone." Gina expressed, "They assist me with being able to maintain a work-life balance."

**Organizational benefits.** This subtheme emerged when participants were asked about their employer's policies and practices that impacted their work-life balance. Most of the participants did not explicitly identify any organizational policies and practices that they wished

their employers offered to assist with work-life balance; however, their specific focus surrounded organizational benefits. This may have resulted from a lack of knowledge and understanding of their organizations' policies and practices.

Patricia was the only participant that identified a desired employer policy related to overtime and compensation and she stated that "They don't have overtime pay. . . If I work overtime I still just get paid $10 an hour and they don't offer any extra vacation time or extra sick days or anything like that." Vivian and Zion described uncertainty regarding policies and practices that were offered by their employers. Zion explained her lack of knowledge and stated, "They have different things available that I really haven't looked into and never utilized. . . It didn't seem like it was relevant for me." Other participants indicated having difficulty navigating their employers' work policies, which had a negative impact on their work-life balance. Gina stated that "There aren't really any policies, but they do reward good behavior and performance. . . They understand and reward the sacrifice." Michelle stated, "There aren't many policies or practices that my employer doesn't already offer that I would take advantage of."

Heidi and Gina indicated that they did not have any benefits that they wished were accessible through their employers. They were both very pleased with their employers' offerings. Heidi described her employer's benefits as beyond generous:

> The hospital has a lot of benefits. Every two weeks that you work, you earn ETO
> [Earned Time Off] time. When you miss a day because you are sick, they automatically
> give you that. Even though I was sick and felt like I was dying, I knew that bills were
> still going to be paid. They actually have a program that if you fall behind or if
> something happens outside your control, twice a year you can use "employees helping
> employees," which pays up to $350 towards a necessary bill, etc. . . I have the max

amount of life insurance, accidental death, and I took out cancer insurance, which I think

is a blessing because cancer runs in my family. . . If I go I leave four children behind that

still have to be taken care of.

The participants understood the importance of having exceptional benefits that would assist their

work-life balance attainment now, but also potential benefits that with longevity.  Patricia was

the only part-timer who would receive an insurance benefits package after her 90-day

probationary period on her new job.

The majority of the participants indicated that they wished their employers had benefits

to assist with work-life balance.  Pam and Sydney expressed their desire to have standard

benefits available such as medical, dental, and life insurance, PTO, and sick time.  Specifically,

Sydney described her desire for benefits:

There are no benefits of any sort for either position because I'm considered self-

employed. . . I think it would be great to have paid sick days or vacation time.  It's been,

like, 4 years since I've had paid time off, and that is nonexistent in my profession.  If you

don't work, you don't get paid.  That would be nice, and some type of insurance benefits

because we don't have insurance through the places that I work, either.

Financial concern as previously stated was also shared by Pam the full-time home care aide and

mother of 3 as she expressed her desire for paid sick time to avoid her compensation being

negatively affected and said, "They are accommodating giving me the time off, but there's no

paid time. . . If they had paid sick days, it would be wonderful."  Gloria discussed how her

employer's paid time-off (PTO) policy had both positive and negative implications and stated,

"Anytime that you take off its paid time off. . . It's nice to know I'm going to have at least my 40

hours on my check. . . If I'm out of PTO I can't leave."  Gloria's employer has a policy that

allows employees to purchase additional PTO at the start of each fiscal year; however, due to her financial challenges she is unable to take advantage of this opportunity.

Besides paid sick time and overtime pay, the most desired benefits identified were afterschool transportation, onsite daycare, and mileage reimbursement. Michelle stated, "Afterschool transportation would be nice" and Patricia stated, "Mileage would also be great" highlighting some of the preferred benefits that they felt would assist in achieving work-life balance. Gloria said she would like onsite daycare and explained how it would help her work-life balance:

> I'd use onsite daycare every day because working until 6 p.m. I have an issue finding places that will keep my son past 6 p.m. That would be something I would utilize every day, and I think most moms would too because that also cuts out travel time. Honestly, even if it costs a little more I'd still do it because it would be worth it in the long run.

Others expressed the desire to receive "sick time that is separate from PTO" and "a daycare in the employer's office." The participants in this study highlighted receiving specific benefits as one of the significant roles and responsibilities of their employers. The organizational benefits that a company offers can positively influence the work-life balance of working single mothers. Organizational support through the demonstration of a positive attitude of care and concern along with suitable benefits were revealed to be the felt role and responsibilities of employers by the participants in this study.

## Summary

Work-life balance achievement was described by the participants as being able to leave work at work, keep their routine without interruptions, and being able to solely focus on their kids. A couple of participants, in describing the pursuit of work-life balance felt like they were

not certain there was a balance to be attained. For these working single mothers, being a mother was the central part of their identity. Having a career or education served as a means to an end, the end was to provide for their children. Their commitment to their primary role as a mother helped them deal with the challenges of maintaining other roles, such as employees and students. Although they recognized the conflict between these different roles, they saw themselves as capable of accomplishing the tasks of working and parenting while being single.

Results showed that for these women, key strategies, a support system, and alone time were the fundamental components in their quest for work-life balance. Although they experienced a variety of sacrifices they made, they expressed a resilient attitude toward pursuing work-life balance. They valued their role as mother and demonstrated how parental responsibilities superseded all other competing roles. They also valued an active role, organizational benefits, and positive support from their employers.

# CHAPTER 5

## DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore working single mothers' work-life balance in order to better understand how employers can assist them. In addition, the study identified strategies implemented by working single mothers to balance their work and family lives and the challenges that they encounter in their pursuit of work-life balance. This research was conducted utilizing a narrative inquiry approach through semi-structured interviews that was framed by the following research questions that revealed four major themes and several subthemes.

