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# AN EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERS IN DUAL- CAREER FAMILIES

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Andrea Darlene Marable entitled "AN EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERS IN DUAL-CAREER FAMILIES." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Child and Family Studies.

Priscilla Blanton, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Mary Jane Moran, Julia Malia, Sandra Thomas

Accepted for the Council:

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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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**AN EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE LIVED  
EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERS IN DUAL-CAREER FAMILIES**

A Dissertation  
Presented for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Andrea Darlene Marable  
August 2011

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation project is dedicated to my parents, Eddie and Tina Marable, and my sister, Beth Blevins. Your unwavering love, support, and encouragement kept me going on those days when I could not see the light at the end of the tunnel. Thank you for all you have done to help me accomplish my goal!

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I must thank the director of the University of Tennessee Early Learning Center for Research and Practice, Dr. Sean Durham, for his willingness to allow me to utilize the center in soliciting participants for my research project. I was overwhelmed by the number of mothers who agreed to participate in the study, and I want to thank everyone who volunteered to participate. Most importantly, I want to thank all 10 study participants. All the mothers I spoke with were so gracious, inviting me into their homes

and lives. I must thank them for taking time out of their busy day to speak with me about an issue I find important, as well as for their honesty and candid descriptions of their experiences. I am forever grateful to them for helping to make this project a success.

I must thank as well my friends and co-workers for their encouragement and support. I want to thank them for their kind words of comfort on days when I felt like giving up, as well as their reassurances that I would, indeed, graduate. I must say thank you as well to the children I work with on a daily basis who make me laugh and bring a great deal of joy to my life, so to Michael, Simone, Francisco, Lily, Catherine, Max, Jalen, and Lucy, I want to say thank you for being you!

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of mothers living in dual-career families. Using existential phenomenology as the guiding research methodology, I interviewed 10 mothers living in dual-career families. Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed four themes that stood out as figural for participants in the study: (a) “Free time isn’t really free anymore”: Timing is Everything; (b) “It’s because of the support I get”: Supporting Me; (c) “I feel like I’m lacking in one area all the time, just a little bit”: Struggling to Find a Balance; and (d) “I know how I would do things”: Knowing Myself. Each theme stood out against the ground of world, specifically the two worlds of home and work and the struggle that existed in integrating the two.

Study findings revealed that the two primary struggles faced by these mothers living in dual-career families were those associated with balancing and time. A limited amount of time necessitated a need to try to balance work and home, a balance that was not easily achieved. Mothers perceived support networks and certain personality characteristics as helpful in balancing the two worlds (although personality characteristics were perceived as disadvantageous at times). Although challenges existed for these mothers, they noted overwhelmingly that they desired to have a career. These mothers saw their careers as one of the primary benefits of the dual-career lifestyle, and it was a lifestyle they willingly chose.

Two findings from the study warrant future research. First, supportive others in the community were an integral part of the support network for mothers in the present

study, and little empirical literature is dedicated to the impact of this type of support on the dual-career family. Second, participants perceived certain personality characteristics as either advantageous or disadvantageous in helping them navigate the dual-career lifestyle, and little empirical literature is dedicated to denoting the impact of individual personality characteristics on managing the dual-career lifestyle. It would behoove family scholars to be aware of these two unique aspects of the study.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

One need conduct only a quick search of the Internet to find a plethora of information dedicated to mothers who are part of dual-career families (hereafter referred to as *dual-career mothers*) and their impact on the contemporary American family. Articles dedicated to providing information about this particular population of mothers range from those intended to help mothers balance their busy lives (e.g., Picker, 2005) to those discussing the emotional issues these mothers face (e.g., Lucca, 2008). Additionally, articles and books abound that are dedicated to discussing the ever-changing American family (e.g., Elmer-Dewitt, Brown, & Donley, 1990) and the impact these changes have on both the family unit and society at large (e.g., Coontz, 1997). Because such a large volume of literature exists related to the topic of dual-career mothers and their impact on contemporary American family life, it is quite easy to become overwhelmed in a search for information related to the daily, lived experiences of these mothers. What do they experience in their daily lives? It was my hope that through this research project I would be able to gain a greater understanding of the lived experiences of a small sample of dual-career mothers and share a glimpse into their world.

### *Rationale*

Primarily, I chose to study the experiences of dual-career mothers because I have a personal interest in the topic, having worked with these mothers for several years. In addition to this reasoning, I noticed as well that much empirical literature has been

dedicated to this population of mothers, and I hoped the findings from my study would allow me to expound on said literature.

*Personal interest.* For 7 years I have been employed at the University of Tennessee Early Learning Center for Research and Practice, a center dedicated to providing exemplary early childhood education programs for children 6 weeks through 5 years of age. My position at the Early Learning Center has afforded me the opportunity to work with a variety of age groups, including infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and each age group has taught me something new and exciting about a specific stage of child development. In addition, I have learned a great deal about working effectively with parents, especially mothers, and it was through my interactions with many of them that I became interested in studying their lived experiences.

The majority of mothers who place their child in care at the Early Learning Center are mothers who have careers outside the home. These mothers seem to me to be strong and confident, truly having it all. I have observed the great love these mothers have for their children and their willingness to protect and defend them at all costs. The mothers for whom I work are diligent in asking questions about their children, including how they have fared during the day and what important or exciting activities have taken place. Once I began babysitting for several of these mothers' children, I learned how committed the mothers were to their work as well. They seemed passionate about their careers, truly seeming to enjoy their work. I wondered how these mothers managed to balance both their work and family life and what challenges they might be facing that I was unaware existed for them.

As I began thinking through the characteristics of the mothers for whom I worked, I began to narrow my topic considerably. I noted that each mother with whom I had a personal relationship had both a professional career and a preschool-aged child. Also, I noted that a few of the mothers with whom I worked had delayed having their first child because they were either finishing their education or establishing themselves in their careers. Thus, the focus of my dissertation work became studying the lived experiences of dual-career mothers who (a) are parenting a preschool-aged child and (b) have chosen to delay having their first child until the decade of their 30s. Because I was interested in each mother's lived experience, I chose phenomenology as my research methodology. In describing procedural aspects of phenomenological research, Creswell (2007) noted that a research project best suited for utilization of phenomenology is one in which the author seeks to understand "common experiences in order to develop practices or policies, or to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon" (p. 60). As I began searching the empirical literature dedicated to the study of dual-career mothers, I found no studies in which phenomenology had been chosen as the research methodology. There were certainly studies in which other qualitative methodologies were utilized, but I was interested specifically in phenomenology. Thus, it was my hope that this research project would expand the family science literature by exposing audiences to information concerning the daily, lived experiences of dual-career mothers.

*Introduction to empirical literature.* The number of women participating in the labor force increased dramatically in the second half of the 20th century (Coontz, 1997; Spain & Bianchi, 1996), with the most dramatic increase evidenced in the number of

mothers, especially mothers of young children, entering the world of paid work (Fischer & Hout, 2005; Hochschild, 2003). As women expanded their sphere from the home to include the workplace, changes occurred within the family system, and questions surrounding issues such as child care (Benin & Chong, 1993) and division of household responsibilities (Perry-Jenkins, 1993) arose. Who should care for the children? Should husbands take on more household responsibilities? A body of literature soon emerged dedicated to better understanding the working woman and her family and how the above questions were being addressed.

Authors whose work focuses on the topic of working women and their families use a distinct terminology when referring to this family type. Some authors (Barnett & Rivers, 1996) use the term *dual-earner* family to denote a family in which both the man and woman work outside the home, while other authors (Hochschild, 1997) use the term *two-job* family to denote the same family type. However, some authors (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1976; Schneider & Waite, 2005) focus solely on a similar, yet differentiated, family type referred to as the *dual-career* family. According to Rapoport and Rapoport (1976), a dual-career family is one in which “both heads of household—the husband and the wife—pursue active careers and family lives” (p. 9). They went on to define the term *career* as “those types of job sequences that require a high degree of commitment and that have a continuous developmental character” (p. 9). Arguably, members of dual-career families are members of dual-earner families as well, in that both the husband and wife earn income for the family. Therefore, for purposes of this dissertation project, the term *dual-work* family will be used to differentiate those families in which both the

husband and wife work outside the home but do not have professional careers, from *dual-career* families, those families in which both the husband and wife work outside the home and do have professional careers.

Women involved in dual-career families possess certain characteristics that distinguish them from women involved in dual-work families, including their level of education and dedication to a career (Weitzman & Fitzgerald, 1993). Another characteristic that is evidenced in dual-career women in particular is that often they choose to delay childbearing, in part to become established in their careers (Soloway & Smith, 1987; Spain & Bianchi, 1996).

According to Martin et al. (2009), the birth rate for women aged 30-34 years in 2006 was 97.7 births per 1,000 women, the highest rate recorded in 4 decades. Additionally, the birth rate for this age group of women has risen 21% since 1990. The birth rate for women aged 35-39 years (47.3 births per 1,000 women in 2006) has increased 50% since 1990, with an increase in birth rate evidenced each year since 1978. Spain and Bianchi (1996) noted the same trend and reported that in 1992 the birth rate for women aged 30-34 years was 80.2 births per 1,000 women, while in 1980 that figure had been 61.9 births per 1,000 women. The birth rate for women aged 35-39 years was 32.5 births per 1,000 women in 1992, compared with 19.8 births per 1,000 women in 1980.

The increase in birth rate among women in their 30s may be attributable to several factors, among them a woman's educational level and income (Weeden, Abrams, Green, & Sabini, 2006). However, although women may choose to delay childbearing, the fact remains that many women will choose to become mothers at some point in their lives

and, as evidenced above, will likely be active participants in the labor force as well. As women choose to delay childbearing, an increasing number find themselves both actively pursuing a career and parenting a young child.

According to the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009), approximately 71% of mothers with children under the age of 18 years participated in the labor force in 2008, and the percentage of mothers with children under the age of 6 years who participated in the labor force during this same year was only slightly lower at 64%. In comparison, approximately 50% of mothers with children under the age of 18 years had participated in the labor force in 1965, and approximately 57% had done so in 1970 (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006). As is evident from the percentages noted above, there has been a steady increase in the percentage of mothers participating in the labor force since the 1960s, a trend one author referred to as “one of the largest social changes in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Halpern, 2005, p. 398).

### *Purpose*

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of dual-career mothers who are parenting a preschool-aged child and who have chosen to delay childbearing until the decade of their 30s. Using existential phenomenology as the guiding research methodology, I sought to gain insight into each mother’s world through the use of “dialogic interviewing procedures and thematic interpretations” (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 44). My goal was to capture a rich, thick description of the essence of each mother’s lived experience and adequately document what I learned.

### *Research Question*

I was interested in learning more about the daily, lived experiences of mothers in dual-career families and the meanings that emerged from those experiences. Therefore, the research question for the present study became, “What meanings emerge from the day-to-day experiences of dual-career mothers?”

### *Nominal Definitions*

*Dual-career mother.* For purposes of this research project, the term *dual-career mother* was defined as a mother who is part of a *dual-career family*. A dual-career family is defined as a “family structure in which both heads of household—the husband and the wife—pursue active careers and family lives” (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1976, p. 9).

*Delayed childbearing.* The term *delayed childbearing* has been used loosely by many researchers to refer to the increasing number of women who have given birth to their first child in the decade of their 30s (Maheshawri, Porter, Shetty, & Bhattacharya, 2008; Weeden, Abrams, Green, & Sabini, 2006; Wu & Macneill, 2002). The United States Census Bureau (Dye, 2008) organized the ages for a woman’s fertility as follows: (a) 15-19 years, (b) 20-24 years, (c) 25-29 years, (d) 30-34 years, (e) 35-39 years, and (f) 40-44 years. Taking into account the very loose definition of the term and the division of ages used to denote a woman’s fertility by the United States Census Bureau, the term *delayed childbearing* was used to denote a woman who gives birth to her first child at or after the age of 30 years.

*Preschool-aged child.* According to *Webster’s College Dictionary and Thesaurus* (2005), the term *preschool* is defined as “of or for a child between infancy and school

age” (p. 293). In examining information regarding the employment status of women by age of the youngest child in the household, I noted that the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008) divided ages of children as follows: (a) under 18 years old, (b) 6-17 years old, (c) under 6 years old, (d) under 3 years old, and (e) no children under 18 years old. Taking into account the definition of the term *preschool* as well as the division of ages denoted by the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, the term *preschool-aged child* was defined as a child who is 6 years of age or younger and who has not yet begun elementary school.

### *Summary*

The labor force participation rate for women, especially mothers of young children, has increased dramatically over the past half century, with some women choosing to delay childbearing in order to advance their careers. However, although there may be a delay in childbearing for some women, the fact remains that many will choose to have children at some point in their lives and will therefore find themselves both working and parenting simultaneously. By using existential phenomenology as the guiding research methodology, it was my hope that through this research project I would be able to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of a small number of dual-career mothers.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of the family science literature regarding mothers who are part of dual-career families revealed a plethora of information surrounding the challenges these mothers face. However, there was literature too that demonstrated the rewards and benefits these mothers obtain from their chosen lifestyle. This chapter begins with a brief look at the history of women's participation in the labor market, moves to an overview of the recent trend in delayed childbearing, and concludes with a review of both the challenges and rewards of the dual-career lifestyle.

### *History of Women's Labor Force Participation*

Women have always worked--a brief, but true, statement echoed by authors such as Stephanie Coontz (1997) and Sherylle Tan (2008). Although the number of women entering the world of paid work accelerated in the second half of the 20th century (Spain & Bianchi, 1996), women were not absent from the world of work prior to this time. Throughout history, women have been involved in the economic realities of family life, an involvement that continues in today's dual-career family.

Women living in early hunting and gathering societies were involved deeply in all aspects of family life, helping to provide for their families' economic well-being. Coontz (1997), in her detailed history of women's labor force participation, noted that in early agrarian societies women worked alongside men to provide for the family through participation in activities such as tending crops and hunting animals. At this time, according to Coontz (1997), "Responsibility for family life and responsibility for breadwinning were not two different, specialized jobs" (p. 55). It was not until the

Industrial Revolution in the early 1800s that the specialization of work emerged and a distinction arose between caring for the family at home and caring for the family economically through paid work (Coontz, 1997).

As our society progressed from primarily agrarian to primarily industrial, men (and children) left the family homestead to work in factories in the cities, leaving women home to care for the smallest children and oversee household responsibilities (Tan, 2008). However, this is not to say that women were not a viable part of the working world at this time. During the 1920s, there was a resurgence of women into the working world as office jobs became plentiful (Coontz, 1997), and during the World War II era, women were encouraged to join the paid labor force to help manufacture products needed for the war effort (Barnett & Rivers, 1996). Once the war ended, however, women were encouraged to return to the home, in part so that jobs would be available to returning war veterans (Coontz, 1997). It was during this period, the post-World War II era (the decade of the 1950s), that there was a resurgence of what has been called the *traditional family*, a family form in which the man is the breadwinner and the woman stays home to care for the children and manage other household responsibilities (Coontz & Parson, 1997). Idealized by many as the golden age of family life, this period in history was fraught with problems of its own and, in the end, was relatively short-lived (Barnett & Rivers, 1996).

The decades of the 1960s and 1970s were a time of political and social upheaval, and it was during this time that the Women's Liberation Movement gained momentum. Of course, women were fighting for equality and liberation prior to this time, but incidents such as the famous bra-burning event that took place on September 7, 1968,

brought an increased awareness of women's issues to the American public. This event, in which women did not actually burn their bras but rather discarded them (along with other items thought to oppress women), was intended to spotlight the fact that women were being treated as sex objects. It was during this time as well that prominent women's organizations, such as NOW (the National Organization for Women), were established and gained strength (Berkeley, 1999). Further, this time in American history saw the publication of such books as *The Feminine Mystique*, a book in which author Betty Friedan (1963) spoke about the plight of American women living in the 1960s. Friedan wrote specifically about "the problem that has no name" (p. 15), a problem in which women who were told they should be satisfied as mothers and housewives often were not. Many of the women Friedan interviewed for the book spoke about feeling desperate and dissatisfied with their lives, many stating they wanted more from life. With such attention apportioned to women's issues during this time in American history, it is no surprise that during these decades, especially the 1970s, there was once again an influx of women into the paid labor force.