1. In what ways do working single mothers strive to attain work-life balance?

2. What challenges do working single mothers encounter that affect their ability to obtain work-life balance?

3. How do working single mothers believe their employers' policies, practices, and attitudes impact their ability to balance work and family responsibilities?

This chapter reviews, analyzes, and discusses the findings of the overall study. Furthermore, this chapter outlines the implications for practice as well as concludes with suggestions for future research.

### Discussion

Theoretical frameworks were selected that revealed how being a working single mother implicitly pose challenges to achieving work-life balance. The theoretical underpinnings of this study were role theory, role conflict theory, and spillover theory. Role theory addresses the personal conflict that arises from the performance of multiple life roles. Although the working single mothers from this study had varying demographic information and lived experiences, they all encountered conflict through their shared roles as mothers and employees. Research

predicted that the existence of conflict was inevitable, specifically that a compromise took place when women combined these roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; McElwain et al., 2005).

The theory of role conflict indicates that one role will take precedence over others and that there is a direct correlation between energy transfer from one role to another. The participants in this study indicated experiencing energy transfer from the various challenges that were identified and the ways in which they were felt and understood. The participants described multiple examples of positive spillover they experienced from their employer's positive attitude towards them and the impact it had on their energy at home or at school. The participants in this study highlighted multiple challenges impeding their attainment of work-life balance, including, but not limited to, financial concerns and time constraints. Work-family conflict exposes the degree to which participation in one role influences the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Varying degrees were described by the participants, depending on the situation and domain in which it occurred. Situations involving their home life, especially their children, generally were on the higher end of the scale.

Spillover theory defined the impact of work on family life as being either an enhancement or a loss (Kiecolt, 2003). All of the women in this study described the impact from their work life in a positive way, indicating spillover as an enhancement to their family life. Their experiences did not support Robbins and McFadden's (2003) research, which suggested that work, was the cause of their conflict and the stress associated with it. Their conflict predominantly arose from managing their household and child-rearing responsibilities. The results from this study supported the components of role theory, role conflict theory, and spillover theory among this sample of working single mothers. The following section is

organized around the study's research questions and the themes and subthemes that emerged from the participants' responses.

**Research Question 1:** In what ways do working single mothers strive to attain work-life balance?

Two themes emerged from the data that became ways in which single mothers attain work-life balance. The first theme was utilization of strategic planning. The participants attributed their success in achieving work-life balance to the implementation of several strategies, including life management system implementation and deliberate self-care. More specifically, the participant's life management system implementation focused on organization and planning strategies. Reed-Woodard (2007) gave examples of strategies to support work-life balance that were consistent with the findings of this study. These strategies included prioritization of life's events, clear and concise communication, staying on task, focusing on the present day, creating a professional and personal network of support, and having "me time."

Schwanbeck (2006) proposed that the key to learning how to keep all of the "balls in the air" as simply doing what works best for you. Many responses were connected to the importance of planning as working single mothers went about balancing their work and family lives. The participants described planning sessions and the use of agenda books, calendars, and e-mail. Others mentioned their written to-do lists, task preparation, and mental checklists. Other research also supports those participants who indicated that they did not utilize a formal strategy or life management system but their style somehow worked for them. This school of thinking encourages ownership and the freedom to have a carefree outlook and approach to work-life balance. Working single mothers employed various approaches in their pursuit of work-life balance support the theories that framed this study. These women indicated functioning in

multiple roles that often conflicted resulting in positive or negative spillover into other domains of life that they were forced to manage.

The participants also identified deliberate self-care through focusing on physical, mental, social, and emotional activities that enhanced their ability to achieve balance in their work and family lives. Fuegen (2010) described several coping strategies to reduce stress. The two coping strategies that were consistent with this study were exercise and relaxation. Most of the interview discussion involving self-care was positive and was expressed with enthusiasm. Several participants also described the benefits of taking vacations and enjoying new places and adventures with friends and family. Other women mentioned napping and escaping by means of reading and writing fiction, social media, and television, as their stress reducing or relaxation options.

Bakker and Karsten's (2013) study found that single mothers experienced very little leisure time, and Carli (2010) described the self-sacrificial nature of women revealing that leisure and sleep were two of the main areas in which such sacrifice occurs. Several participants who described sleepless nights supported the observations of these researchers and one participant who indicated that "me time" was "foreign" to her. Richards (2015) summarized the importance of self-care with this question: "Are we so busy that we are willing to sacrifice the quality and possibly the length of our lives?" (p. 118). Another participant echoed Richards's idea as she described the importance of focusing on making a life for herself and her daughter instead of simply making a living. The experiences of these working single mothers have a direct connection to role conflict theory, as well as spillover theory; unfortunately, it was experienced in a negative manner.

The second theme was the value and role of support. The participants attributed their success in achieving work-life balance to developing and maintaining a system of support. The participants also stressed the importance of having a good support system and sharing the responsibilities of managing their home and children in their goal of work-life balance achievement. Several means of support were identified: including family, friends, community members, and other single mothers and through relationship with Jesus and their church family. Krymis's (2011) study found that sharing one's faith and values with others professionally and personally was a coping strategy. Several participants in this study reflected the aforementioned role that a community of faith specifically played in their lives and its influence on their ability to attain work-life balance. Others expressed their gratitude for their church groups and for the influence that godly father figures had in their children's lives.

Allen's (1993) recommendations for a variety of support systems for employed single mothers to successfully balance family and work were agreed upon among the participants in this study. Most of the women expressed the luxury of having family within 50 miles; however, not all of them were as fortunate. One participant resided more than 800 miles away from family, and expressed the support that she received from a neighbor whom she befriended who was also a single mother. Others described their support systems as being made up of individuals within their community, churches, and campus programs. There was only one participant who indicated that she did not currently have a support system; however, she understood what she was missing. In addition, women with family in close proximity seemed to be more relaxed and less stressed when discussing support than were the other women who had to develop their own support network from non-family members.

Working single mothers utilize multiple strategies to achieve work-life balance. Strategic planning was the overarching theme in addressing working single mothers' approach to balancing their family and work lives. The participants of this study highlighted the importance of creating a life management system, developing a network of support, and intentionally building in time for self-care.

**Research Question 2.** What challenges do working single mothers encounter that affect their ability to obtain work-life balance?

One theme with two subthemes emerged from the data and was interpreted to be challenges that single mothers encounter that affect their ability to obtain work-life balance. That is, the theme, entitled sacrificial mothering, which was named from the researcher's interpretation of the participant's explanation of the what, why, and how behind the sacrifices they were making to fulfill the role and duties of a mother. The participants adamantly expressed that their children were their number one priority and their actions of sacrifice naturally followed suit. Sacrificial mothering included the two subthemes financial concerns and time constraints.

Financial concerns were the most anticipated challenge that participants in this study articulated in their work-life balance efforts, confirming the findings from previous research. Ciabattari's (2005) study found that low-income women reported higher levels of work-family conflict than higher-income women did. This trend was consistent, as half of the single mothers interviewed indicated financial difficulty as a major challenge. These working single mothers indicated that their means of financial support were primarily from positions that would be considered a job versus a career. Three of the participants were currently in a professional career and four had aspirations for career advancement through pursuing postsecondary education.

Three of these four participants were presently enrolled in a higher education institution with hopes of achieving economic self-sufficiency. The disparity of economic self-sufficiency among women was confirmed by the results of this study. Grall (2011) indicated that "only one third of single mothers receive any child support" (p. 3). Half of the participants from this study indicated that they received child support from their children's fathers, happily exceeding these statistics; however, several of these same participants were among those who indicated finances as an area of sacrifice.

As a second challenge and component of sacrificial mothering, the women described additional sacrifices with time limitations, school deadlines, health issues, and relational difficulties with the fathers of their children and their teenagers. The frequent nature of these sacrifices as a result of single parenting and role overload is described by Caplan et al. (1975) as having too many things to do and not enough time to do them. Several participants echoed this sentiment as they shared story after story of the challenges presented by not having enough hours to get everything done resulting in the constant need to make sacrifices. Many of the participants in this study could identify with the results from Galinsky's work that working mothers expressed positive feelings about the amount of time and energy they gave to their children. A few participants also indicated challenges with parenting and raising children in this generation along with feeling as if they were not present enough with their children. Single parenting in itself was highlighted as a challenge as the participants expressed frustration with having to parent their children alone.

Malone (2011) found that family sacrifices had a greater impact on mothers than did career sacrifices. The participants described having to constantly be on the go, feeling rushed, and not being able to run their households the way they would prefer due to time constraints.

Additional sacrifices with time constraints were associated with not being able to attend their children's extracurricular activities, cooking meals, and working required overtime. Although none of the participants in this study were executives, time constraints appear to be a universal challenge, as noted in James's (2010) study that reported that although financially more self-sufficient, executive women also made sacrifices by choosing to be absent from their children's events. One participant described a similar thought after being required to work overtime and having to sacrifice a day to play with her daughter and the two of them having to run errands instead. Another participant discussed difficulty with not having enough time to get everything done, resulting in an unkempt home. Having to say 'no' was discussed within the idea of the sacrifices that working single mothers have to make on their journeys to attain work-life balance. McKinney and Hillebrand (2015) highlighted the "right to refuse" (p. S168) strategy to be considered when striving to approach the balancing act with care.

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) also discussed insufficient time as the main cause for work-family stress. Their results were consistent with the data from this study. Several participants indicated struggling with whether they spent enough time with their children or if they should be working more to give them a better life. The concept of role overload was also related to this challenge and was supported by this study. The participants gave several examples describing their challenges in making decisions. A participant summed up this theme as she described the position of sacrifice in deciding between providing for her children or making them happy and how these decisions can negatively affect your relationship emphasizing the need for damage control to manage relationships (Edley, 2001).

The need for emotional management was a thread through the sacrifices that these participants encountered. The participants in this study described a range of emotions that

surfaced while striving to balance work and family with frequent challenges of varying degrees

of intensity that may occur on a daily basis. Several of the participants indicated the notion of

"being busy," which, according to Richards (2015), is code for "I'm overwhelmed" (p. 117).

Several of the participants expressed this statement verbatim. Previous studies have found that

women had experienced a sense of loss by the choices they made, resulting in feelings of guilt

and inadequacy in their roles as mothers (Hochschild, 1997; James, 2010; van Steenbergen,

Ellemers, & Mooijaart, 2007). Research has also found that only a little over a third of working

mothers felt that they spent enough their time with their children (Thompson, 2000). Elliott

(1980) also suggested that guilt and a sense of loss would be felt by working mothers. Identical

thoughts along with a host of other emotions were supported by the responses of the participants

in this study. The participants remorsefully described feelings like being emotional, frustrated,

overwhelmed, and stressed.

Robbins and McFadden (2003) found that single mothers who experience high levels of

stress are susceptible to adverse health issues. One of the participants in fact mentioned

temporary hospitalization due to having a nervous breakdown because of the amount of stress in

her life, while others described the compromised health of their children and extended family

members. The experiences highlighted by the participants in this study reiterates the importance

of promoting the overall health of working mothers as it directly relates to the health of their

families (Baruch et al., 1987).

Working single mothers experience multiple challenges requiring them to make sacrifices

in their pursuit of a healthy work-life balance. In this study, the types of work-life challenges

varied from individual to individual; however, the participants highlighted the most common

sacrifices were surrounding financial concerns and time constraints.

**Research Question 3.** How do working single mothers believe their employers' policies, practices, and attitudes impact their ability to balance work and family responsibilities?