Although the Women's Liberation Movement certainly played a part in encouraging women to enter the world of paid work, the economic realities of family life were pertinent to the transition as well. As wages for men fell in the early 1970s, income from women was needed to help support the family. During this time, a larger proportion of mothers returned to the world of paid work because, as with women in general, their income was needed to provide extra support for the family. Many mothers worked to "help the family build a nest egg, often to send their children to college, and to help with

the rising cost of household expenses” (Tan, 2008, p. 12). This trend of increased participation in the labor force by women continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with women entering the world of paid work in the 1980s “at a rate that far exceeded the country’s overall population growth” (Spain & Bianchi, 1996, p. 79). This trend continues to be evidenced after 2000 with approximately 59% of women employed in 2004, up 16% over the prior 24 years (Whitehead, 2008). In 2000, approximately 73% of mothers with children under the age of 18 years were employed, up from 47% in 1975 (Whitehead, 2008). As increasing numbers of women, including mothers, enter the world of paid work, issues arise surrounding work and family life. Whitehead (2008), speaking of the influx of women into the paid labor force following World War II, stated that although this trend “is not the sole societal shift that has brought work and family issues to the fore, it is nonetheless acknowledged as a major contributor” (p. 13). One such work/family issue impacting working women today is that of whether or not to have a child and, if the decision is made to have a child, the timing of first birth.

### *Delayed Childbearing*

An investigation of the research surrounding the choice some women make to either delay childbearing until well into their 30s or never have children at all reveals several factors these women may consider when making such a decision. Of course, every woman is unique and personal preferences and attitudes certainly play a part in any decision (Marable, 2005), but it seems that several motivational factors are present in the lives of many women who make the decision to either delay the birth of their first child

or abstain from having children at all. These factors include (a) employment opportunities, (b) level of income and education, and (c) personal goals and aspirations.

Spain and Bianchi (1996) summarized the impact of employment on women's childbearing considerations when they stated, "Employed women delay family formation longer and are more likely to remain childless than women who are not employed" (p. 13). Halpern (2005) supported this statement when she asserted that part of the change taking place in the contemporary American family is not only the increase in the numbers of mothers who are active participants in the labor force, but also that men and women are waiting to become parents several years after beginning work. Other researchers, too, have noted this trend in their research surrounding work and family issues. For example, Nomaguchi (2006) in his/her study on the relationship between employment, leisure time, and delayed childbearing among Japanese women found that a woman's employment status was one of the strongest predictors of delayed childbearing. Similarly, in their research examining the impact of employment and education on Canadian women's childbearing considerations, Wu and Macneill (2002) found that a woman's employment status had a negative effect on the likelihood of her becoming a mother.

Although a woman's employment status is certainly a mitigating factor in the decision-making process regarding childbearing considerations, income and educational achievement impact the decision as well. Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie (2006) addressed the impact of educational achievement on childbearing considerations when they stated, "Another change that has gone hand in hand with delayed childbearing is the increase in educational achievement of parents as a group" (p. 5). The authors asserted

further that concurrent with educational achievement comes a greater degree of affluence. Other researchers echo these sentiments, as evidenced in the research of Weeden, Abrams, Green, and Sabini (2006) who, in their study examining the relationship between education, income, and fertility in America, found that the women in their sample who had higher incomes were more likely to have reduced fertility rates (it should be noted that, when controlling for educational level, this was only the case for those who were high-school educated) and that attainment of an advanced education predicted a delay in childbearing and a higher incidence of childlessness. Additionally, Soloway and Smith (1987), in their examination of factors impacting the decision of 15 dual-career couples to delay the birth of their first child until after age 30, found that both financial security and educational goals were important factors the couples considered when deciding at what point in their lives to have a child.

Intuitively, it would seem that a woman's personal goals and aspirations would play a part in the decision-making process surrounding childbearing considerations. However, research geared toward examining this particular motivational factor is scant. A majority of the research speaks more to personal satisfaction as it relates to career goals and the impact of these goals on childbearing considerations. For example, in a study conducted by Meisenhelder and Meservey (1987), women were asked to note reasons they had chosen to delay childbearing. A full one-third of the women in the study noted that one of the reasons they had chosen to delay childbearing was because they felt they needed time to develop their careers. Similarly, Holahan's (1983) examination of the relationship between information search (i.e., gathering information about what it is

like to be a parent) in the childbearing decision-making process and life satisfaction for both mothers and non-mothers found that, for voluntarily childless women, satisfaction with career was negatively related to information search, suggesting that if women are satisfied with their careers, they may be less motivated to have children.

Although much of the available research reflects the importance of satisfaction with career in relation to childbearing considerations, a few authors do note the general effect of personal attitude and preference on this important decision. For example, Barber (2001) found that when women had a positive attitude toward childbearing (e.g., enjoying participating in activities with children), they were likely to begin bearing children earlier in the marital relationship. Additionally, the author found that, for both men and women, having a positive attitude toward alternatives to childbearing (e.g., educational pursuits, career aspirations, luxury spending) lowered the odds of premarital childbearing, suggesting that if individuals value education, aspire to certain professions, or enjoy spending income on luxury items, they may be less likely to have children before marriage. Similarly, the research of Daniels and Weingarten (1982) noted the impact of personal goals and aspirations on the childbearing decision-making process. The authors studied the impact of birth timing on the experience of parenthood and examined, among other things, reasons couples chose to delay the birth of their first child. The authors noted four different “family-timing scenarios” (p. 13), one of which is “programmatically postponement” (p. 13), meaning that some parents choose to delay parenthood until they accomplish certain personal or professional goals. Some couples in the study noted that they needed to feel ready to have a child, a reason evidenced in the

statement by one participant that “I couldn’t have parented a kitten at 21” (p. 21). Other couples noted a desire to build a strong marriage relationship before having a child so that any future children would be born into a stable family system. Finally, many couples noted the desire to accomplish certain career goals before bringing a child into the world.

Whatever the reasoning behind delaying the birth of a child, the fact remains that many women will choose to wait and become mothers at some point in their 30s. Many of these mothers will be gainfully employed outside the home as well and will thus be working and parenting simultaneously. The combination of work and parenthood can be challenging, requiring skilled negotiation between partners, adequate child care for children, family friendly work policies, and time for personal space and rest. However, these requirements may be missing in some families, their absence leading to strain and stress in the family system.

#### *Challenges Facing Dual-Career Mothers*

Mothers involved in dual-career families face many challenges and stressors as they navigate their varying roles and responsibilities. Of course, all families experience some degree of *family stress*, a concept defined by Boss (2002) as “pressure or tension in the family system—a disturbance in the steady state of the family” (p. 16). At its most basic, family stress is change in the family system, a change that can be either helpful or hurtful (Boss, 2002). More specifically, family stress can be seen as a stress of relationships, extending beyond the immediate family to the outside world of work, school, and community (Goldsmith, 2007). This more specific view of family stress

coincides with Boss's (2002) assertion that we must come to understand family stress through a contextual lens.

As family members traverse the various stressors that come their way, they may find they cope quite well with many of them. However, it may be the case that the family experiences *family strain* as they try to cope with the stressor they are facing. A family experiences strain when there is "a mismatch between the location of its strengths and pressures" (Boss, 2002, p. 68). This means that, although a family may possess certain strengths (e.g., abundant financial resources), the pressure they face (e.g., caring for an elderly family member) is not alleviated by that strength. When a family experiences strain, their ability to adapt to stressor events is weakened and they become vulnerable, thus beginning to function in an unhealthy way. Once a family is under considerable strain, the likelihood of that family entering a crisis is heightened considerably (Boss, 2002).

Mothers in dual-career families are no strangers to family strain. In fact, much of the literature surrounding the topic of dual-career mothers focuses on the stressors and resulting strain experienced by this particular population of women. Specifically, much of the literature focuses on issues related to (a) role overload, (b) time, (c) child care, and (d) family friendly work policies.

*Role overload.* One challenge facing many dual-career mothers is that of *role overload*. The definition of this particular concept varies considerably depending upon the source one consults, and scholars have pointed to the fact that the concept is often used interchangeably with other related concepts, such as *role conflict* (Coverman, 1989;

Duxbury, Lyons, & Higgins, 2008). That being said, for purposes of this dissertation project, the concept of role overload will be defined as follows:

We define role overload as a time-based form of role conflict in which an individual perceives that the collective demands imposed by multiple roles (e.g., parent, spouse, employee) are so great that time and energy resources are insufficient to adequately fulfill the requirements of the various roles to the satisfaction of self or others. (Duxbury, Lyons, & Higgins, 2008, p. 130)

Arlie Hochschild's (2003) use of the phrase *the second shift* popularized the concept of role overload for dual-career mothers everywhere. According to Hochschild, the second shift is a concept referring to the fact that many mothers work a full shift at a career outside the home and come home to work another shift completing household chores and tending to the children. In her study examining the phenomenon of the second shift, Hochschild interviewed 50 couples, along with the couples' neighbors and friends and their children's teachers, babysitters, and day care workers. Her research revealed that wives did proportionately more of the household work than their husbands, a fact noted by other researchers as well (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006; Coontz, 1997; Lee, 2005; Spain & Bianchi, 1996), with only 20% of the men in Hochschild's study sharing equally in household chores. She noted also that the mothers in her study "seemed to be far more deeply torn between the demands of work and family life" (p. 7) and tended "to talk more intently about being overtired, sick, and emotionally drained" (p. 10) than the fathers or nonparents. The mothers in Hochschild's study developed strategies for coping with the situation in which they found themselves. Some mothers

took on the Supermom persona, seeing themselves as “women without need for rest, without personal needs” (p. 204), while others eventually cut back hours at work, hired a maid, or cut back on housework. No matter what coping strategy these women chose, however, the fact remained that they did more of the second shift work than men, an imbalance that often led to strain and stress in the family system.

Although quite popular, Hochschild’s (2003) work is not the sole source of information on the impact of role overload in the lives of women. For example, Glynn, Maclean, Forte, and Cohen (2009) examined the importance of role overload on women’s mental health and were interested specifically in the importance of role overload in relation to other factors that might affect women’s mental health, such as social support, income, etc. The authors found that women who perceived themselves as having a higher degree of role overload reported poorer mental health. Additionally, the authors noted generally that role overload had a greater effect on mental health than some other known determinants, such as income and employment status. Similarly, in Pearson’s (2008) work examining the relationship between role overload, job satisfaction, leisure satisfaction, and psychological health, he found that for women who were employed full-time, there existed a negative relationship between role overload and psychological health. Further, he noted that there was a negative relationship between role overload and both job satisfaction and leisure satisfaction. Overall, the author stated that “role overload was the strongest predictor of psychological health for all of the variables measured in this study” (p. 60). Finally, Perry-Jenkins, Goldberg, Pierce, and Sayer (2007) found that for their sample of dual-earner couples experiencing the transition to parenthood, as role

overload increased, so too did the frequency of depressive symptoms reported by the participants. Additionally, the authors found that as role overload increased, so too did the amount of conflict the couple experienced in their relationship.

Mothers experiencing the negative effects of role overload are no doubt dealing with a variety of everyday hassles. According to Helms and Demo (2005), everyday hassles are defined as “the proximal stressors, strains, and transactions of day-to-day life that can be viewed as common annoyances” (p. 356). Everyday hassles can be either anticipated (e.g., commuting to work, taking children to school and soccer practice) or unanticipated (e.g., arguing with a significant other, picking up a sick child from school), but both types can cause stress and strain in the family system. The ways in which families cope with these hassles, the “adaptive processes” (p. 357) they use, determine the level of stress they experience. When families deal with hassles constructively, they are less likely to experience a high level of stress, but when the adaptive processes they choose are poor, the level of stress can be high. Women, in particular, may experience more stress than men when confronting everyday hassles, in part because often they are more responsible for attending to certain hassles than are men. For example, women tend to take care of children and aging parents more often than men, tasks that are repetitive and never completed. One task associated with caring for children is that of locating child care when both parents work outside the home, a task that is stressful for many women (Casad, 2008).

*Time.* Perhaps the most popular example of working families’ experience of time comes from Hochschild’s (1997) work *The Time Bind*. Through interviews with 130

employees of a large corporation and observation of six separate families, Hochschild discovered that time was a precious resource for working families. These families reported feeling pressed for time, many working long hours at their job and feeling as though they did not have enough time with family at home. For these families, dealing with less time at home meant working a third shift, a shift Hochschild described as “noticing, understanding, and coping with the emotional consequences of the compressed second shift” (p. 215). The overall idea expressed in Hochschild’s work was that men and women work a full day in paid employment, come home to a second shift wherein they feel pressed “to hurry, to delegate, to delay, to forgo, to segment, to hyperorganize the precious remains of family time” (p. 215), and end up working a third shift trying to cope with this lack of time at home. Although Hochschild’s work is quite popular, other authors too describe the impacts of time on family life (e.g., Daly, 1996; Milkie, Raley, & Bianchi, 2009).

In her work *Families and Time: Keeping Pace in a Hurried Culture*, Daly (1996) spoke of the precious nature of time for those men and women who “struggle for a sense of balance in both public and private domains” (p. 144). Although both sexes find time to be a precious resource, men seem to have more of it than women. According to Daly, dual-career women spend significantly more time in “family-work” (p. 155), leading to a greater degree of family-to-work spillover for these women. Similar findings were denoted by Milkie, Raley, and Bianchi (2009) in their work describing the time pressures of parents with preschoolers. They noted that, compared to fathers, full-time employed mothers more often reported multitasking and feeling rushed, as well as reporting that

they did more housework and provided more care for the children than did their husbands. Findings from the same study indicated that these mothers, too, tend to sleep less and have less leisure time than non-employed mothers, a trend noted by Daly (1996) as well. Overall findings suggest that time is a precious resource for families comprised of women and men who work outside the home, and this resource may be especially precious for the women living in these families.

*Child care.* In 2005, approximately 36% of all children under 6 years of age and not yet enrolled in kindergarten were enrolled in some type of center-based child care program (including Head Start). Another 8% of these children were enrolled in in-home child care programs, and 2% were in the care of a nanny or babysitter. On average, these children spent 29 hours each week in nonparental care (United States Department of Education, 2006). When examining preschool-aged children specifically, approximately 57% of all children ages 3 to 5 who were not yet enrolled in kindergarten were enrolled in some type of center-based child care program, and another 11% were enrolled in other types of nonrelative care programs (e.g., in-home child care programs) (United States Department of Education, 2006). Not surprisingly, the largest percentage of children enrolled in center-based child care programs (64%) were children of mothers who worked 35 hours or more per week outside of the home.

As is evidenced by the above statistics, almost half of all parents of young children place their child in the care of someone other than themselves for a substantial part of the week, and mothers who work outside the home are even more likely to do so. For these families, the task of finding affordable, high-quality child care is a stressful

one, with many mothers pointing to child care issues as a major source of strain in their attempt to balance work and family life (Casad, 2008). Child care concerns are so stressful for some mothers that their workplace productivity is affected, leading some to work fewer hours or consider quitting their jobs altogether (Benin & Chong, 1993). It is certainly no surprise to learn that child care concerns are stressful for many dual-earner families, especially when the evidence suggests that affordable, high-quality centers are quite rare (Benin & Chong, 1993; Brooks, 2008). In addition, some research studies point to the negative effects child care programs can have on children's development (e.g., Baydar & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Belsky & Eggebeen, 1991; Brooks-Gunn, Han, & Waldfogel, 2002; Geoffroy, Cote, Parent, & Seguin, 2006), information that only adds to an already stressful situation for parents. However, high-quality child care programs do exist and can be beneficial to the children who attend them. For those parents who locate these programs, their importance cannot be underscored.

The benefits to children enrolled in high-quality child care programs are well documented. In particular, many researchers have noted the benefits to children in the arenas of cognitive and social development. For example, using data from the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Study of Early Child Care, Burchinal and Cryer (2003) found that when caregivers were sensitive and stimulating (an indicator of child care quality), children showed higher levels of cognitive and social skills, as measured by standard assessments such as the Bracken School Readiness Scale. This finding held true for all three ethnic groups examined in the study, which included African-American, Latino, and

Caucasian children. Similarly, as part of the Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers Study, 733 children were followed from ages 4 to 8 in order to examine the impact of preschool child care quality on children's cognitive and social development. The results of the study indicated that preschool child care quality influenced children's "receptive language ability, math ability, cognitive and attention skills, problem behaviors, and sociability, indicating that children who had better quality preschool experiences were more advanced in their development over a 5-year period" (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001, p. 1549). In addition to the cognitive and social benefits high-quality care programs offer children, researchers have demonstrated that this type of care is beneficial also to children with behavior problems. For example, Pluess and Belsky (2009), using data from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care, found that children with difficult temperaments (i.e., a high level of negative emotionality) exhibited fewer behavioral problems and a higher level of social competence when enrolled in high-quality child care programs. Additionally, in Burchinal, Roberts, Zeisel, Hennon, and Hooper's (2006) study to identify protective factors for African-American children experiencing certain social risk factors (e.g., poverty, high level of maternal depression, low maternal education), the researchers found child care quality to be a protective factor for these children, especially in the area of behavior problems. For children who had received high-quality child care, fewer behavior problems emerged during early elementary school years. The opposite was true also: Children who received lower-quality child care exhibited more behavioral problems in their early elementary school years.