One theme with two subthemes emerged from the data and were interpreted to be beliefs that working single mothers have about the impact of employers' policies, practices and attitudes on balancing work and family. The theme is organizational support and includes two subthemes that reflect formal and informal support, that is, organizational care and concern and organizational benefits. The majority of the participants felt that employer support was critical because employers played an important role in their ability to attain work-life balance. McDermott (2010) suggested the need for organizational support, concluding that there was a direct relationship between how employers take care of their employees and their investment profits. Taking care of someone indicates a hands-on approach, which is a defining characteristic of support. If employers take the time to know their employees and understand their situations, that knowledge could be used to inform employers' decision-making processes. Several participants indicated that her employers were cognizant of their life situation and strived to be helpful and supportive.

Michaels (2009) noted that mothers in the workplace lack flexibility in work hours and structure and meaningful part-time employment and also work in a culture with extreme work hour expectations. The deficiency of flexibility rang true for one participant as she described her job's phone policy and the stress it causes her by not being able to step away from the phones without being penalized. Of the four participants who indicated that they had part-time positions to assist them in their work-life balance, only two of them felt that their work was meaningful. Another participant described her reason for working as the means to take care of her son and that her job was not her life.

The absence of female role models and female managers was highlighted as one of the issues for mothers in the workforce (Michael, 2009).  In the present study, however, one participant expressed the opposite experience and indicated that she had the privilege to work for a woman-ran company where most of them were also mothers.  A few of the other participants also spoke positively about the presence of female managers in the workplace as an encouragement for working single mothers striving for work-life balance.  Stone's (2007) study highlighted the reasons women choose to leave their careers and head home; unfortunately, single mothers do not usually have that option.  One participant shared her perspective and desire to be a stay-at-home mom and how disappointed she was with this not being an option in her current situation.

The remaining participants defined their employers' organizational support by using descriptors such as accommodating, understanding, and family-friendly.  Additionally, the participants who believed that their employers had no role in their work-life balance seemed to completely absolve them of the responsibility of human resource development.  According to Heathfield (2016):

> Human Resource Development (HRD) is the framework for helping employees develop their personal and organizational skills, knowledge, and abilities.  Human resource development includes such opportunities as employee training, employee career development, performance management and development, coaching, mentoring, succession planning, key employee identification, tuition assistance, and organization development.  (para 1)

One participant strongly disagreed with this idea, desiring that their employers would see working single mothers as an asset instead of a liability.  The working single mothers who

believed their employers had no role or responsibilities in their attainment of work-life balance shared a strong sense of self-pride and control.  Interestingly enough, when asked about policies and practices, these same women were able to identify benefits they desired, thereby contradicting their opposing views regarding their employers responsibilities.  Although participants offered mixed views regarding organizational support, it appeared to be valued and important to most of the working single mothers in this study.

Fuegen (2010) indicated that, "women value institutions that value employees' goals and their desire to find satisfaction in their work" (p. 147).  The participants in this study all believed that being employed by an organization that supported them was important.  Many of the participants' positive descriptions of their employer backed Fuegen's assertion.  All of the participants also expressed gratitude for their employers' support, and many reflected on previous instances where support was withheld.  Schwanbeck (2006) noted a working mother, disclosing her parental status, felt the disdain from a potential employer while inquiring about his views on family.

Michaels (2009) listed some of the ways that employers can offer support to their employees with "paid leave, flexible hours, job sharing opportunities, or consistent child care arrangements" (p. 318).  Paid leave and flexible hours were enjoyed by some of the participants in this study and were deemed helpful; however, all but one of Michaels' recommendations was listed as a desired form of support.  An inflexible workforce perpetuates the working mothers' inability to achieve work-life balance, as discussed in Ciabattari's (2005) study which indicated that low-income women were mostly affected by a lack of "flexibility at work to handle family needs" (p. 17).  This statement was true for a couple of participants in the study; however, the majority indicated that they had flexibility at work that allowed them to manage their home life.

Several participants highlighted their positive experiences with their employers allowing them to create their own work schedules. One participant, however, had the opposite experience and described her situation of support—or the lack thereof as although she can expect to receive a full paycheck if she has an emergency and doesn't have any PTO she is expected to continue working or receive a write up that may have negative implications on promotions and advancement opportunities. Similar situations have the power to present ongoing challenges for working single mothers.

Edley (2001) discussed the exhaustion of women striving to balance work and family while working two full-time jobs "of paid work and unpaid work, of childrearing and housework," while trying to "have it all" (p. 28). Offering a glimmer of hope from the workplace, several participants articulated their positive experiences with their bosses and feeling supported by them as single mothers. Employers offering this type of support can help ease the tension that some working single mothers endure each day. Several of the study participants described different types of support that they received from their employers, including financial, mental, and emotional. The participants also used similar words to describe feeling understood and supported by their employers, using terms such as loving, kind, flexible, and caring. Organizational support is clearly a tangible entity that employers can offer to assist the working single mother population in their pursuit of work-life balance.

The participants in this study identified several types of benefits that would assist them on their journey to work-life balance. Several of the participants indicated that they wish they had the basics such as health insurance, paid time off, and sick leave, while others expressed the desire to have more of those benefits to sustain them. Others felt taken advantage of by the lack of certain policies that are commonplace for most businesses. Despite their employers' lack of

an overtime pay policy, several of the participants indicated that there was still an expectation to work overtime as needed. Other participants described not being able to earn paid time off due to the complexity of their employers' policies that they believed were not single mother–friendly. These types of flaws in policies and practices may cause employers to lose dedicated workers. McDermott (2010) described a life-cycle approach to work-life balance, encouraging employers to evaluate their practices regularly. Providing appropriate organizational benefits have great potential of lessening working single mothers stress while enhancing their ability to achieve work-life balance.