The benefits to children enrolled in high-quality child care programs are easily evidenced, but it seems there are benefits to parents as well. An example of one benefit described by the mother of a 4-year-old is seen in the following interview excerpt taken from a paper I wrote for a qualitative research class. At the end of the interview, in which I asked the mother questions related to her experience balancing work and family life, she brought up the subject of quality child care, a subject I had not specifically intended to cover in the interview. She stated,

One of the most important things I think about being a successful working mom has been really trusting the place that's caring for your children. You know I've had friends that were working mothers with their first child and had such bad experiences with it they just stopped working with their second child. And so I think that we got lucky. (Marable, 2007, p. 20)

One benefit to this parent was the knowledge that her child was cared for properly. This parent, too, had the luxury of working for a university with a child care program on campus, a benefit many working parents are without. In fact, many working parents are in the opposite situation, a situation in which family friendly work policies are non-existent.

*Family-friendly work policies.* Many industrialized nations offer employees access to family-friendly work policies, policies that enable employees to more effectively balance work and family demands. Such policies may include allowing an employee to telecommute, work a condensed work week, job share, or work flexible hours (Casad, 2008). Unfortunately, the United States lags behind other industrialized

nations in the number of family-friendly policies offered to employees. For example, the United States is one of the few industrialized nations not to offer paid maternity leave following the birth or adoption of a child (Whitehead, 2008; Widener, 2007). In addition, the United States “is alone among affluent countries in not requiring a minimum number of sick days and vacation days” (Halpern, 2005, p. 403). Numerous reasons have been suggested as to why family-friendly work policies are not a high priority for companies in the United States, primarily centering around the fact that many companies believe these policies to be cost-prohibitive (Casad, 2008; Halpern, 2005). However, if employees do not have access to family-friendly work policies, the conflict they experience between work and home may intensify, creating a wealth of problems for both the employee and the employer.

All individuals striving to maintain a balance between work and family roles will, at some point, experience work-family conflict. *Work-family conflict* can be defined as “a form of inter-role conflict that involves the extent to which individuals feel that the demands of paid work and family roles are incompatible so that participation in either role is difficult because of the other role” (Nomaguchi, 2009, p. 15). In essence, spillover occurs between work and family life. Galinsky (1999) described *spillover* as “the dynamic connections between work and family” (p. 168) and denoted that spillover can occur from work to home or home to work (or both). Such spillover can lead to conflict, which can have negative effects on an individual’s health and well-being. For example, in Frone, Russell, and Cooper’s (1997) study examining the relationship between work-family conflict and health outcomes among 267 employed parents, the researchers found

work-family conflict to be positively related to heavy alcohol consumption. This finding is echoed in the work of Roos, Lahelma, and Rahkonen (2006), who found work-family conflict to be related to problem drinking behaviors in both men and women and associated with heavy drinking among women. Other studies, too, have examined the effects of work-family conflict on an individual's health and well-being and have found this type of conflict to be related to everything from making poor food choices (Allen & Armstrong, 2006) to a negative impact on psychological well-being (Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001). Obviously, if individuals are suffering from poor health and compromised psychological well-being, workplace productivity will decrease as employees take increased amounts of time off work to deal with health issues, which in turn impacts their employers financially. However, when employees have access to family-friendly work policies, health and well-being outcomes are improved (Halpern, 2005; Huffman, Culbertson, & Castro, 2008). In addition, access to these policies promotes increased job satisfaction and a host of other positive outcomes (Breugh & Frye, 2008; Brough, O'Driscoll, & Kalliath, 2005; Glass & Riley, 1998). Friedman and Greenhaus (2000) noted too that family-friendly work policies lessen the degree of conflict between work life and family life. They noted that, overall, "family-friendliness leads to feeling better in our personal life and about our jobs and employers" (p. 5). For these authors, who believed that work and family could be allies instead of enemies, one way to accomplish this goal was for employers to provide their employees with family-friendly work policies. This is good news not only for the employee, but for the employer as well.

In sum, all individuals must contend with work-family conflict and the negative ramifications it brings. However, this negative impact can be reduced if employers provide their employees access to family-friendly work policies. Although employers may believe these policies to be cost-prohibitive, they actually save companies money in a variety of ways. Halpern (2005) summarized nicely the benefit to companies who offer employees access to family-friendly work policies when she said, “Organizations that implement family-friendly programs, such as telecommuting, job sharing, and flexible start and stop times, can expect increased employee productivity and commitment, reduced turnover intentions and absenteeism, and reduced employee work-related strain” (p. 407). Access to family-friendly work policies is a benefit to both employee and employer and is needed desperately by families who strive each day to balance work and family life.

#### *Benefits and Rewards for Dual-Career Mothers*

Families possess a certain degree of *resiliency*, a concept defined by Boss (2002) as a process of growth, a process of “becoming stronger for having had the experience” (p. 4). A family’s resiliency is manifest in the ways in which that family employs a wide range of protective factors to ensure that stressor events will be handled adequately. This concept is related in some ways to that of *family coping*, a concept defined by Boss (2002) as “the process of managing a stressful event or situation by the family as a unit with no detrimental effects on any individual in that family” (p. 79). Research findings suggest that families use various coping strategies to address strains and stressors in their lives (Schnittger & Bird, 1990) and that coping mechanisms can moderate the effects of

various stressors such as role overload and role strain (Paden & Buehler, 1995).

Therefore, although there is evidence to suggest that mothers involved in dual-career families face stressors and strain when trying to both work and parent simultaneously, there is evidence also that many of these women are resilient and cope with these pressures quite well, the result being a family unit that thrives. Specifically, much of the literature regarding the more positive aspects of the dual-career lifestyle focuses on issues related to (a) life satisfaction, (b) health and psychological well-being, (c) outcomes for children, and (d) networks of support.

*Life satisfaction.* Myriad factors are involved when evaluating an individual's satisfaction with life, including satisfaction with one's job, marital relationship, and economic status. For at least some of the women involved in dual-career families, satisfaction with these varying realms seems to be primarily positive.

Many authors denote the satisfaction women garner from their work, positing that a great deal of fulfillment comes from being involved in a career one enjoys (Barnett & Rivers, 1996; Coontz, 1997; Tan, 2008). Rapoport and Rapoport (1976), in their study examining the lifestyle of 16 dual-career families, noted that in the 1960s the number one reason a woman took on all the challenges associated with the dual-career lifestyle was because her work gave her a sense of fulfillment, a sense of self-realization. One woman interviewed stated she would have felt unfulfilled without her work, and another said she felt her energies would have been wasted at home. Similarly, in her study of the impact of working parents on the lives of children, Galinsky (1999) noted that 89% of the parents in the study found their work meaningful. In describing her work as a nurse, one mother

stated, “It’s just that I really love it. I love the challenge” (p. 114). Such statements attest to the intrinsic rewards gained from satisfaction with one’s work, but it should be noted that the economic impacts of working are paramount to life satisfaction as well.

Many women must work to help provide for the needs of their families, and in this instance, income is of the utmost importance simply so that families have their needs met from day to day. In addition, it has been demonstrated that for low-income families, when both parents work outside the home, income is increased by as much as 70% over families with only one earner (Hanson & Ooms, 1991). For those women working not out of necessity but out of desire for a career, income is important as well. For example, Coontz (1997) noted that when women earn income, they hold a greater degree of decision-making power in the family. In addition, income, even when not necessarily needed for minimum subsistence, provides a family with an opportunity for upward mobility. Coontz summarized nicely the importance of income to an employed woman’s family life when she stated, “One of the most important benefits that working women bring to families with children is monetary” (p. 65). Finally, the marital relationship of women involved in dual-career families may benefit because of the availability of greater financial resources (Parker, Peltier, & Wolleat, 1981; Thomas, Albrecht, & White, 1984).

As is the case for all couples, marital satisfaction for dual-career couples is based on a variety of complex factors. Researchers have suggested that for dual-career couples specifically, marital satisfaction is dependent on the couple’s attitude toward gender roles, how the couple prioritizes work and family life, and the extent to which the couple effectively manages time and energy (Sears & Galambos, 1993). In addition, it has been

noted that satisfaction with the marital relationship is higher when dual-career couples report a high degree of love, sexual satisfaction, and communication (Perrone & Worthington, 2001). Although these factors *increase* marital satisfaction for dual-career couples, the question remains as to whether or not these marriages are, as a general rule, satisfactory for the partners.

The body of research literature dedicated to examining the positive aspects of the dual-career lifestyle indicate that for couples involved in dual-career marriages, there is certainly satisfaction to be found in the relationship. Primarily, the literature suggests that the very act of having a career strengthens the marriage relationship. For example, in Bird and Schnurman-Crook's (2005) work examining the connection between professional identity and coping behaviors among 15 dual-career couples, the researchers found that participants credited their careers with impacting the marital relationship in positive ways. One respondent stated that her husband respected what she did as a professional and she felt that this respect led to an equal partnership and responsibility sharing. Another participant stated that she felt her husband was proud of her accomplishments and that he thought of her in a more positive way because she had a career. Similarly, Rapoport and Rapoport (1976), in their study examining the lifestyle of 16 dual-career families, found that many of the husbands in the study took a great deal of satisfaction from their wives' achievements. Additionally, several husbands who participated in the study commented that "once one had tasted the dual-career pattern it was difficult to settle for anything else" (p. 323). A statement from the work conducted by Barnett and Rivers (1996), in which they examined the two-income lifestyle,

summarizes the satisfaction dual-career couples garner from their marriages. They stated,

For the women in our study, marriage is not a place where you have to give up your freedom to be loved. On the whole, it is a partnership in which both men and women are very busy and work hard, but find that the rewards of sharing are many, and worth the work. (p. 204)

According to these authors, a trend was emerging toward a couple known as *the collaborative couple*, a relationship in which both spouses shared “the economic and household management functions of the family” (p. 39) and one that brought with it a great deal of satisfaction.

*Health and psychological well-being.* Because employed mothers face challenges and stressors on a daily basis, whether that is stress in juggling multiple roles or the challenge of finding adequate child care, one might conclude that these women might well exhibit high levels of depression, poor self-esteem, or poor physical health. However, there is evidence to suggest that this simply is not the case. In fact, employed mothers in general tend to fare better, both psychologically and physically, than their non-employed counterparts (Sears & Galambos, 1993).

The health benefits, both physically and psychologically, for employed mothers are easily evidenced in the literature. Overall, mothers who are employed have enhanced self-esteem, better overall psychological well-being, and lower levels of depression than non-employed mothers (Tan, 2008). In addition, these women tend to be physically healthier than non-employed mothers, perhaps in part because employed women often

have access to health benefits as part of their compensation package. In fact, it has been shown that women who are employed, married, and have children are the healthiest mentally and physically, whereas women who are single and non-employed are the least healthy (Sears & Galambos, 1993). Therefore, it appears that although participation in multiple roles (i.e., wife, mother, and employee) is, at times, stressful, participation in these roles actually can improve health and well-being.

The impact of participation in multiple roles on health and well-being is documented in Menaghan's (1989) review of literature surrounding the topic of role change and psychological well-being. She noted that some authors not only state that combining marriage, employment, and parenting is associated with better physical health but also that participation in multiple roles is helpful in that the individual gains certain resources (e.g., security, personal gratification) from each role. Similarly, Galinsky (1999) noted that when women participate in multiple roles, they enjoy multiple sources of support, so that if things are going well at work and not at home, for example, the problems at home have less of an impact. Overall, it appears that participation in multiple roles can be beneficial for employed mothers, but what effect might these roles have on children?

*Child outcomes.* Despite popular media portrayals of out-of-control children whose mothers work and pay them little attention, there is research to suggest that children actually fare quite well when their mothers work. For example, maternal employment has been shown to be positively related to academic achievement and higher career aspirations in adolescent girls (Etaugh, 1993) and positively related to cognitive

and social development in children of lower socioeconomic status (Gottfried & Gottfried, 2008). In addition, as was evidenced above, women who are employed are psychologically healthier than their non-employed counterparts, and in regards to how this impacts children, Tan (2008) denoted that maternal employment improves child outcomes in that mothers are healthier and able to parent in supportive ways. Finally, it appears that parents feel there are positive outcomes for children when mothers work. For example, Rapoport and Rapoport (1976) noted that in their sample of dual-career families, parents felt their careers affected their children positively in that the children were encouraged to become more independent and resourceful. Many parents felt their children were proud of them “and of the fact that their mothers as well as their fathers had careers” (p. 322).

It should be noted that although maternal employment can improve child outcomes, there are other factors which play an important role as well. For example, in Halpern’s (2005) address to the American Psychological Association, in which she makes it clear that a parent’s work does not necessarily adversely affect a child’s cognitive or physical health, she asserted that what does make a difference in the life of a child has more to do with certain external contexts, such as the family’s socio-economic status. Galinsky (1999), too, addressed the issue of how well working mothers’ children fare and noted that the well-being of children in families has to do primarily with the quality time parents spend with children when they are together and only secondarily with the circumstances children are in when they are away from their parents. In fact, in Galinsky’s interviews with children, she found that more than two-thirds of children felt

their parents were successful at managing both family life and work. The impact of external factors on child outcomes is summarized succinctly in a statement by Etaugh (1993) in which she noted that “clearly, the impact of maternal employment on the child can be understood by examining it within the larger context of work and family circumstances” (p. 79).

*Networks of support.* As was mentioned earlier, a family’s resiliency is manifest in the ways in which that family employs a wide range of protective factors to ensure that stressor events will be handled adequately. Research findings suggest that families use various coping strategies to address strains and stressors in their lives (Schnittger & Bird, 1990) and that coping mechanisms can moderate the effects of various stressors such as role overload and role strain (Paden & Buehler, 1995). One of the coping strategies employed by women living in dual-career families involves using a network of supportive others to aid in managing the various aspects of the dual-career lifestyle.

Darrah, Freeman, and English-Lueck (2007) conducted an ethnographic study of 14 dual-career families and noted the importance of support networks on the families’ ability to cope with their chosen lifestyle. They stated, “Connections to other people often formed the critical buffers that allowed people to cope” (p. 196). In this instance, those supportive others included family, friends, co-workers, and even various organizations of which the families were a part. These supportive others provided a buffer to the busyness of everyday life and provided the families with resources they could use to better manage their world. Other authors, too, have denoted the benefits of

support networks in the lives of those living in dual-career families, especially the benefits to women living in these families.

Thorstad, Anderson, Hall, Willingham, and Carruthers (2006) studied mothers' experience of spousal support and found that when husbands provided both practical and emotional support, wives' sense of well-being increased. This was especially true when husbands helped with household tasks, provided child care, and were interested in their wives' work. Similarly, Rao, Apte, and Subbakrishna (2003) found that, for women experiencing multiple roles, the support of spouses as well as other family members such as parents and in-laws was a significant predictor of well-being. In documenting the importance of these support networks, the authors said, "Many of the women reported that they would not have been able to continue working after marriage, but for the support from their spouse and parents" (p. 181). The inverse of these relationships seems to be true as well in that, when there is little support, outcomes are poorer. For example, in Edwards' (2006) study on the role of spousal support in the lives of employed mothers, she found that levels of work-family conflict and stress were negatively correlated with spousal support. Additionally, Rudd and McKenry (1986) found that job satisfaction for employed mothers was significantly related to the extent to which husbands supported their wives in their employment. In particular, they found that emotional support was more important for these mothers than physical support. Overall, findings from the empirical literature suggest that support networks are an important coping mechanism utilized by women living in dual-career families.

## *Summary*

Throughout history, women have participated in the economic realities of family life, working alongside men in early hunting and gathering societies to ensure their families were cared for adequately. During the second half of the 20th century, there was an influx of women into the paid labor market, and as women entered the working world, issues arose surrounding work and family life. One such issue impacting a woman's work and family life is whether or not to have a child and, if so, the best timeframe for bringing a child into one's life. It was found that a woman's employment opportunities, level of education and income, and personal goals and aspirations influenced her childbearing decisions.

For women who choose to both work and parent and who have partners who choose the same, there are certain challenges they must face. Primarily, women involved in the dual-career lifestyle must contend with issues related to role overload, time, child care, and workplace policies. However, there are benefits to this lifestyle as well, including in general a high degree of life satisfaction, good physical and psychological health, improved outcomes for children, and the presence of support networks.