McDermott (2010) described useful employer benefits through work-life balance commitment including, "powerful recruitment, retention, and talent development tools for all workers" because it just made good business sense (p. 2). Several of the participant's experiences supported this research as they described receiving exceptional benefits from their employers, even as a part-time employee particularly in one of the participant's case. Interestingly, one participant described a company policy that allowed employees to purchase time off at the start of each fiscal year. The implementation of a similar policy by employers may prove to be beneficial to working single mothers, not to mention the potential impact that these businesses may have on the nation's economic prosperity and global competitiveness (McDermott, 2010). The participants also expressed the desire to have mileage reimbursement, after-school transportation, and onsite daycare. Others mentioned the cost of health care and sick time that is separate from paid time off. Surprisingly, two of the participants were unaware of the policies and practices their employers offered. Implementing mandatory new hire orientation may ensure that working single mothers are aware of and understand their employer's policies and benefits.

Many of the identified desired benefits would promote work-life balance but would also offer the element of convenience and lessen the stress on working single mothers. Sensenig (2011) wrote that the future of work-life balance hinged on the idea that, "organizations will have to do more than give lip service to work-life balance if they expect commitment, dedication and increased productivity" (p. 26). Participants expressed agreement with Sensenig's assertions and described feeling that employers should express dedication to their employees' happiness and work-life balance by having policies that reflect their commitment and willingness in support of working single mothers. Sensenig proposed that employers take work-life balance initiatives seriously in order to reap the insurmountable benefits of "happier employees who are retained longer and tend to be more productive over the long term" (p. 25).

Working single mothers believe their employers' policies, practices, and attitudes had an impact on their ability to balance work and family responsibilities. Organizational support through demonstrated care and concern along with sufficient benefits proved to have a positive impact on the work-life balance of the majority of the working single mothers in this study. The researcher highlighted the negative and positive implications for practice that could potentially affect employers in the following section.

<p align="center">**Implications for Practice**</p>

Throughout this study, the suggested roles and responsibilities of the employer have been revealed, resulting in both positive and negative implications. Additional work-life balance solutions have been outlined to further assist working single mothers in their pursuit of work-life balance. Findings suggested three areas of importance: employer gains, employer losses, and work-life balance policies.

**Employer Gains**

Employers committed to creating a family-friendly work environment strategically position their organizations to experience a variety of positive gains (Sensenig, 2011). Inviting and welcoming single mothers while valuing their contributions to the company may result in gains that will have a positive effect on the overall success of an organization. Some of those gains may include low absenteeism, low turnover, and decreased costs for recruitment and training, resulting in an overall increase in the level of employee productivity (McDermott, 2010). These positive gains can also increase the return on the employers' investment. It may also impact the level of engagement, commitment, and morale of employees, especially single mothers. Companies may seek to employ single mothers due to their responsibility and commitment to their children, making them potential outstanding employees (Mattock, 2015).

**Employer Losses**

Another implication of this study relates to the potential human capital losses that employers may experience, such as employee turnover and a low-skilled applicant pool (Robbins & McFadden, 2003). High employee turnover may be due to low wages that make it difficult for working single mothers to provide for their families. Qualified candidates who are also single mothers may choose to work for a different company due to a particular employer's lack of work-life balance initiatives. These types of losses can result in financial implications for a company and ruin its brand or reputation. Rebuilding and rebranding an organization may result in a massive amount of time, energy, and money (McDermott, 2010). All of the previously discussed gains could easily be converted into losses for companies that are not dedicated to supporting the work-life balance of their employees.

**Work-Life Balance Policies**

Several solutions are available for creating a family-friendly work environment; however, these must be initiated by company policy and practice. Organizations committed to the belief that policies inform practice will ensure that their values align with their actions (Sensenig, 2011). This will result in inclusive policies that promote work-life balance. These employers often research workforce trends to understand their employees and conduct regular needs assessments, policy reviews, and policy revisions as necessary. Some of the offerings that may be considered to promote work-life balance are flexible schedules, job sharing, and remote online positions (Michaels, 2009). Other health-related benefits that companies should consider include customizable benefits packages such as vacation time, sick leave, and medical leave.

Employers may also offer internal advancement training programs that develop career pathways within an organization, promoting personal growth by learning new skills. These types of initiatives display a level of value and care to employees. They also encourage employees to become lifelong learners who can enhance their overall quality of life. Last, employers should consider offering professional development opportunities, such as certifications, conferences, trainings, education benefits, and tuition reimbursement to support working single mothers.

Overall, these solutions have the potential to result in additional employer gains through employee satisfaction (Fuegen, 2010). In addition, these programs will provide opportunities that may enhance the experiences of single mothers in the workplace. The following section discusses the researcher's concluding thoughts and this study's contributions to the field.

<div align="center">

**Conclusions**

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The purpose of this study was to explore working single mothers' work-life balance in order to better understand how employers can assist them. It examined the narratives of 10

single mothers juggling the responsibilities of managing a home, childrearing, and work. The interviews allowed the working single mothers to describe how they experienced work-life balance in their daily lives along with the challenges they experienced. The women were also able to explain the felt roles and responsibilities of their employers. The data collected answered the research questions and revealed these working single mothers' approach and strategies to achieve work-life balance, the types of challenges they encountered, and the formal and informal roles and responsibilities that they believed their employers had in their work-life balance attainment. The practical goals of this study were to confirm and discover challenges that single mothers encountered, to gain insight for potential employer policies and programs, and to explore working single mothers' approaches and self-perceptions of achieving work-life balance. The study also sought to identify the significance of the employer's role in addressing the needs of working single mothers and the workplace support resources that would benefit them in their pursuit of achieving a balanced work and home life.