As I searched the empirical literature dedicated to the study of dual-career mothers, I found a lack of literature in which the emphasis was on the lived experiences of these women. Therefore, the goal of the present research project was to explore and describe the lived experiences of dual-career mothers. In order to accomplish this goal, I chose to employ existential phenomenology as the guiding research methodology. It was

my hope that this research project would expand the family science literature by exposing audiences to information concerning the daily, lived experiences of dual-career mothers.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of dual-career mothers who are parenting a preschool-aged child and who have chosen to delay childbearing until the decade of their 30s. Using existential phenomenology as the guiding research methodology, I sought to gain insight into each mother's world through the use of "dialogic interviewing procedures and thematic interpretations" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 44). My goal was to capture a rich, thick description of the essence of each mother's lived experience and adequately document what I learned.

#### *Introduction to Phenomenology*

At its most basic, *phenomenology* can be defined as "the study of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view" (Smith, 2007, p. 188). It is the science of describing individual experience, one's way of "being-in-the-world" (Cerbone, 2008, p. 31). A primary objective of phenomenology is to describe individual experiences free of theoretical assumptions or preconceptions (Welch, 1999). Phenomenologists seek to describe, not explain or analyze, the very essence of individuals' experiences with a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Many types of phenomenology exist, as do many ways of conducting phenomenological research. For example, some phenomenological researchers believe strongly in the philosophical ideals of descriptive, or Husserlian, phenomenology and might choose to follow Moustakas's (1994) approach to conducting descriptive phenomenological research. Other researchers believe strongly in the ideals of existential

phenomenology and might choose to follow Thomas and Pollio's (2002) approach to conducting existential phenomenological research. For purposes of this dissertation project, existential phenomenology was chosen as the guiding philosophy, and the approach to conducting existential phenomenological research developed by Thomas and Pollio (2002) was chosen as most appropriate for the study.

*Historical overview.* Phenomenology has a rich philosophical background, drawing heavily on the ideas of such philosophers as Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty (Creswell, 2007). Often credited with introducing the idea of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl attempted to "revive philosophy with new humanism" (Munhall, 1994, p. 14). His ideas were in stark contrast to the then prevailing positivist viewpoint, and he believed that the ideas guiding the positivist paradigm would lead to a dehumanized society (Drew, 1999). Husserl's alternative to this paradigm was the development of a philosophy centered on a return "to the things themselves," a return to the world of lived experience. It is by returning to the lifeworld (*lebenswelt*) that one can best understand the human condition (Welch, 1999). Husserlian phenomenology, too, centered on the idea of *consciousness*, which Husserl (1964/1999) defined as "truly seeing" (p. 254). According to Husserl, in order to truly see a phenomenon one must bracket out all presuppositions, what he referred to as *phenomenological reduction*. Husserl believed one could not examine a phenomenon "with respect to what it refers to beyond itself, but with respect to what it is in itself and to what it is given as" (p. 248). For Husserl, phenomenology proceeds "by seeing, clarifying, and determining meaning, and by distinguishing meanings...[and]...it does not theorize or carry out mathematical

operations; that is to say, it carries through no explanations in the sense of deductive theory” (p. 254). Husserl’s newfound philosophy of phenomenology attracted several followers, each of whom elaborated on the philosophy with his own ideas.

Martin Heidegger, one of Husserl’s students, furthered the philosophy of phenomenology and moved it in a new direction. Heidegger shared some of Husserl’s ideas regarding phenomenology, and this is demonstrated in his definition of it. Heidegger (1962/1999) stated that phenomenology means “to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself” (p. 294). He stated that, in essence, phenomenology means a return “to the things themselves,” a phrase synonymous with Husserl’s approach. Also, just as Husserl had done, Heidegger studied individual experience and examined the meanings that are a part of our everyday world (Welch, 1999). However, Heidegger stood apart from Husserl in that his phenomenological philosophy focused more on ontology (i.e., what it means to be) than epistemology (i.e., how it is possible to know). Heidegger believed that we must first come to understand ourselves before we can understand how we gain insight and knowledge (Drew, 1999). He referred to the individual as *Dasein*, which he defined as “this entity which each of us is himself” (Heidegger, 1962/1999, p. 276), and noted the importance of context in shaping how we come to know ourselves. Heidegger emphasized the importance of language, culture, and time in the development of self-understanding and believed that the world of which the individual is a part is paramount to understanding what that person values and finds important (Munhall, 1994). For Heidegger, the philosophy of phenomenology was bound in ontology, with an emphasis

on individual experience and the impact of the world on the individual. Heidegger had taken phenomenology in a new direction, and some of his ideas would be adopted by another philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, but he, too, would make the philosophy his own.

The philosophical ideals espoused by Merleau-Ponty were similar to those espoused by Husserl and Heidegger in that Merleau-Ponty emphasized the importance of focusing on an individual's lived experience and, just as Husserl had done, Merleau-Ponty saw phenomenology as a revolt against the positivist viewpoint. He described phenomenology as giving "a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian or the sociologist may be able to provide" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2008, p. vii). Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy was a combination of Husserl's epistemological ideas and Heidegger's existential ones, although he was influenced primarily by Husserl. He is a philosopher known for embracing the combination of existentialism and phenomenology (Smith-Pickard, 2006), and he placed great emphasis also on the importance of the interrelationship of the individual and his or her world. Merleau-Ponty believed that there exists a pre-given world of which each individual is a part, and it is through living in this world that individuals come to learn about themselves (Sadala & Adorno, 2002). Merleau-Ponty (1962/2008) stated this sentiment succinctly when he said that "there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself" (p. xii). This concept of interrelatedness gives rise to several additional

existential phenomenological ideas, among them those of *perception*, *embodiment*, and *intentionality*.

According to Thomas (2005), “Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy was first and always a phenomenology of perception” (p. 69), and in the preface of his work *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1962/2008) described *perception* both in terms of what it is and what it is not. He stated that perception “is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them” (p. xi). Merleau-Ponty believed that individuals experience the world by perception and that each individual’s perception is completely unique to him or her. Additionally, an individual’s perception cannot be disassociated from varying contexts (e.g., historical timeframe, culture). Taken together, an individual’s perception of his or her world as it is impacted by context constitutes that individual’s truth (Parker, 1994).

Merleau-Ponty placed a great deal of emphasis on the body and its relationship to consciousness, noting that consciousness is located in the body (Welch, 1999). He described the body as “my point of view upon the world, as one of the objects of that world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2008, p. 81). For Merleau-Ponty, the idea of *embodiment* was “a way of viewing persons as they are in their world within their body, which is consciously finding expression in feeling, speech, thought, sensing, judging, and so on” (Parker, 1994, p. 291). Because individuals are influenced continually by their body’s position in the world, they can never be totally objective as researchers. Each individual

sees the world differently, depending upon that person's own body and position in the world (Parker, 1994).

All human experience is directed toward certain objects, events, phenomena, and people, and the concept of *intentionality* emphasizes this directional nature. The objects and events that individuals are directed toward become those that are meaningful to them. In other words, "the objects that capture us, or that we seek out, reveal what is significant to us" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 14). ). For Merleau-Ponty (1962/2008), intentionality was related also to understanding. He stated that "whether we are concerned with a thing perceived, a historical event or a doctrine, to 'understand' is to take in the total intention" (p. xx). As is the case with the concept of perception, the importance of context cannot be overlooked in the concept of intentionality. Thomas and Pollio (2002) denoted this importance when they described intentionality as "a general patterning of human experience which suggests that human life can only be understood as always and already in some context (as 'being-in-the-world')" (p. 15). Thus, intentionality refers to the directedness of consciousness toward objects, and this directedness is bound in context.

*Existential phenomenology.* As the name implies, existential phenomenology is the combination of the philosophy of existentialism and the method of phenomenology. Existentialism has been defined as "a philosophical movement that focuses on the uniqueness of each individual and that abandons the search for universal human qualities" (Welch, 1999, p. 237). According to Thomas and Pollio (2002), *existentialism* can be defined as "a philosophy about who we are and how we may come to live an authentic life" (p. 9). Several philosophers embraced the philosophy of existentialism,

but Soren Kierkegaard is generally regarded as the founder of the philosophy.

Kierkegaard felt it was necessary for the philosophy to address the themes with which all humans struggle and to realize the concrete existence of each individual (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). Additionally, Kierkegaard believed in the subjectivity of truth, the notion that to truly exist one must experience intensity of feeling and that all individuals are passionate and inspired (Wahl, 1965). Another philosopher who believed strongly in the ideals of existentialism was Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre (1965) defined existentialism as “a doctrine which makes human life possible and, in addition, declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity” (p. 32). In a defense of existentialism, Sartre addressed several of the primary themes of the philosophy, including an emphasis on the subjective nature of humanity. For Sartre (1965), all men are what they will themselves to be and each individual “chooses and makes himself” (p. 37). Other philosophers, including Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, embraced the ideals guiding the philosophy of existentialism (Smith-Pickard, 2006; Welch, 1999).

Existential phenomenologists combine the philosophical ideals of existentialism with the philosophy and method of phenomenology to arrive at a way of studying an individual’s lived experience. These researchers believe in the importance of context in shaping an individual’s experience, and individuals and their world are said to *coconstitute* one another. It is through living in the world that an individual’s experience takes shape (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). In addition, proponents of existential phenomenology speak of four major existential grounds against which all human experience takes place: (a) space/world, (b) body, (c) time, and (d) relationship/others.

Taken together, these four existential grounds form each individual's lifeworld (Van Manen, 1990). Overall, existential phenomenologists take the position that the lived experience of each individual is bound in context and takes shape against the four major existential grounds. Relying heavily on the ideas of such philosophers as Merleau-Ponty, existential phenomenologists see the subjective nature of human experience as it is lived on a day-to-day basis.

*Differences in philosophy.* Descriptive, or Husserlian, phenomenology and existential phenomenology do have in common certain ideas, and, as was mentioned above, Merleau-Ponty did espouse many of the same ideas as Husserl. However, the two philosophies are somewhat different, and it is important that these differences be noted.

As is evidenced above in the brief summary of Merleau-Ponty's concepts, the interrelatedness of an individual and his or her world is paramount to the beliefs underlying existential phenomenology. However, Husserl did not hold such a strong view regarding this relationship, and this is evidenced in his concept of *epoché*. For Husserl, it was essential that researchers be able to rid themselves of all personal knowledge of a phenomenon in order to understand the experiences of those being studied. This meant that researchers must not only rid themselves of any expert knowledge they had in a certain field but also any biases they might hold (Lopez & Willis, 2004). For Merleau-Ponty, it would be impossible for an individual to completely rid himself or herself of any prior knowledge of an experience or any biases he or she might hold. According to Smith-Pickard (2006), Merleau-Ponty believed that "there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself" (p. 61).

Furthering this idea of a difference in belief regarding the interrelatedness of individuals and their world, Lopez and Willis (2004) noted that Husserl believed in the idea of *radical autonomy*, a belief that all individuals are “free agents who bear responsibility for influencing their environment and culture” (p. 728). This idea is in stark contrast to the existential phenomenological concept of situated freedom. Additionally, Moustakas (1994) noted that one of Husserl’s ideas was that of a *transcendental ego*, an ego that would allow one to assume “a completely unbiased and presuppositionless state” (p. 60). Smith-Pickard (2006) noted the obvious difference between Husserl’s thought and that of Merleau-Ponty when he stated, “There is no room for a transcendental ego in Merleau-Ponty’s existential phenomenology” (p. 61).

#### *Rationale*

As was stated in the introductory chapter of this dissertation project, I first became interested in studying the lives of dual-career mothers after working with their children at the University of Tennessee Early Learning Center. As I began to think about what I wanted to learn from these mothers, I realized I simply wanted to learn more about their everyday experiences. I was curious as to how they perceived their lives as dual-career mothers. As I thought about what I truly wanted to learn from these mothers, I realized a qualitative approach would serve me best in my endeavors.

*Rationale for choosing a qualitative research methodology.* A qualitative research methodology is one “which produces descriptive data: people’s own written or spoken words and observable behavior” (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 4). Qualitative research methods allow the researcher to delve into the lived experiences of individuals,

exploring certain feelings and emotions (e.g., love, pain, hope) that are difficult to quantify. Further, qualitative research methods allow the researcher to study the subjective nature of human behavior, a task that is difficult to undertake in a quantitative study (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). In addition, researchers who employ qualitative research methodologies take the perspective that individuals are capable of interpreting their own experiences, experiences that are subjective and bound in social, historical, and linguistic context. These subjective experiences are valued by the researcher, and individuals are free to be who they are (Munhall, 1994). Considering the above information and what I hoped to accomplish in the study, I believed a qualitative research methodology would allow me the opportunity to describe the lived experiences of dual-career mothers.

*Rationale for choosing existential phenomenology.* In describing procedural aspects of phenomenological research, Creswell (2007) noted that a research project best suited for utilization of phenomenology is one in which the author seeks to understand “common experiences in order to develop practices or policies, or to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon” (p. 60). In essence, I was interested in developing a deeper understanding regarding the lived experiences of dual-career mothers. I wanted to describe, not explain or analyze, the experiences of these mothers. I wanted also to give these mothers a voice, a way to express their experiences however they chose. Because phenomenology has been known as a caring act (Munhall, 1994), I thought this approach would give the mothers in my study the opportunity to truly express themselves to someone who was interested in simply hearing their stories.

I chose to utilize existential phenomenology specifically because of the basic tenets underlying the philosophy. First, I believe strongly in the importance of context in shaping an individual's experience. Each individual and his or her world are interrelated and cannot be disassociated from one another. In addition, I believe each individual is bound by the four major existential grounds of time, space, body, and relationship. Further, I believe that an individual's perception is paramount to his or her description of everyday experience and that perception shapes an individual's relationship with his or her world. Finally, I chose existential phenomenology as my guiding research methodology because, as I began searching the empirical literature dedicated to the study of dual-career mothers, I found no studies in which existential phenomenology had been chosen as the research methodology. Thus, it was my hope that this research project would expand the family science literature by exposing audiences to information concerning the daily, lived experiences of dual-career mothers.

*Rationale for choosing the Thomas and Pollio approach to conducting existential phenomenology.* Primarily, I chose to utilize the approach to conducting existential phenomenology pioneered by Thomas and Pollio (2002) because of the opportunity afforded me to work closely with both the pioneers of the approach as well as members of the University of Tennessee Phenomenology Research Group. This unique approach to conducting existential phenomenology allowed me to utilize feedback from members of the phenomenology research group to uncover fully the themes and resulting thematic structure of my study. Drs. Thomas and Pollio chaired these group meetings and provided insight and feedback as well. Overall, this approach allowed me the opportunity

to collaborate with Drs. Thomas and Pollio, as well as with members of the phenomenology research group, on varying aspects of my project, resulting in a richer, more-detailed description of the lived experiences of mothers in dual-career families.

### *Pilot Data*

In the spring of 2007, I took a qualitative research course offered by the Child and Family Studies Department at the University of Tennessee, and one of the requirements for the course was to complete a small qualitative research project. I chose to explore the experiences of mothers living in dual-career families, the same topic under investigation in this dissertation project. Because the purpose of the research project was to capture adequately the lived experiences of dual-career mothers, I chose to use a phenomenological research design. In order to be considered for inclusion in the study, potential participants had to be (a) the mother of a preschool-aged child, (b) over the age of 35, and (c) employed in a career outside the home. Because of my experiences working at the University of Tennessee Early Learning Center, it was easy for me to identify many women who fit the criteria for the study. I e-mailed two such women to ask if they would be interested in participating in the study, and each agreed to do so. I interviewed each woman in her own home over the course of approximately 1 to 2 hours, asking about her experience. After the interviews were completed, I analyzed the data by (a) listening to and transcribing each interview tape verbatim, (b) highlighting significant statements, (c) grouping the statements into themes, and (d) organizing the themes for inclusion in the final narrative report.

The results of the pilot study demonstrated both the challenges and rewards experienced by the participants. First, each woman spoke of the challenging nature of her dual roles, expressing that trying to balance both work and family life was difficult. One mother spoke of the demands of her career and how it influenced the amount of time she could spend with her child, while the other mother expressed how the fatigue she felt at the end of a long work day impacted how she related to her child. On the other hand, each mother expressed positive aspects of the dual-career lifestyle. One mother felt fulfilled in both her work and parenting roles, noting that it was important for her to “keep doing something that’s so important in defining me” (Marable, 2007, p. 13). The second mother noted the positive side of parenting, stating that her daughter’s laughter and hugs brought a great deal of joy to her life. Additionally, each woman found her age to be a positive asset to motherhood, noting that she felt more mature and ready for parenthood in her 30s. One mother stated that “I think the age that I had my daughter at makes me a better mom” (p. 13).

I learned much from conducting this small research project, and there were certainly a great number of firsts for me as I had to learn about the research methodology of phenomenology, how to conduct face-to-face interviews, and how to analyze the data. I constantly questioned whether or not I was asking the “right” questions, and I quickly learned that the process of interviewing is not an easy one. However, the rewards from the study overshadowed my felt incompetency. The primary reward that came from the study was the benefit the interviews provided the participants. Both participants mentioned that it was therapeutic to talk about the topic and that the questions allowed

them to reflect more deeply upon their experience. I felt as though the participants enjoyed the interview process, and I hope they learned a little more about themselves by engaging in the process with me.

### *Procedure*

The sample, data collection, and data analysis procedures will be discussed in the following sections. Each section will provide the reader with detailed information on each procedural aspect of the study, detailing the ways in which the study was carried through to completion.

*Sample.* Several basic guidelines should be followed when selecting the participants for a phenomenological study. First and foremost, the researcher should look for participants who have experienced the phenomenon of interest and who are willing to talk about their experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). In addition, the participants must be willing to participate in a lengthy interview and must give the investigator permission to publish the data in a dissertation or other publication (Moustakas, 1994). The selection of the sample should be purposeful, that is to say that the investigator “selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). In terms of selecting an appropriate sample size for a phenomenological study, it has been suggested that interviewing as few as 5 participants is appropriate but interviewing as many as 25 is acceptable (Creswell, 2007). However, Thomas and Pollio (2002) offered a narrower guideline, suggesting that investigators focus on interviewing between 6 and 12 participants.

The sample selected for this dissertation project not only met the above general guidelines but met the following criteria as well: (a) Each participant was the parent of a preschool-aged child; (b) each participant had chosen to delay childbearing until the decade of her 30s; (c) each participant had a career outside the home and was part of a dual-career family. I chose to narrow the focus of the study by age of the participant and age of the child for several reasons. I wanted to explore the experiences of mothers who had chosen to delay childbearing because, as stated in the literature review, more and more women are choosing to delay childbearing in order to advance their educations or careers, and it was my intuitive sense that age would impact a mother's lived experience. In terms of age of the child, I chose to focus on mothers parenting a preschooler in part because of my personal experiences with mothers parenting children of this age, but also because mothers who have preschoolers must contend with child-care issues, one of the stressors mentioned in the review of literature.

A total of 10 dual-career mothers were interviewed for this dissertation project, a number which is in keeping with the guidelines set forth by both Creswell (2007) and Thomas & Pollio (2002). In order to recruit participants for the study, I circulated flyers at the University of Tennessee Early Learning Center as well as e-mailed all classroom listservs. The flyers and e-mails outlined briefly salient aspects of the study, including background information, purpose, method and procedure, protection of confidentiality, and information about the researcher. Prior to circulation of the flyers and e-mails, I asked the executive director of the center to complete a letter of permission, authorizing me to contact potential participants and use the center facilities. In addition, I completed a

“Use of the Labs” form, an internal form utilized by the Early Learning Center for all research projects. I interviewed the first 10 mothers who responded to my e-mail and who met all criteria for inclusion in the study. It should be mentioned that, during the course of the tenth interview, I learned that the participant was planning to divorce her husband, thus excluding her from participation in the study. In that instance, I contacted the next individual who had expressed interest in the study, and her interview became the tenth and final one. I understand that because I solicited participants from only one center in the Knoxville area, I had a demographically homogeneous sample. However, I think this is appropriate given the narrow focus of the study and the goals I set for what I wanted to accomplish.

*Data collection.* The primary means of collecting data for a phenomenological study lies in the process of conducting in-depth interviews with participants (Creswell, 2007; Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Interviewing allows the researcher to learn about an individual’s experiences, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. It is a powerful data collection method that captures information about events that would be difficult to quantify. Weiss (1994) described the importance and power of this data collection method when he stated that “most of the significant events of people’s lives can become known to others only through interview” (p. 2). The researcher’s role during an interview for a phenomenological study is to listen closely to the words of the participants, asking for clarification when statements are not understood. In addition, the researcher should guide the participant to focus on themes that arise during the interview and work with him or her to arrive at a rich description of experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). In terms

of the questions asked during a phenomenological interview, Thomas and Pollio suggested that the opening question be broad in nature so as to elicit the greatest degree of description from the participant. Because it is difficult to create an appropriate opening question, it was suggested that the researcher discuss the formation of the opening question with an experienced interviewer or phenomenology research group. Additionally, prior to beginning the interview process, the researcher should participate in a bracketing interview. The term *bracketing* can be defined as “the act of suspending one’s various beliefs in the reality of the natural world in order to study the essential structures of the world” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 175). The purpose of the bracketing interview is to learn about any preconceptions the researcher might hold concerning the phenomenon of interest. Once aware of his or her biases, the researcher should make every effort to remain as nonjudgmental as possible, both during the interview and while interpreting the interview (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

For purposes of the present research project, I conducted in-depth, face-to-face interviews with all 10 participants. Prior to beginning the actual interview process, I thought critically about the structure and wording of the opening question and sought the guidance of one of my committee members in helping me solidify the question. The final version of the opening question and the one that was asked of each participant became, “When you think about your experience living in a dual-career family, what stands out to you?” My goal was to construct an opening question that would allow the participants to expound freely on their experiences with the dual-career lifestyle. In essence, I wanted to

open the door for the participants to tell their stories in rich, descriptive ways, and I believed a well-stated opening question could open that door.

I participated in a bracketing interview prior to conducting interviews with the participants. A former member of the University of Tennessee Phenomenology Research Group was gracious enough to conduct my interview. I transcribed the interview myself and presented the transcript during one of the phenomenology group meetings. Others in the group helped me uncover the preconceptions I had regarding this population of mothers, identifying some biases of which I needed to be aware during interviews with participants. I learned that I had a great deal of admiration and respect for these women, a bias that could influence not only the questions I asked during the interviews but my analysis of the transcripts as well. In addition, I learned I needed to be aware of the role I play as child care provider, as this could influence me to ask questions regarding child care even if the participant chose not to mention it. Further, I learned that I needed to be aware of the preconceived notions I had that the participants would discuss both challenges and rewards associated with their lifestyle, as well as my notion that these women would be balancing all aspects of their lives quite well. Finally, as the interviews progressed, I became aware that as each participant spoke of a common theme, I began to assume subsequent participants would speak of that theme as well. Obviously, this was not an assumption that arose during the bracketing interview, but nonetheless it was one that I had to keep in mind so as not to lead participants to speak of certain themes.

Once the bracketing interview was completed and the transcript analyzed, the actual interview process began. Because it was important that the interviews be

conducted in a location that was comfortable for the participants so that they felt at ease speaking with me (Thomas & Pollio, 2002), the interviews took place in the participants' homes, places of work, or the Lake Avenue site of the UT Early Learning Center. Prior to beginning the interview, each participant signed an informed consent form. The consent form outlined for the participant the purpose of the study, study procedures (e.g., length of interview, audiotaping information), as well as potential risks and benefits. Although the possible risks were minimal, each participant was told that, if at any time the interview became uncomfortable or distressing, it would be stopped. In addition, the consent form outlined information concerning confidentiality, participation in the study (i.e., participation is voluntary and the participant may withdraw from the study at any time), and information about the researcher (e.g., my role in the study, contact information). In addition to signing the informed consent form, each participant completed a demographic questionnaire prior to the beginning of the interview.

Once the interviews began, I took field notes so that I could easily remember the experiences being discussed as well as the individual nuances of participants (e.g., body language, tone of voice, facial expressions). I found the field notes helpful, especially in formulating the interview questions. I made notes of times when I felt elaboration was needed on an experience the participant was discussing, and I found myself often making a list of certain words or phrases I thought needed clarification. Each participant interview was audio-taped and later transcribed by either me or a paid transcriptionist.

*Data analysis.* Data for the present research project were analyzed according to an approach pioneered by Thomas and Pollio (2002). This approach is based primarily

on analyzing the research data in a part-to-whole process, a process whereby the researcher relates “a part of some text to the whole of the text, and any and all passages are always understood in terms of their relationship to the larger whole” (p. 35). One important aspect of this approach to analyzing data is that the researcher utilizes the guidance of the University of Tennessee Phenomenology Research Group to help him or her adequately identify important themes in the interview transcripts. During the group meeting, the researcher’s interview transcript is read aloud, and members comment on words, phrases, or metaphors that they find significant. These significant “meaning units” (p. 35) serve as the basis for the creation of themes. *Themes* are defined as “patterns of description that repetitively recur as important aspects of a participant’s description of his/her experience” (p. 37). When deciding what is thematic, the researcher and group members pay close attention to the context in which words and phrases were spoken and how these words relate to the narrative as a whole. Once all the transcripts have been analyzed (some transcripts are analyzed with the help of group members and some are analyzed by the researcher alone), the group searches for themes across interviews. In so doing, the researcher is able to take note of similarities that may exist across experiences of several participants. Themes that exist across interviews are called *global themes*, and these lead to the development of the *thematic structure*. Once the thematic structure is agreed upon by the researcher and members of the research group, the researcher presents the thematic structure to each of the study participants to ensure that it is an adequate reflection of each participant’s experience. If a participant disagrees with the interpretation, the researcher asks the participant to provide an

alternate interpretation. Once the thematic structure is finalized, the final narrative report is prepared.

Analysis of data for this dissertation project was a multi-step process. I presented a total of three interview transcripts in the phenomenology research group meeting, and the group gave insight as to words, phrases, and metaphors they found significant in each transcript. One group member served as the interviewer and one as the participant, and the transcript was read aloud. The research group leader would stop the readers after several lines were read so that the group could discuss that section of the transcript. During the discussion, I listened carefully to the group's interpretations, taking notes as necessary. At the conclusion of reading each transcript, the group discussed possible themes they saw emerging from that particular participant's experience. I took the same approach as the group when analyzing those transcripts I did not present in the group meeting. I read each transcript line by line, reflecting on important words, phrases, and metaphors, always keeping in mind that the transcript should be analyzed in a part-to-whole process and context should always be considered. Once I had developed a list of themes for each transcript, I looked across transcripts to see which themes were common among the majority of participants. Although there is no set number of participants who must discuss a theme in order for it to be considered a global theme, I chose to make themes global only if they were evident in more than half of the transcripts. Once I had developed a list of global themes, along with exemplary quotations from participants in support of those themes, I presented the list to the phenomenology research group, asking for suggestions and making clarification as needed. The group gave suggestions as to the

labels of the themes but found that overall they coincided well with the transcripts that had been read aloud in group. I edited the list of global themes, taking into account the suggestions of the group members, and worked toward developing my thematic structure. A rough draft of the thematic structure was presented to members of the research group and suggestions were made regarding possible changes and additions to the structure. In addition, group members provided feedback regarding the ground against which the themes emerged. I took the suggestions into consideration and developed the resulting thematic structure and supporting diagram myself.

### *Credibility of the Study*

Qualitative researchers often choose to speak of the trustworthiness of their studies in terms that are distinct from those used by quantitative researchers. Typically, quantitative researchers speak of the trustworthiness of their studies using the terms *validity* and *reliability* (Creswell, 2007) while qualitative researchers use terms such as *credibility*, *dependability*, or *authenticity*, terms that adhere more closely to qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The reasons for the use of differentiating terms varies, with one explanation being that quantitative research is not congruent with qualitative research and, therefore, separate terms should be used (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991). Because the present research project is qualitative in nature, the term *credibility* will be used to discuss the trustworthiness of the study.

Creswell (2007) denoted several specific strategies used by qualitative researchers to demonstrate credibility. The first strategy was that of “prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field” (p. 207). Because I have worked

with mothers in dual-career families for 7 years, I have had much exposure to, and observation of, this particular population of women. The second strategy was that of *peer review* (p. 208), having an individual or individuals present who provide an outside check on the research process. This strategy was utilized in the present research study by having several interview transcripts analyzed by members of the University of Tennessee Phenomenology Research Group. Members of the group aided in the process by helping create the overall thematic structure as well. A third strategy denoted by Creswell was that of *clarifying research bias* (p. 208). This is done by having the researcher comment of any biases or past experiences that might influence his or her approach to the study. This strategy was utilized in the present study through the use of a bracketing interview, wherein I spoke about my experiences with mothers in dual-career families as well as the biases I thought I held about these women. A final strategy mentioned by Creswell was that of obtaining “detailed field notes by employing a good-quality tape for recording and by transcribing the tape” (p. 209). This strategy was utilized in the present study in that I took detailed field notes during each participant interview, paying close attention to detailed nuances in the tone and body language of each participant. In addition, after completion of each interview, I reflected on what I had heard and wrote those reflections in my field notes. Finally, I personally transcribed three of the interview tapes as well as my bracketing interview tape, paying close attention to pauses and changes in tone.

### *Protection of Human Subjects*

In order that the present research study met the guidelines for the protection of human subjects, a University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) Institutional Review Board

Form B was completed and submitted to the Department of Child and Family Studies review committee for approval. Once the form was approved by the department, it was submitted for approval by the UTK Institutional Review Board. The board approved the research study on March 7, 2011.

*Summary*

In order to accomplish the goals of the present research study, existential phenomenology was chosen as the guiding research methodology. A total of 10 participants were chosen for inclusion in the study, and data were collected via in-depth, face-to-face interviews. Data were analyzed using an approach pioneered by Thomas and Pollio (2002) in which global themes across all interview transcripts lead to the development of an overall thematic structure. The credibility of the project was discussed as were the guidelines for protection of human subjects.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The focus of this chapter is on presenting the findings of the current study. First, a brief description of the demographic characteristics of all 10 study participants will be discussed, followed by a more detailed description of each individual participant. Next, the four figural themes that emerged from the study will be described, followed by a discussion of the contextual ground from which the four themes stood out. Finally, a discussion of the overall thematic structure of the study will be presented.

### *Demographic Data*

I must admit that one of my fears in conducting this study was that too few mothers would agree to participate. Because my sample was taken from only one child care center and there were multiple criteria that had to be met in order to be included in the study, I worried that too few mothers would be eligible and/or willing to participate. However, I was surprised when I received over 30 responses to my original e-mail asking for mothers to participate in the study. Many expressed an interest in the research and were eager to tell me their story. I chose to select the first 10 mothers who responded to my e-mail, providing they met all inclusion criteria. In terms of the inclusion criteria, all 10 of the participants included in the study were at least 30 years old at the time they gave birth to their first child, with a mean age of 33.6 years. In addition, all participants had at least one preschool-aged child, with the majority of participants having two or more children. The children's ages varied across participants, with the youngest being a newborn and the oldest being 9 years old. Further, all participants had careers outside the home, and although occupations varied across participants, 6 of the mothers were either

teachers or professors. In addition, all had at least some college education and 8 of the 10 participants had at least a Master's degree. Further, 9 of the 10 participants were employed full-time. All participants were married currently to their spouse, and the mean number of years married was 9. Further, all spouses had careers outside the home, with occupations varying across spouses. Overwhelmingly, participants identified themselves as Caucasian, with only 1 participant identifying herself as Caucasian/Greek. Table 1 documents the demographic data for all 10 study participants.

### *Participant Vignettes*

A brief introduction to all 10 study participants is provided below. It should be noted that pseudonyms were used when referring to the participants, their children, or their spouses so that privacy and confidentiality could be maintained.

*Ariel.* Ariel is a 32-year-old full-time case management specialist and mother of two young daughters, one 22 months old and one newborn. Ariel welcomed me warmly into her home, her newborn daughter in her arms. Ariel was on maternity leave at the time of the interview and although I'm sure she was exhausted from caring for her child, she was a gracious host and seemed genuinely excited to help me with my research. We talked in her living room for several minutes prior to the interview, and Ariel expressed her interest in my topic and said she was curious to know how other families managed the dual-career lifestyle. Ariel talked openly during the interview about her experience, especially as it pertained to the support she received from her family.