The study builds upon previous research related to work-life balance among women, in this study of working single mothers. The consistency of its findings revealed a continued need for support. Despite all the so-called 'advances' for women, this study's significance hinges on the fact that we are still hearing the same things that researchers have heard for years. This notwithstanding the voices of the working single mothers in this study needed to be heard to reiterate the need to rectify the financial concerns hindering their ability to attain economic self-sufficiency. Addressing financial concerns could alleviate several of the other challenges discussed. For example, an economically self-sufficient working single mother could outsource time-consuming household chores and errands, and that would free her up from previously mentioned time constraints. It would also allow her to attend school functions eliminating the

difficulty of the sacrificial decision-making process and the emotional guilt felt from disappointing her child. The direct attention and action by national and state policy makers responsible for ensuring fair and livable wages for the working single mother population can demolish the challenges identified by this study. Employers may address the financial concerns through offering pay incentives and benefits that coincide with the demographic changes within the labor force.

In addition, the majority of the participants collectively defined their work-life balance approach as subconsciously fulfilling the primary role and responsibility of being a single parent. The participants did not deliberately focus on strategies through a work-life balance perspective; however, their approach was their "norm" of doing what was necessary. The self-perception of these participants was that of determination, motivation, and dedication. Their positive attitude exuded strength and resilience, which seemed to be a trend among the working single mothers in this study. The researcher believes that the attitude these women demonstrated contributed to their ability to successfully function as single mothers. Strategies such as life management systems, support, and self-care were universal among all employed individuals; however, the study revealed that the necessity was heightened for the working single mother population. Therefore, special attention should be given to ensure that future employees are equipped with work-life balance strategies, whether they are currently or may become a single parent as a result of divorce, separation, or loss.

The role expectations of the employer, although important, did not seem to be the key to addressing working single mothers' needs; their identified purpose was completely embedded in their role as "mother." However, as a result of this study, employers can be equipped with tangible information that can be implemented to assist working single mothers, such as

affordable health care and adequate sick and paid time off.  Employers should also be cognizant of the potential benefits from making favorable revisions to their current policies and program offerings for working single mothers.  Their investment may be returned in the form of strengthened employee relations, reduced recruitment and training costs, and overall increased productivity.  Mattock's (2015) notion is that leaders should be an example to those they lead and encourage work-life balance as something that "You owe it to yourself. . . After all, you are your own greatest and longest commitment" (p. 307).  If every employer adopted this philosophy, every member of the organization would function more efficiently as a team.  The significance of this study compels employers to go beyond addressing the needs of working single mothers but to invest in them as the dedicated asset they are due to their primary role of mother.

In summary, the results of this study may offer encouragement and strategies to single mothers who are in the midst of their struggles of how to balance work and family life.  The concluding information in this study may also contribute valuable data to inform employer policy formation and work-life balance initiatives.

## Recommendations for Future Research

This study attempted to highlight the roles and responsibilities that working single mothers believed that their employers had in their ability to achieve work-life balance.  In addition, this study also focused on how working single mothers balanced their work and family lives and identified the challenges they contend with in the process.  Although this study represents a start for developing a deeper understanding of the work-life balance of the working single mother population, more research is necessary.  Further investigation will enrich what we know about this population and will serve to improve how we support them in the workplace.

First, a comparative analysis study of working single mothers from Generation X (1965–76), Generation Y/Millennials (1977–95), and Generation Z/Post-Millennials (1996–early 2000s) could be conducted, thereby discovering their understanding and approach to work-life balance and the evolution of how the roles of mother and employee are actualized from one generation to another. A longitudinal study could be conducted by following a group of newly working single mothers over a period of time, perhaps checking in with them at three different stages of their lives. This type of study may yield a perspective that moment-in-time research could not achieve.

Second, repeating this study with working single fathers may help to understand their approach to work-life balance, the challenges they encounter, and the perceived roles and responsibilities of the employer. These two studies could be compared to identify their similarities and differences, homing in on issues of gender, the wage gap, and outsourcing domestic work. Another related study could examine the organizational support and advancement opportunities that single fathers receive in comparison to single mothers.

Third, additional research could be done to understand treatment of single mothers in the workforce (standard treatment versus specialized treatment). How do they want to be treated? Do they want to be treated differently? An interesting study might be to research the experiences of single mothers regarding treatment in the workplace through the intersectionality of race, for example, Black and White single mothers. Another related study could explore the perceptions of single mothers in mid- to senior-level positions in corporate America. Does disclosing their marital and parental status have an impact on their career development, growth, and success? The purpose of the study is to understand the reason behind their decisions and how upper management perceives single mothers and their access to advancement opportunities.

Fourth, a comparative analysis of working single mothers and married mothers may help to understand the differences and similarities in their approach to work-life balance, the challenges they encounter, and the perceived roles and responsibilities of the employer. The study may discover the impact that marital status, household income, and shared domestic and parental responsibility have on work-life balance attainment.

Finally, research could be conducted with employers to reveal whether or not work-life balance attainment is valued at their organizations. Are there initiatives available? How do workforce trends inform company policy? Understanding the process of how these initiatives are developed and implemented may be useful. This study uncovered the need for employers to consider creating customizable benefits packages, disassociating from the outdated universal model. Another related study might simply investigate the role that employers believe they have in the work-life balance of their employees.

## Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations are offered for organizations that employ working single mothers: (a) develop affinity groups for support in the workplace, (b) organizational policy and practice awareness, and (c) develop and promote wellness programs.

### Affinity Groups

The majority of the working single mothers' from this study indicated a constant need for support including in the workplace. Employers may address this concern through the development of affinity groups that provide that additional support. Affinity groups aim "to enhance the workplace, to support diversity and inclusion, to strengthen organizational culture and to support personal and professional development" (Meeth, 2015, para 6). Acknowledging the reality that these women spend the majority of their daily hour allotment at work there would

be a number of positive effects from working single mother participation in affinity groups. In addition, Meeth (2015) suggests that these groups may "play a key role in recruitment, mentoring, networking, career development, workplace inclusion, retention, and community involvement" (para 7). This approach would also recognize single mothers in the workplace, which is considered a marginalized group. In addition, mentorship or sponsorship type voluntary programs may developed within the organization for single parents to connect with a mentors or sponsor who are also single parents to share best practices, etc. (Karosas and Myrick, 2013). This group may explore the best practices in the workplace that benefit their populations and provide a means of support for one another during their work hours. The affinity group could provide a platform to customize individual development plans for single parents taking into account their unique situation and allow for training classes with education opportunities that are available during work hours.