*Catherine.* Catherine is a 34-year-old full-time high school teacher and mother of one young daughter who is 2 years old. At the time of the interview, Catherine was

**Table 1: Participant Demographics**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Racial Background</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Occupational Title/ Number of Years Employed</b>	<b>Spouse's Occupational Title/ Number of Years Employed</b>	<b>Number of Years Married</b>	<b>Number of Children/ Gender of Children</b>	<b>Age(s) of Child(ren)</b>	<b>Age at First Birth</b>
Ariel	Caucasian	Master's Degree	Case Management Specialist/ 3 years	Project Manager/ 2 years	6	2/ Females	1 month/ 22 months	30
Catherine	Caucasian	Master's Degree	High School Teacher/ 6 years	Business Owner/ 8 years	10	1/ Female	2 years	32
Erica	Caucasian	Some College	Early Childhood Education Teacher/ 4 years	Merchandising Manager/ 3 years	5	1/ Female	6 months	31
Ashley	Caucasian	Bachelor's Degree	High School Teacher/ 15 years	Vice President of Development/ 14 years	12	2/ Females	2 years/ 6 years	33
Sarah	Caucasian/ Greek	Doctoral Degree	Assistant Director/ 11 years	Research Scientist/ 9 years	16	2/ Males	3 years/ 9 years	34
Emily	Caucasian	Doctoral Degree	Associate Professor/ 15 years	Software Engineer	10	3/ Two Females, One Male	4 years/ 9 years/ 9 years (twins)	38
Susan	Caucasian	Master's Degree	Associate Director/ 15 years	Associate Professor/ 15 years	9	2/ Males	5 years/ 5 years (twins)	36
Karen	Caucasian	Master's Degree	Nurse Practitioner/ Instructor/ 5 years	Executive Associate Dean/ >25 years	3	2/ Males	2 years/ 8 years	34
Rachel	Caucasian	Master's Degree	Manager/ 4 years	Analyst/ 5 years	10	2/ Females	1 year/ 3 years	34
Elaine	Caucasian	Doctoral Degree	Assistant Professor/ 3 years	Freelance Journalist/ 8 years	9	2/ One Male, One Female	1 year/ 5 years	34

expecting her second child. I met with Catherine in her classroom after school hours. It was a strange feeling for me to be back in a high school setting, sitting in a desk, feeling a little like there were certain rules I should be following. Catherine made me feel very welcome, however, and we chatted for a few minutes prior to the interview. Catherine was very open with me during the interview, especially as it pertained to the difficulties she encountered with the dual-career lifestyle during the first year of her daughter's life.

*Erica.* Erica is a 31-year-old full-time early childhood education teacher and mother of a daughter who is 6 months old. Erica has a bubbly personality and was eager to speak with me about her experience. We met after hours at the child care center where Erica teaches and chatted for several minutes prior to the interview. Erica smiled and laughed a great deal as she talked about her daughter, obviously smitten with the newest member of her family. Much of Erica's experience living in a dual-career family now revolved around caring for her new daughter, and she spent a great deal of time talking about how things had changed now that the baby had arrived.

*Ashley.* Ashley is a 39-year-old part-time high school teacher and mother of two young daughters, one 6-year-old and one 2-year-old. Ashley welcomed me warmly into her home, and we sat at her dining room table, talking for a few minutes prior to the interview. Ashley's yard was beautiful so we spent some talking about the flowers and plants and how she and her family spent some time on the weekend gardening, the children helping to plant some of the flowers. Ashley smiled and laughed a lot during the interview as she talked about how chaotic things could become in her household at times, saying that although it was chaos, it was a good type of chaos. At the end of the

interview, Ashley suggested I conduct a second research project and talk with fathers in dual-career families, saying she thought I would hear some interesting and different perspectives. Several other participants suggested this as well.

*Sarah.* Sarah is a 43-year-old full-time assistant director and mother of two young sons, one 9-year-old and one 3-year-old. Sarah and I met after hours in the director's office at the Lake Avenue site of the UT Early Learning Center. Sarah has a Greek background, so I paid close attention as she spoke, trying to ensure I understood completely what she was relaying to me. Sarah took a very matter-of-fact approach as she spoke of her experience, listing day-to-day tasks and how she managed those. She spoke as well about the support of her network of friends and the partnership she felt existed between her husband and herself.

*Emily.* Emily is a 47-year-old full-time associate professor and mother of three young children, a set of 9-year-old twins (one daughter and one son) and a 4-year-old daughter. Emily and I met in her office one warm afternoon and chatted briefly prior to the interview. Emily described her experience in great detail and spoke rather quickly. At times it was difficult for me to think of the next question I would ask as I had a difficult time keeping up with my field notes as Emily talked. Emily spoke at length during the interview about one of her child's special needs and the ways in which her family responded to those needs. As with the other participants, Emily was open with her experience, answering all my questions thoroughly.

*Susan.* Susan is a 41-year-old full-time associate director and mother of a set of 5-year-old twin sons. Susan and I met in her office one afternoon, and I immediately

sensed she had a very sweet spirit. Susan was eager to help me with my research and spoke at the end of the interview about her feelings regarding the lack of maternity time women receive in the United States. We talked as well about the lack of quality child care and how Susan felt lucky to have the ability to send her children to a center where she felt the children were loved and respected. During the interview, I felt Susan gave thoughtful responses to my questions, often pausing after I asked a question to reflect on her answer before giving it. I struggled to give her time to think without rushing into a more detailed explanation of my questions, but I think I managed well enough.

*Karen.* Karen is a 42-year-old full-time nurse practitioner and mother of two biological sons, one 8-year-old and one 2-year-old. In addition, Karen has one adult stepdaughter. We met at Karen's home one evening, and as I entered the home, I could smell dinner cooking. Karen led me to the kitchen, and we sat at the kitchen table, Karen stirring the pots on the stove occasionally. Karen seemed outgoing and personable, asking me questions about my degree, what I planned to do after graduation, etc. Karen was somewhat different from the other participants in that her experience of living in a dual-career family was overwhelmingly positive. For example, she spoke of having ample time to spend with her children and felt she was balancing all her demands rather well.

*Rachel.* Rachel is a 37-year-old full-time manager and mother of two young daughters, one 3-year-old and one 1-year-old. I had a difficult time scheduling the interview with Rachel as she had a great deal of responsibility at work. In addition, one of her children became ill during one of the scheduled interview times. However, we did

manage to find a good time to meet, the interview taking place one evening after hours at the Lake Avenue site of the UT Early Learning Center. Rachel was the least talkative of all the participants, giving shorter answers than I was accustomed to hearing. I tried my best to ask thoughtful questions, but I felt at times that maybe I was not asking the questions very well. In the end, Rachel gave me a great deal of information regarding her experience, but I did ask more questions of her than I did of the other participants.

*Elaine.* Elaine is a 39-year-old full-time assistant professor and mother of one 5-year-old son and one 1-year-old daughter. Elaine and I met one evening at the Lake Avenue site of the UT Early Learning Center and chatted for a few minutes prior to the interview. Elaine has a bubbly, outgoing personality and was eager to help me with my research project. Elaine asked a few questions about the study prior to the interview, wondering about the type of methodology I was using, what I hoped to learn, etc. Elaine spoke at length during the interview about her desire to have a career as well as how she and her husband navigated everyday life.

### *Themes*

In linking together the underlying meanings of the participants' accounts of their experiences living in a dual-career family, four themes emerged: (a) "Free time isn't really free anymore": Timing is Everything; (b) "It's because of the support I get": Supporting Me; (c) "I feel like I'm lacking in one area all the time, just a little bit": Struggling to Find a Balance; and (d) "I know how I would do things": Knowing Myself. The two most dominant themes were those of "Timing is Everything" and "Supporting Me", both represented in all 10 interviews. However, the theme which participants spoke

about in the greatest detail and at the greatest length was that of “Timing is Everything.” The themes of “Struggling to Find a Balance” and “Knowing Myself” were found in 8 of the 10 interviews. The narrative that follows describes the themes and subthemes.

*Theme #1: “Free time isn’t free anymore”: Timing is Everything.* All 10 study participants spoke in some manner about the role time played in their lives. Because there were three distinct ways in which participants spoke of time, three subthemes were created to support those experiences. The first subtheme was that of “Squeeze(ing) out more time with the kids.” The premise of this subtheme was that participants wanted to spend as much time with their children as possible, and because there were only so many hours in a day, participants had to find ways of carving time from other areas of their lives in order to spend time with their children. Prior to having children, participants had focused their time on other aspects of their lives, such as work, but participants’ priorities shifted once children entered the family. Ariel mentioned the shift from a focus on work to a focus on her children when she said,

And so prior to having kids, I worked 60 hours a week, and that was okay, and my husband worked the same, so that didn’t cause problems for us, and then with kids you don’t want to do that. I don’t want to be there 60 hours anymore.

The shift from a focus on work to a focus on children meant that some participants modified their work schedules or times when they accomplished work tasks in order to spend time with their children. Catherine talked about staying up later at night to complete job responsibilities so that she could spend time with her daughter. She said,

I'm up later, I'm grading later [participant is a teacher], before I could just come home and grade papers while my husband, before my husband got home from work or something like that. Now that I have a daughter, obviously, I'm spending all the time I can with her while she's awake, and when she goes to sleep, then I don't start finishing my job until 8:00, 8:30, 9:00 when she's asleep.

Ashley spoke of cutting back on her work hours so that she could spend time with her children. She said,

I adapted my job to a half-time position, so that I could adjust with Jane starting to kindergarten and her having a shorter day, so now I work from 10:00-2:00 so that I could go to Jane's school and be available to pick her up from school.

In addition to shifting priorities from a focus on work to a focus on children, participants spoke as well about shifting priorities from a focus on household chores and routines to a focus on children. Ashley said,

I could spend my time in the kitchen hand-making my pie crusts and hand-making stuff or I can go to the store and buy a Mrs. Smith's frozen pie, put it on the table, and now I've got 20 extra minutes to spend with my kids.

Ariel concurred with Ashley when she stated, "I've just had to let some of it go, you know, is it really that important to do laundry today or should we [she and the children] just go to the park and have a good time." Elaine spoke of this time with her children as "clock[ing] out" from her other responsibilities. She stated, "I clock out, for the most part, on weekends. On Saturday and Sunday during . . . during the daylight hours, I am absolutely, you know, concentrated on the kids." For these participants, spending time

with their children was a priority, and they were willing to cut back on work hours, adjust their schedules, and find alternatives to routine tasks in order to make time for their children.

The second subtheme was entitled “My entire life has to be scheduled”. The one word that could easily sum up the lives of these participants is ‘busy’. Because the participants had so many demands on their time, they found they had to stick to a schedule and plan ahead as much as possible in order that their days run smoothly. When asked what stood out to her about living in a dual-career family, Ashley said, “It’s the speed at which we have to move to get things done and the planning ahead that has to take place.” Erica spoke about the importance of sticking to a schedule when she said,

During the week we have to rush to get out of the house in time, and the hours we have at home in the evening are so few that it’s more of, you know, just staying on schedule so that everybody gets in bed on time.

All the scheduling and planning was challenging for some participants, as Emily demonstrated when she stated,

It’s very hard dealing with scheduling, dealing with the time constraints that we have, so if I want to go do something on my own or if my husband and I want to do something together, we have to do advanced planning, figure out can we get the babysitter here, will it work for everybody’s schedules, so it’s pretty challenging.

Although scheduling and advanced planning were not always easy, they were necessary in order that quality time could be spent with family members. Ashley spoke about the

need to schedule time with her husband when she said,

Sometimes we have to put it on the calendar, like “We will go on a date” just to be alone, or “We will go away for the weekend,” just to be alone . . . my time with my spouse, we have to set the time aside.

The third subtheme was entitled “We just never have enough time to get everything done,” a theme which addressed the lack of time the participants perceived they had for themselves, their spouse, their child, and various others in their lives. When asked what stood out to her about living in a dual-career family, Rachel said, “It’s crazy all the time. We just never have enough time to get everything done.” She went on to talk specifically about the lack of time she had with her children and for herself. She said, “I think I added up, and we spend like 3 hours a day during the week, maybe [with the children].” As for time for herself, Rachel said, “Two hours a week I go for a run, and that’s the only time I have. I would run every day; I just don’t have the time.” Susan, too, spoke about a lack of time with her children, stating that “I do think it’s sad that in an average day how few hours you really get to spend with your kids when you add it up.” I think Susan summed up the importance of time in these participants’ lives when she said,

Whenever my husband and I, we talk about gifts like what do you want for Christmas or what do you want for your birthday, a lot of times we say there’s almost like no concrete item we want, because what we really wish we had was time . . . so I think we just wish we had more time.

Although the majority of participants perceived a lack of time in their lives, it should be noted that one participant, Karen, believed she did have an ample amount of

time, at least in terms of the time she spent with her children. She stated,

I think right now we have the best of both worlds. Both of us have fulfilling careers, but we are spending a lot of time with the children, and I have more time with them than he (husband) does, and I feel like that's a benefit and a luxury.

Karen's experience was, however, unique and not the experience of the majority of participants.

*Theme #2: "It's because of the support I get": Supporting Me.* All 10 participants spoke in some manner about the role support networks played in their lives as members of dual-career families, and this was the case whether or not participants deemed themselves to have certain personality characteristics (one aspect of the "Knowing Myself" theme). Because participants spoke about this support network in two distinct ways, two subthemes were created to reflect this experience. The first subtheme was entitled "It's not my job or his job, it's our job, just who's doing it at which time," the premise of which concerned the role participants' husbands played in their family lives. The degree of support participants received from their spouses varied, but a majority of participants perceived themselves to be in relationships with husbands who were willing to divide tasks and chores equitably. Participants used words such as "partnership" (Sarah) and "team" (Erica) to describe these relationships. Sarah said,

I'm already stressed enough with what needs to be done that I could not imagine continuing to work if . . . if we didn't have the partnership we have, and so if I had to single out the one factor that makes me able to work at the level I do, it's because of the support I get from him.

Erica echoed these sentiments when she said,

I just really feel lucky. I think I'm really fortunate with the husband I have that is so giving and so, so much of a team player. I don't have to ask him to be that way, that's just the way he is, you know. I'm not sure how, how I would be able to handle it if I didn't have David.

Erica went on to say, "We just really try to do everything 50/50 so that neither of us feels like we're doing more of the work than the other." When asked what stood out to her about living in a dual-career family, Karen replied, "Teamwork. I would say that my husband is very helpful." In terms of how chores and tasks were divided in these equitable partnerships, participants spoke in terms of sharing them or taking turns. Ashley said, "From the very beginning we took turns giving baths, we took turns reading books at bedtime" and Catherine said, "We don't follow the traditional thing. I don't do all the cooking, he cooks, we share all the stuff, all the roles, all the things that need to be done."

Although most participants perceived themselves to be in equitable relationships with their spouses, a few did speak of the fact that traditional gender-specific roles existed still in their households and the irritation and frustration they experienced in dealing with them. Karen gave an example of a time when she was aware that the traditional gender roles existed still in her household. She said,

I think those traditional roles are still in play, and there are times I feel resentment, like I'm driving home, and I think, "I don't know what we're having for dinner tonight, and I bet my husband hasn't given a single thought to it," and that irritates me.

She went on to say,

We get home at the same time, and he says, “What’s for dinner?” and I say, “I don’t know, what *is* for dinner?” not in a mean way, but then he does step up and make something, and I don’t feel bad about that at all [laughing].

Elaine spoke of the difference between her and her husband and the way they navigated household tasks in terms of a general difference between men and women. She stated that often she is tired and frustrated because

I’m, you know, doing three things at one time while he is standing in the kitchen with a dishtowel in one hand watching *Sports Center*, instead of doing what, you know, while one child is asking him for milk, you know?

Ariel, too, spoke of the gender-specific roles that existed between her and her husband.

She stated,

I consider my husband fairly progressive as far as his ideas about roles and things like that, and I definitely don’t think that we’re traditional in our own minds, but then, a lot of times it does fall into really traditional roles about like how . . . getting things done or who does what for the kids, those sort of things.

She went on to say, “You’re an equal part a breadwinner, and you’re an equal part a career person, but then you and your partner still don’t understand how to divvy out roles that aren’t really sort of traditionally based, I guess.” However, even in these relationships where participants felt their relationships were more traditionally based, they still saw their spouses as supportive. For example, although Karen’s husband might ask her what was for dinner, he would step in and make dinner himself if he sensed she

was upset. Also, although Elaine spoke of gender-specific roles existing in her household, she noted later in the interview that “We found our strengths, and we usually do those because they’re our strengths, but it’s not *all* tailored toward some sort of like expectation from a gender perspective.” For all 10 participants, spouses played a supportive role in making the dual-career family a possibility. For some, relationships were more traditionally based, but for the majority, they perceived themselves to be in equitable relationships with husbands who took on their share of the workload.

The second subtheme was entitled “I’m just thankful to have that support system if we need it,” the premise of which concerned the importance to participants of having a support system, those who made their dual-career lifestyle more manageable. Primarily, participants spoke of three types of support: family support, support from friends, and support from outside others (e.g., staff at the child care center, babysitters, housekeepers). Just as they had when speaking about their husbands, many of the participants expressed gratitude for this support network, noting they were integral to the success of their family life. In speaking of her husband’s sometimes long work hours and the accommodations that had to be made to support his schedule, Ariel said, “And we couldn’t do any of that without my family being involved and sort of helping us.” She went on to say she wondered how couples “with less support than we have, how they get everything done.” Erica expressed her thankfulness for her network of support when she said, “I’m just thankful to have that support system if we need it.” In addition to expressing their gratitude toward those in their support network, participants spoke as well about the types of assistance these friends, family, and caretakers provided. Primarily, participants spoke

of both instrumental (e.g., assistance with routine household tasks, assistance with child care responsibilities) and emotional support, providing examples of times when they were aware of each. Emily talked about the instrumental support her babysitter provided, especially as it related to her son and his special needs. She noted that the sitter helped get her son to various therapy appointments. She said, “We now have things arranged so that our sitter brings him to that [therapy appointment] so that’s a little less difficult than it used to be.” In addition, Emily spoke about the support she received from staff at the child care center. She said,

I guess it’s true with both Linda [babysitter] and with the teachers, especially the full-time teachers at the Early Learning Center, that they’ve really been resources for me there. If I’ve got questions about why is the kid behaving this way or how do I deal with this, um, I’ve always felt that both the Early Learning Center teachers and Linda have been people I could raise that with.

Sarah, too, spoke of the instrumental support she received. In speaking about her network of friends Sarah said, “We have come up with some kind of substitute network of friends that are in the same situation, and we help each other with picking up the kids some days when both me and husband need to be out.” In terms of the emotional support the participants received, Susan said, “I would get emotional support from co-workers, you know, people being very understanding and kind.” Perhaps Ariel said it most eloquently when she said, “I think a lot of it is that emotional peace of knowing that if I’m not with her [participant’s child] or my husband’s not with her, it’s family and other people that I really trust.”

A majority of participants had a network of supportive others available and willing to help in times of need, but those participants who did not found it challenging to accomplish all their everyday tasks. When asked for some examples of challenges in managing her everyday household responsibilities, Susan said,

Just having to take off from work to, um, be with them [participant's children] and get them to doctor's appointments and not having family in town to help with that, so my husband and I having to split our time to manage all that.

Sarah, too, mentioned the challenge in getting everything done with no family in town when she said, "And part of the juggling is hard for us because we do not have any, um, family in town, no grandparents or aunts and uncles."

*Theme #3: "I feel like I'm lacking in one area all the time, just a little bit":*

*Struggling to Find a Balance.* Eight of the 10 participants spoke about having to balance various aspects of their daily lives. Primarily, participants talked about the demands of balancing their career with their family lives and/or parenting or balancing the demands of their everyday, busy lives with time for the family to be together. Catherine spoke of the challenge of balancing her career with parenting when she said,

I wasn't prepared for the amount that it took to balance both parenting with being a teacher, basically. It's really hard to balance both things. I feel like my parenting hurts because I'm exhausted from teaching sometimes, and I definitely feel that because I am more focused, obviously, on my daughter now than my career, that I am not giving as much to my students and that they're suffering and I'm not as good of a teacher as I know I'm capable of being.

For Catherine, balancing parenting with a career seemed impossible. She stated, “It seems like it’s always, ‘Okay, you can be a good teacher or you can be present as a parent, but you can’t be both’.” Susan, too, noted the challenge of balancing parenting with a career when she said,

I think it’s very challenging to manage all the responsibilities and live up to the expectations that I set for myself, so I often feel like to be the best mom and the best worker I can are sometimes at cross-purposes.

In regards to balancing everyday busyness with family time, Erica said,

During the week, it’s very busy, um, just getting through the evening and getting all the things done we need to get done, um on the weekends it’s a lot more relaxed, and we try to spend time together so just trying to balance that, the busyness with just relaxing time, time with just the three of us.

Elaine found herself balancing various household tasks with parenting and said,

I feel pretty tense a lot of the times because, uh . . . a lot of the time because I’m doing just huge amounts of juggling. Whether it’s I have my leg up on, you know, the kitchen counter with my daughter sitting on it where my arms are around her and then with the other hand making pasta, me making pasta. But it’s constantly . . . I’m never just doing one thing, ever.

As is evidenced in the above quotes, this balancing act was not simple for the participants, and many indicated they found this task quite difficult, using words such as “hard” (Catherine) and “challenging” (Susan) and phrases such as “just getting through” (Erica) to describe their experiences. As I listened to their stories, I felt their exhaustion

and the inner struggle they seemed to have as they tried to find a way to best manage all the tasks they needed to complete in one day. It was as if there weren't enough of them to go around and they were trying to find ways to make it all work but were struggling to do so.

Although the majority of participants found balancing the various aspects of their lives a challenging task, one participant, Karen, perceived herself as balancing the demands of work and home quite well. She stated, "I always saw myself as having a career and having children, and I worried about how I would balance that, but it's turned out to work really well." Karen's perception, however, was unique and not the experience of the other participants.

*Theme #4: "I know how I would do things": Knowing Myself.* Eight of the 10 participants spoke about either their personal characteristics or their decision to pursue a career as impacting their family lives. Because these two types of knowing are somewhat different from one another, two subthemes were created to support this theme. The first subtheme was entitled "I'm very Type-A" and addressed the manner in which participants described their personal characteristics (it should be noted that participants used the term *Type-A* as it is used in popular culture and not as it is used in scholarly research). Participants' personal characteristics enabled them to be efficient but at the same time added a degree of difficulty to their lives. One participant, Susan, explained it as "a price to pay" for being organized and structured. The characteristics mentioned by the participants were quite similar, with words such as "organized" (Susan), "detail-oriented" (Ariel), and "Type-A" (Erica) mentioned as personal descriptors. In speaking

of how her personality enabled her morning routine to run smoothly, Ashley said, “I have toothpaste on the toothbrushes for the girls before they’ve ever been woken up, just because it helps once they are awake and we get through the schedule. That’s also my Type-A personality probably.” Ariel, too, perceived that her personality traits enabled her to operate smoothly, using as an example her work life. She said that her personality characteristics “serve me really well in the job that I do, my specific job role now.”

However, these types of personality traits could bring challenges as well. Susan said,

I am a very task-oriented person, and I like to get my things done. I’m an ESFJ on the Myers-Briggs [laughing], and I know that sometimes the price I pay for that is probably not being just as spontaneous and flexible and playful [with the children].

Erica, too, found her personality traits challenging when it came to allowing others to care for her daughter. She said,

I’m very in-control, and I have, I’m very Type-A, and so it’s hard for me to let that go and just trust other people, even when I know they’re trustworthy. That’s hard because I know how I would do things.

The second subtheme, “I always saw myself as having a career,” addressed the decision by participants to work outside the home. Participants’ decisions to pursue careers were spoken of as being positive, with results being improved parenting, more social and mental stimulation, and independence. Rachel spoke about the positive aspects of working outside the home when she said that she believed if she did not work, she would miss the “social interaction with people your own age” and the “mental

stimulation” that a career provides. She further stated that she believed working provided financial resources to her family and that it would be irresponsible for her not to contribute in that way. She stated,

Well, I took a couple of months off after I had Lori for about a year because I was like, “Oh, maybe I should stay home.” I just can’t do that. It’s, not only is it financially not as responsible, also I would just miss the adult interaction, and I like being independent, so I can’t imagine just staying at home and relying on someone else for my income.

Karen, too, spoke of the positive attributes of working and the fulfillment she got from her career. She said,

It’s just maybe a rare day in the past 4 years that I’ve come home upset from work. This just almost doesn’t happen, so I’m really, really lucky, and I think I’m, I think my baseline is happy. I’m, at base, able to be very happy and fulfilled on a daily basis.

Elaine summed up the positive benefits of work when she said, “I just cannot imagine not working and being passionate about something outside of just, you know, family and friends.” For these participants, the primary benefit of living in a dual-career family came from engaging in work that was both personally fulfilling and mentally stimulating.

In sum, four themes stood out as figural for participants living the dual-career lifestyle. Participants spoke in depth and at great length about issues of time and the impact time had on various aspects of their lives. In addition, participants spoke about support networks and how integral they were to the success of managing everyday tasks

and routines. Further, participants spoke about the struggle they faced in balancing the various aspects of their lives as well as how their personal characteristics helped or hindered them in navigating their various roles. Finally, participants spoke of their decision to work outside the home and the benefits associated with that decision.

### *Contextual Ground*

Each individual's experience is situated within a specific context or situation. In other words, what is figural for an individual stands out against a certain background (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Merleau-Ponty (1962/2008) described this figure/ground relationship as follows:

It [the figure] has an "outline", which does not "belong" to the background and which "stands out" from it; it is "stable" and offers a "compact" area of colour, the background on the other hand having no bounds, being of indefinite colouring and "running on" under the figure. (p. 15)

In describing the figure/ground relationship, it is important to note as well that each figure and ground co-constitute one another, that is to say that one cannot be seen without the other (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

Existential phenomenologists speak of four primary grounds against which all human experience emerges: (a) space/world, (b) body, (c) time, and (d) relationship/others. For purposes of the present study, the ground against which participants' experiences emerged was that of the world, specifically the two worlds of home and work, and the struggle that existed in integrating the two. For these participants, there was a constant pull between the two worlds, both in terms of dividing

time between the two as well as trying to balance various tasks and routines associated with each. Catherine spoke about one instance in which she struggled with the division of time between work and home. She stated,

Last night was conference [parent conference at participant's place of work] so I stayed 'til 7:00 at night, and my daughter was asleep before I left in the morning because I got here early to get ready for everything, so, you know, I put in a 12 to 14 hour day at work, I didn't get to see my daughter the entire time because she was asleep by the time I got home and she was asleep when I left, so I missed out on her for a whole day, and she's 2 and she's only going to be 2 once, so that's kind of something I don't want to miss.

Susan, too, spoke about the difficulty in dividing time between work and home and perceived that, because of work commitments, few hours were left during the day to spend with her children. She stated, "I think I added up and we spend like 3 hours a day during the week, maybe [with the children]." One example of the struggle to balance the two worlds of home and work came from Ariel, who spoke about the differences she perceived in her home life and her work life. She stated,

I think the things that sort of benefit me in my career don't necessarily benefit me as like a parent, and so I find that challenging, I guess. You know, some of your strengths in a career might be your sort of things I would identify as like compulsive behavior as far as being timely or tidy or conscientious or . . . all the things that sort of get a job done don't always translate into like a family home, and how do you balance that?

Another example of the struggle to balance home and work came from Sarah. When asked what stood out to her about living in a dual-career family, she said,

Juggling, trying to get stuff done at the office, staff and taking care of people and everything that comes with the work, and taking care of what needs to be done at home and taking care of people at home.

For these participants, integrating the two worlds of work and home required support, both spousal support and support from family, friends, and hired help. These support networks were integral to the success of the dual-career lifestyle. One example of the importance of spousal support was given by Karen, who spoke of how her husband would help when work collided with family life. She stated,

Often, as a nurse practitioner, I have to have some evenings where I do some continuing medical education, and on those evenings he'll [the husband] pick up the children, make them dinner, get them, you know, bathed and ready for bed.

In terms of support from those other than spouses, Rachel noted their importance when she stated,

My mom and mother-in-law do stuff that I can't get done, because there's only so much I can get done within a day, and sometimes they help, like if Courtney or Lori [participant's children] is sick, or, you know, right now my mom's been helping a lot with the transportation since the childcare center is located in two different places [one child was in care at one location and the other child was in care at another location]."

In addition, many of the participants had at least some degree of flexibility in their

careers, allowing them to integrate home and work more easily. Karen stated,

Probably both of my workplaces know that it's really important to me to pick up the kids and to be there in the afternoons, um, if they think I'm less professional for that, that's fine, but they actually have been very respectful of it.

She went on to say, "I work in all-female offices, both of my roles, which is unusual, and I feel extremely supported." Ariel, too, felt supported by those at her place of employment. She said,

I think we just accept that there are times that work is going to be unfairly time consuming, but there are times that we can walk away from work, and I feel like I work for people who really get that, like when I'm needed, I'm there and I'm doing it, and when I can, you know, grab an hour one way or the other, then that's okay.

However, when there was a lack of support, participants reported having a more challenging time integrating the two worlds of work and home. In speaking of having to manage work and family responsibilities without family in town, Susan said,

Just having to take off from work to be with them [participant's children] and get them to doctor's appointments and not having family in town to help with that, so my husband and I having to split our time to manage all that.

Participants' self-described personal characteristics influenced as well their ability to integrate the worlds of work and home. For many participants, their personal characteristics were an asset, allowing them to operate more efficiently in both worlds. Ariel gave a good example of the advantages of her personality traits in the world of

work when she said, “I’m just a doer and I want to get it done and I want to see the final product” and those characteristics “serve me really well in the job that I do, my specific role now.” In terms of the advantages of her personality traits on family life, Erica said her “very organized, very methodical” personality allowed her to “just really stay on top of any kind of chores or anything that needs to be done.” However, participants reported these traits could prove to be a disadvantage as well. Susan stated that there was a “price to pay” for being a very task-oriented person, and that price was “probably not being just as spontaneous and flexible and playful [with the children].”

Participants noted overwhelmingly that they had chosen to work outside the home, even though the two worlds of work and home required constant negotiation and could prove challenging. Many noted a need for the personal fulfillment work gave them, stating they wanted to be engaged in “adult interaction” (Rachel). Some participants mentioned they thought they were better parents because they worked, as illustrated in a quote from Ashley who said, “I think in some ways I’m a better mom because I work outside the home. It makes me value my time with my children better.” The perception of these participants was that work was integral to their development of self and a necessary part of their lifeworld. For these participants, the decision to work outside the home was seen as a primary benefit of the dual-career lifestyle. However, if sacrifices had to be made and a first priority established, participants chose family and home life over work. An example of this choice was demonstrated by Karen when she said, “I’ve not advanced my career as much as I might have so that I can be there for the

children ‘cause that’s very important to me.” Emily, too, spoke about the sacrifices she had made in her career when she said,

I at one point thought that I could have a really high-powered academic career, and it’s not going to happen now. It’s been 5 years since I published anything even, and in my field, people don’t publish as often as in others, but I should be getting an article out per year, and having the third child just put the kibosh on that totally, so, on the one hand, I really would not have wanted to miss out on this [parenting]. I mean, I’m thrilled to have the kids and really glad we did have the third one.

Catherine, too, spoke of choosing family life over work when she said, “When she’s [child] awake, I’m focused on her, hanging out with her, playing with her, reading books, whatever, and I’m not willing to use those few hours in the evening to grade papers or work.”

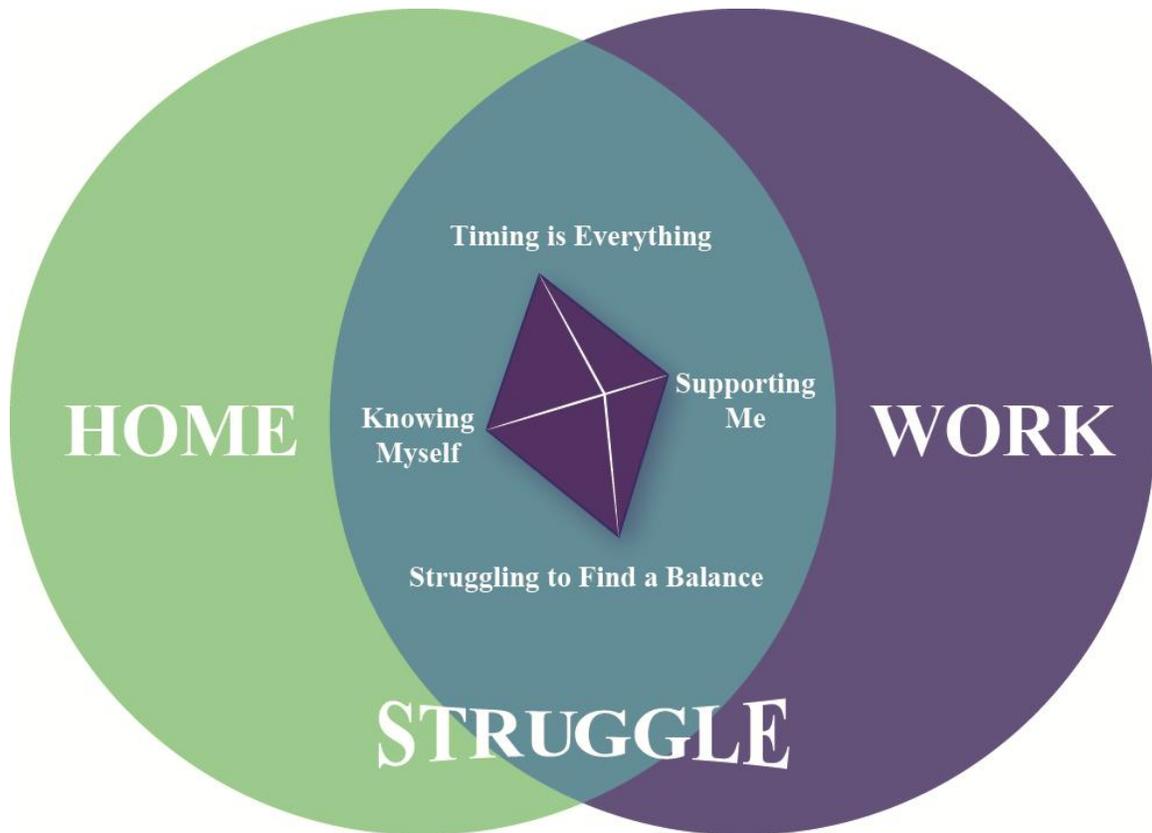
### *Thematic Structure*

Four themes emerged as figural to the overall experience of mothers living the dual-career lifestyle: (a) “Free time isn’t really free anymore”: Timing is Everything; (b) “It’s because of the support I get”: Supporting Me; (c) “I feel like I’m lacking in one area all the time, just a little bit”: Struggling to Find a Balance; and (d) “I know how I would do things”: Knowing Myself. The ground against which these figural themes emerged was that of the world, specifically the worlds of home and work, and the struggle that existed in integrating the two. It is the interrelationship of the four figural themes as well

as their relation to the ground that form the overall thematic structure. Figure 1 demonstrates this structure in diagram form.