**Organizational Policies and Practices**

The majority of the participants in this study was more interested in benefits; however, due to their lack of knowledge regarding policies emphasized the necessity for education and awareness. Organizational policies and practices aimed at awareness for both employers and single parents (Mather 2010). Developing training or awareness classes specific to managers to increase their understanding of the impact and the ways they can support their individual development. Organizations would benefit by understanding the complexities that working single mothers encounter and the supports crucial for their overall workplace success. Identifying the needs of working single mothers will inform policies that influence their professional development and success while promoting work-life balance. In addition, it would be beneficial to equip working single mothers with skills to conduct self-assessments not to

receive preferential treatment but to clearly articulate their needs for professional development and advancement opportunities in the workplace (Robbins & McFadden, 2003).

**Wellness Programs**

The majority of the participants in the study indicated the importance of self-care and employer support as main factors in achieving work-life balance.  Therefore, to transfer learning from research to practice employers may develop wellness programs to promote health among the working single mother population.  There are approaches that an employer may seek to address the needs of working single mothers.  Flextime may be an option allowing an additional 30 minutes to engage in exercise or other approved stress reducing activities (Fuegen, 2010). The employer may also consider offering these programs during work hours, specifically for single parents to promote physical and mental wellness.  Activities may include yoga, meditation, or access to an onsite workout facility or a discounted rate through a partnership with a local facility.  Attention to the health of working single mothers will also promote healthy families (Baruch et al., 1987).  This approach will also ensure lasting benefits beyond the single mother population but the organization as a whole (Mattock, 2015).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Basic Demographic Information

Participant ID# _____

1. What is your age?
   18–24
   25–34
   35–44
   45–54
   55–64

2. What is the grade level you have completed?
   Less than high school degree
   High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
   Some college but no degree
   Associate Degree
   Bachelor Degree
   Graduate Degree

3. What is your approximate average household income?
   $0-$24,999
   $25,000 - $49,999
   $50,000 - $74,999
   $75,000 - $99,999
   $100,000-$124,999
   $125,000-$149,999
   $150,000-$174,999

4. What is your marital status?
   Single, Never Married
   Divorced
   Widowed
   Separated

5. How many children do you have? (<u>Include ages</u>)

        One _____

        Two _____

        Three _____

        Four _____

        Five or more _____

6. Which race/ethnicity best describes you? (Please choose only one.)

        American Indian or Alaskan Native

        Asian/Pacific Islander

        Black or African American

        White/Caucasian

        Bi-racial or Multi-racial (please specify):_____

7. On average, how many hours do you work per week? _____

        20–30 hours

        31–40 hours

        41–50 hours

        51–60 hours

8. Does your employee classify you as part-time or full-time? _____

        Part-time

        Full-time

9. Do you live with anyone other than your children?

        Yes

        No

If so, with whom? _____

10. Do you have family members that live within 30–50 miles?

        Yes

        No

If not, within how many miles? _____

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

Participant ID# _____

***Research Question 1: In what ways do working single mothers strive to attain work-life balance?***

a.  Describe the way in which work-life balance comes into play in your daily life.

    i.    Describe what a typical day looks like for you.  Please include details from both work and home life.

    ii.    What does balance look like in your work and family life?

    iii.    When do you feel balanced in your work and family life?  Describe the feelings you have when you feel balanced.

b.  How is your daily decision-making impacted when striving to balance your work and family responsibilities?  Please provide specific examples/details.

c.  What has helped you balance your work and family responsibilities?  Please provide specific examples/details.

    i.    What strategies have you used?

    ii.    What type of rejuvenating methods do you use?

    iii.    Who is your support system?  What role do they play in your life?

    iv.    What other resources do you utilize to help you achieve work-life balance

*Research Question 2*: *What challenges do working single mothers encounter that affect their ability to obtain work-life balance?*

a. What are some of the challenges that you face with balancing family and work-life?

    i. How are these challenges experienced? Please provide specific examples/details.

    ii. How are the challenges felt and understood?

b. How often do you encounter these challenges?

c. How do these challenges typically arise? Do they occur from work and/or home life responsibilities?

    i. Describe the intensity of these challenges that arise from work and/or home life responsibilities.

*Research Question 3*: *How do working single mothers believe their employers' policies, practices, and attitudes impact their ability to balance work and family responsibilities?*

a. Does your employer impact your ability to balance family and work? If so, in what ways?

    i. What role do you believe your employer has in your ability to balance family and work?

    ii. How do you handle working overtime and/or bringing work home

      iii.    How does your employer respond to sick days or other absences for child-related reasons?

      iv.    How does your employer's attitude impact your ability to attain work-life balance?

b. What policies, practices, and/or attitudes does your employer have that help you attain work-life balance?

      i.    Have you taken advantage of the policies and/or practices available to you? If so, which ones and how helpful have they been as you strive to achieve work-life balance? Did you encounter any difficulty in taking advantage of your employer's policies and/or practices? If so, please explain.

      ii.    If you have not taken advantage of any of the policies and/or practices available to you, why do think that is?

c. What policies, practices, and/or attitudes does your employer have or not have that hinder your ability to attain work-life balance? Please provide specific examples/details.

d. If offered by your employer, what types of policies, practices, and/or attitudes do you feel would be helpful to you?

      i.    How often do you think you would need to utilize these policies and/or practices?

APPENDIX C

E-mail participation request


From: Casheena Stephens

Subject: Research Request

Dear _____,


My name is Casheena Stephens, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of

Workforce Education and Development at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.  Your e-mail

address was obtained (from the database at your university / referring participants) because I am

recruiting working single mothers to participate in an interview-based study about the family and

work-life of working single mothers.  I am interested in interviewing women who are at least 18,

single, work at least 20 hours per week, and/or attend school full- or part-time, and have at least

one child in the home full-time under the age of 18.  The interview will take approximately one

hour to complete.

All of your responses and identity will be kept confidential.  At the beginning of the

project, you will be assigned a 5 digit ID number connecting your identity and responses for ease

during data analysis and reporting.  Your name will not be used allowing your identity to remain

anonymous.  At the completion of the study, the code list will be kept for 90 days and then

destroyed.  Only individuals directly involved with this project will have access to the interview

response.

If you are interested in participating in an interview for this study, please contact me via e-mail at sheoc1@siu.edu. Participation in this study is voluntary. However, participants will be entered into a drawing for a $25 Walmart gift card for their participation. The gift card will be awarded to the winner at the conclusion of the interview process.

Thank you for considering serving as a participant to assist me in this research. You may opt out of receiving future e-mails by contacting me at sheoc1@siu.edu. Please put Opt out on the subject line. Questions or concerns about this study may be directed to Casheena Stephens, sheoc1@siu.edu or my advisor, Dr. Cynthia Sims, Associate Professor in the Department of Workforce Education and Development, Pulliam Hall Room 215D, csims@siu.edu.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL. 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail: siuhsc@siu.edu

APPENDIX D

Consent Form

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project conducted by Casheena Stephens, <u>Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Workforce Education and Development</u>.

I understand that the purpose of this study <u>is to gain a deeper understanding of the lives of working single mothers.</u>

I understand my participation is strictly voluntary and may refuse to answer any question without penalty. I am also informed that my participation will last approximately <u>60 minutes</u>.

I understand that I will be assigned a 5-digit participant ID number that will connect my identity to my data that will be kept in a locked file cabinet and discarded after 90 days.

I understand that my audible responses to the questions will be digitally recorded, and that these recordings will be transcribed/stored and kept for 90 days in a locked file cabinet. Afterward, these recordings will be destroyed.

I understand that I will be entered into a drawing for a $25 Walmart gift card that will be awarded to the winner at the conclusion of the interview process.

I understand questions or concerns about this study are to be directed to <u>Casheena Stephens, sheoc1@siu.edu or my advisor, Dr. Cynthia Sims, Associate Professor in the</u>

Department of Workforce Education and Development, Pulliam Hall Room 215D, csims@siu.edu.

I have read the information above, and all questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity.  I understand a copy of this form will be made available to me with the relevant information and phone numbers.

I agree _____ I disagree _____ to have my audible responses digitally recorded.

I agree _____ I disagree _____ that Casheena Stephens may quote me anonymously in her paper.


_____                        _____

Participant Signature                                                  Date


This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL. 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail: siuhsc@siu.edu.




Assigned Participant ID # _____

APPENDIX E

Interview Participants Information

| Participant | Marital Status | Geographic Location | Recruitment Tool |
|---|---|---|---|
| Vivian | Single, Never Married | Northern Illinois | Flyer |
| Veronica | Single, Never Married | Southern Illinois | Non-Traditional Programs |
| Zion | Single, Never Married | Southern Illinois | Facebook |
| Patricia | Divorced | Southern Illinois | Facebook |
| Michelle | Single, Never Married | Texas | Facebook |
| Heidi | Single, Never Married | Southern Illinois | Facebook |
| Pam | Widow | Southern Illinois | Flyer |
| Sydney | Divorced | Southern Illinois | Facebook |
| Gloria | Separated | Southern Illinois | Flyer |
| Gina | Single, Never Married | Texas | Facebook |

APPENDIX F

Advice for Single Mothers

Balancing family and work as a single mother is possible, but it's going to come with a lot of dedication and hard work. You're going to have a lot of sleepless nights, but it's possible. The following quotes have been arranged by topic, highlighting words of encouragement from the working single mothers of this study to other single mothers.

Faith

Jesus needs to be your foundation if you're going to make it.

You have to have faith.

My church family is a huge part of my life.

Attitude

Stay positive!

Patience, it does get better eventually.

Don't let your pride get in the way.

It's not going to be easy, but it comes with a lot of sacrifice.

You can do it!

You can get through it!

Priority

Don't ever get so busy making a living that you forget to make a life.

Do what's best for you to take care of your kids or your family, whatever the situation is.

Having that time with your child is more important than expensive stuff.

Help others.

Support

You have to have the right people in your corner.

You just need the right people in your life to encourage you and just tell you that you can do it.

Find reliable people whom you can trust; they don't have to be family members.

Have other individuals around you who are willing to help, because it takes a village raise a

child.

Have a network of support; it's very hard without one.

It's definitely hard, and I couldn't imagine it without the support system or local family.

Have individuals whom you can trust to help raise your child.

Self-care

Find things that you enjoy that rejuvenate you to keep yourself going.

Have your own identity outside of your child.

Kids will make you crazy; lock yourself in the bathroom and breathe deep

VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University

Casheena A. Stephens

sheoc1@siu.edu

Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Bachelor of Science, Biological Sciences, May 2004

Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Master of Science in Education, Workforce Education and Development, December 2009

Dissertation Title:
      Women & work-life balance: A narrative inquiry of working single mothers balancing family and work

Major Professor: Cynthia Sims

Publications:

Stephens, C. (2016). Stopping the bleed: Retaining and preparing first year students for college transition and academic success. *35th Annual Research-to-Practice Conference (R2P) in Adult and Higher Education*, Albuquerque, NM, November 7–8, 2016.

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Stephens, C. (2010, Spring). The potential barriers to adult GED transition. *Online Journal of Workforce Education and Development, 4*(2), 1–25.