The ground of the world is demonstrated by the use of two circles, one representing the world of home and the other representing the world of work. The two circles are interconnected, denoting that each world spills over into the other. Because the two worlds overlap, participants often find themselves struggling to navigate each fully (“It seems like it’s always, ‘Okay, you can be a good teacher or you can be present as a parent, but you can’t be both’”--Catherine). The four figural themes are centered in the interconnected segment of the two worlds, denoting that each stands out from the integrated nature of the worlds of work and home. The themes are diagrammed in the shape of a diamond, denoting an interrelationship among them that is never-ending. Although the themes were described separately, each contributes to the overall essence of the experience. The theme of “Timing is Everything” is located at the apex of the diamond, denoting it as the most prominent theme. Finally, the entire diamond leans to the left, indicating that if a choice has to be made in regards to prioritizing the world of home or the world of work, the world of home is chosen as most important.

In regard to the interrelationship among the four figural themes, it is best to begin with the most prominent, “Timing is Everything,” situated at the apex of the diamond. An awareness of time (e.g., a lack of time, a need to make time) necessitated the need for balancing (“It’s very busy just getting through the evening and getting all the things done that need to get done, and we try to spend time together so just trying to balance that, the busyness with just relaxing time”--Erica), illustrated in the theme



**Figure 1: Thematic Structure**

Graphic designed by Kelly Porter, MFA candidate

University of Tennessee, Knoxville School of Art and Architecture

“Struggling to Find a Balance,” the theme situated directly across from “Timing is Everything” in the structure of the diamond. In order to effectively manage time and balance both work and home, participants perceived support networks as integral (“If I had to single out the one factor that makes me able to work at the level I do, it’s because of the support I get from him [spouse]”--Sarah), illustrated in the theme “Supporting Me,” the theme situated on the diagonal to the right of both “Timing is Everything” and “Balancing Act.” The theme of “Knowing Myself” situated directly across from the theme of “Supporting Me” and on the diagonal and to the left of both “Timing is Everything” and “Struggling to Find a Balance” included self-described personal characteristics that were perceived by participants as helpful as well in managing time and balancing work and home (“We’re [participant and her husband] very structured and organized people because I think we learned that we had to just to be efficient”--Susan). Included in this theme as well was the choice to pursue a career, a choice necessitating the need to balance home and work (the theme of “Struggling to Find a Balance”) as well as a need for an awareness of time (the theme of “Timing is Everything”). The inverse relationship between “Knowing Myself” and “Supporting Me” on “Timing is Everything” and “Struggling to Find a Balance” was true as well. In the event there were no support networks or personality traits proved challenging, participants perceived it to be more difficult to effectively deal with issues of time (“Having to take off from work to be with them and get them to doctor’s appointments and not having family in town to help with that, so my husband and I having to split our time to manage that”—Susan) and

to balance work and home (“And part of the juggling is hard for us because we do not have any, um, family in town, no grandparents or aunts and uncles”--Sarah).

### *Summary*

Ten participants were interviewed in order to explore and describe their experiences living in a dual-career family. Findings from the present study showed that four themes stood out as figural for participants: (a) “Free time isn’t really free anymore”: Timing is Everything; (b) “It’s because of the support I get”: Supporting Me; (c) “I feel like I’m lacking in one area all the time, just a little bit”: Struggling to Find a Balance; and (d) “I know how I would do things”: Knowing Myself. These four themes stood out against the ground of the world, specifically the two worlds of home and work, and the struggle that existed in integrating the two. The overall thematic structure demonstrated both the interrelationship of the four figural themes as well as their relationship to the ground of world.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of mothers living in dual-career families. Using existential phenomenology as the guiding research methodology, I interviewed 10 participants and asked the question, “When you think about your experience living in a dual-career family, what stands out to you?” Interview tapes were transcribed and then analyzed using an approach to existential phenomenological research pioneered by Thomas and Pollio (2002). Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed four themes as figural for participants in the study: (a) “Free time isn’t really free anymore”: Timing is Everything; (b) “It’s because of the support I get”: Supporting Me; (c) “I feel like I’m lacking in one area all the time, just a little bit”: Struggling to Find a Balance; and (d) “I know how I would do things”: Knowing Myself. Each theme stood out against the ground of world, specifically the two worlds of home and work, and the struggle that existed in integrating the two. The overall thematic structure revealed the interrelationships among all four themes as well as their relationship to the ground of world.

In this chapter, conclusions from the study as well as the researcher’s personal reflections will be presented. In addition, implications for the areas of practice and future research will be discussed, and a description of the theoretical context will be offered. Concluding the chapter will be a discussion of the limitations of the study as well as a brief, overall summary of the project.

### *Conclusions*

The two primary struggles faced by mothers living in dual-career families were

those associated with balancing and time. For these mothers, time was a precious resource, and there was never enough of it. Much planning and scheduling had to take place in order that family life operated smoothly, and even when it did, mothers still found themselves exhausted, multi-tasking in order to make it all work. This limited time necessitated a need to try to balance work, parenting, spousal relationships, and household tasks, a balance that was not easily achieved. Mothers found themselves in a constant state of rearranging and prioritizing in order that the most important responsibilities were taken care of first, often relying on support networks and spouses to help make this happen. In the event mothers did not have a network of support, challenges arose surrounding issues of time and balance. For these mothers, being a self-professed Type-A personality could be advantageous as it allowed them to be more efficient but could prove challenging as well when tasks could not be completed in a manner consistent with their standards. Although challenges existed for these mothers and their lives were, at times, stressful and exhausting, they noted overwhelmingly that they desired to have a career. The personal satisfaction, mental stimulation, and independence that a career afforded these mothers were integral to their development of self and not something they were willing to give up so that life could be less stressful. These mothers saw their careers as one of the primary benefits of the dual-career lifestyle, and it was a lifestyle they willingly chose.

In reflecting on the review of earlier empirical work, many of the study conclusions are not unusual or surprising. It has been well-documented that mothers living the dual-career lifestyle face challenges in balancing multiple roles, a phenomenon

known as *role overload* (Duxbury, Lyons, & Higgins, 2008; Glynn, Maclean, Forte, & Cohen, 2009; Hochschild, 2003), and that these mothers often are pressed for time (Hochschild, 1997; Milkie, Raley, & Bianchi, 2009). In addition, it is not unusual that the worlds of work and home would spill over into one another, causing work-family conflict (Nomaguchi, 2009). Although there is a trend toward viewing the worlds of work and home as allies, making integration of the two plausible (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000), conflicts still exist and solutions must be sought to resolve them. Further, it is not surprising that mothers would take a great deal of satisfaction from their work (Coontz, 1997; Tan, 2008), viewing their careers as one of the benefits of the dual-career lifestyle (Barnett & Rivers, 1996). In addition, it is not surprising that support from both spouses and other family members is seen as a valuable resource, an integral part of making the dual-career lifestyle a reality (Darrah, Freeman, & English-Lueck, 2007; Edwards, 2006; Rudd & McKenry, 1986). However, empirical literature dedicated to denoting the importance of supportive others in the community lags behind that of literature dedicated to the importance of both family and spousal support. In the present study, support from both paid help and others in the community, such as staff at the child care center, was important in managing the dual-career lifestyle. In addition, there is little in the literature denoting the impact of one's personality traits on one's decision to pursue a certain lifestyle or in aiding or hindering that individual in a given lifestyle. These two areas of importance for mothers living in dual-career families warrant further research.

It should be noted here that, although mothers living in dual-career families face challenges and struggles, the mothers in the present study had a great deal of resources

that lessened these challenges considerably. First, these mothers were employed in professional-level careers that afforded them not only a great deal of satisfaction but a higher level of income as well. Because these mothers had a higher level of income, they were able to place their children in a high-quality child care center, a luxury many do not have. Further, several of the mothers had the ability to hire outside paid help to aid in child care and household responsibilities. Finally, many of these mothers perceived themselves to be in egalitarian relationships with their spouses, and even if relationships were perceived as more traditionally based, all mothers experienced their relationships as supportive.

### *Personal Reflections*

One of the most interesting aspects of the study for me as a researcher came prior to beginning any of the interviews. The day I sent out the e-mail asking for participation in the study, I worried that I would receive few responses, requiring me to employ a snowball sampling technique. In fact, I just assumed this was going to happen. However, the response I received to my e-mail was overwhelming. I knew intuitively that the topic was important and timely, but I did not grasp just how important until I heard from mothers who wanted to share their story with me. As I began the interview process, participants told me over and over that they thought this topic was important to explore, and they were eager to speak with me about an experience that touched their lives so deeply. Many were interested in reading the results of the study, wondering if the other participants' stories were similar to their own. As I concluded the final interview, I reflected on the entire interview process and the mothers with whom I had

spoken. I believe that for these mothers I became an attentive listener, someone with whom they could share their stories freely, in a nonjudgmental atmosphere. I believe this atmosphere allowed them to be open and honest and express their true thoughts and feelings. It is not always easy to talk with someone about your personal experiences, and I am grateful for the many mothers who agreed to speak with me, both those I interviewed and those who simply volunteered to participate in the study.

Another aspect of the study that stood out to me involved what the participants *did not* speak about in their interviews. One of the study criteria was that participants had to be at least 30 years old at the time they gave birth to their first child, and this criterion was included in part because of the recent trend in delayed-childbearing among employed women (Halpern, 2005; Spain & Bianchi, 1996). However, the age at which participants had their children did not stand out for them in thinking about their experience living in a dual-career family. Perhaps it is the case that delayed childbearing is becoming so commonplace that women do not see it as unusual or noteworthy. It may be the case that women now view the decade of their 30s as a natural time to begin a family. In any event, age simply was not figural for participants in the present study.

An additional aspect of the study that stood out to me as a researcher involved my observation that participants described their experiences differently depending on the number of children in the household as well as ages of the children. For example, Erica had one infant daughter and spent a great deal of time talking about issues related to time as well as how she was adjusting to having a new member of the family, whereas Ashley, who had two young daughters (one 2-year-old and one 6-year-old), spent a great deal of

time talking about balancing the demands of family life, having two young children to consider. These observations are strictly my own, and it should be noted that participants did not expressly mention that time or balancing was related to the number or ages of the children, but I nonetheless found it an interesting aspect of the study.

I learned a great deal from the mothers who participated in this study. First, I learned that the topic of living in a dual-career family is important to those living this lifestyle. Not only did participants state they believed it was important, but they were willing to take time out of their busy lives to talk with me about it, and they were willing to arrange their schedules so that this could happen. For example, many arranged child care after work on a weekday evening so there would be no distractions during the interview. Second, I learned that, although there were struggles associated with the dual-career lifestyle, this was a lifestyle these participants chose to live. I was struck by the passion these women had for their careers and the personal fulfillment they garnered from their work. These participants were willing to deal with the challenges that came along with trying to integrate work and home because they wanted careers, work that would stimulate them mentally and provide independence and freedom as well. Finally, I learned that, for these participants, family was a top priority. Although they were passionate about their careers, these participants were even more passionate about their families, specifically their children, and they were willing to sacrifice aspects of their work lives in order to spend as much time as possible with them. It appeared that the joys associated with a career did not compare with the joys of motherhood.

### *Theoretical Context*

In considering the present study, I found socio-cultural theory to be useful in better understanding the findings. Lev Vygotsky, the father of socio-cultural theory, saw individuals as influenced greatly by historical, societal, and cultural influences and his works, although focusing on many different concepts inherent in the theory, express this underlying message (Vygotsky, 1978). Many scholars use Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory to explain various aspects of child development, but I believe it can be applied to other areas as well because of the broad assumptions underlying it.

The key tenets of Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory lie in the importance of context in development, specifically societal, historical, and cultural contexts. In regard to societal context, Vygotsky believed that social interaction with others was paramount to development. In their summary of socio-cultural theory, Berk and Winsler (1995) noted that "to understand the development of the individual, it is necessary to understand the social relations of which the individual is a part" (p. 12). In regard to historical context, Vygotsky believed human nature changes as a result of historical changes. He used as an example the sign systems individuals use (e.g., writing, language) as proof of this change, noting that these systems have evolved throughout history. Finally, in regards to cultural context, Vygotsky saw individuals as influenced by the culture of which they are a part. He used again the example of sign systems and noted that the only way individuals can internalize concepts and processes is to be exposed to them on a cultural level.

In considering how this theory illuminates the findings of the present study, one must consider the importance of the three contexts mentioned in the theory. First, these mothers were impacted by history. Historically, women have always worked (Coontz, 1997) but women began entering the world of paid work in greater numbers during the decade of the 1970's (Tan, 2008) and these numbers only grew in the 1980's and 1990's (Spain & Bianchi, 1996). The mothers in the present study were a part of this increased number of women who have entered the world of paid work and were thus dealing with issues related to working outside the home. In addition, some of these mothers were dealing with the historical notion that men should not be as involved in family life as women, causing frustration for some. Second, these mothers were influenced by the social relationships they had with others in their lives, and this was evidenced in their experience of support with both spouses and others in the larger society. In addition, these mothers were influenced greatly by their children, choosing to spend as much time as possible with them and making sacrifices in order to do so. Finally, these mothers were influenced by culture, specifically the cultural worlds of home and work. Each of these cultures spilled over into the other, causing these mothers to have to try to balance both worlds and deal with issues related to time. Through these examples, one can better understand the study findings as they relate to a theory bound in context.

### *Implications for Practice*

It was near the end of an interview, right before I shut off the tape recorder, that Susan said to me,

I am glad that you're doing research on this, and that's one of the reasons I was glad to participate is because I do feel like it's an important issue that, you know, I wish more people were looking into. And I don't know that anything will ever really change in our culture, but I think it's something that needs attention.

I am not sure who these "people" were that Susan thought should be "looking into" the topic of mothers living in dual-career families, and I wish I had asked, but I completely agree with her statement that it is a topic that needs attention and should be addressed by professionals who seek to work with this population of mothers.

Although there are a number of areas of practice that could be addressed here (e.g., marriage and family therapy, women's medicine, social work), as a Certified Family Life Educator, I feel that one of the ways attention can be brought to this population of women is by providing them with access to family life education programs that can help them as they strive to balance their home and work lives. This is an area that perhaps is not as popular as some others, but I believe it is both timely and important as the American family continues to change and evolve.

According to Arcus and Thomas (1993), the goal of family life education is "to strengthen and enrich individual and family well-being" (p. 5). In order to accomplish this goal, family life educators focus on certain content areas, depending on the population with whom they are working. The primary content areas are (a) marriage and relationship education, (b) sexuality education, (c) parent education, (d) education for family resource management, (e) education for midlife and later life families, and (f) education for family communication and problem solving (Arcus, Schaneveldt, & Moss,

1993). Family life educators often cover several of these content areas in one workshop or program session, which would be my recommendation with this particular population of mothers. Because these mothers have such constraints on their time, they may be unable or unwilling to devote a large amount of time to attending several program sessions. Therefore, combining several content areas into one or two workshops might prove most effective. In speaking of the time commitment that individuals were willing to make to attend family life education programs, Powell and Cassidy (2007) said, “More people will come to a one-shot program than will commit to a long-term group experience” (p. 121). In regard to who should offer or provide these workshops, a good place to begin would be with the workplace. An employee assistance program that offered workshops to mothers living in dual-career families could provide these women with strategies to better balance work and home, potentially increasing their work productivity and decreasing their stress levels. Utilizing the workplace as a location for providing family life education programs may indeed be the wave of the future. According to Brock, Oertwein, and Coufal (1993), the changing world of family and work may require that family life education programs come to employees, rather than employees going to the programs. They stated, “It may be time to move parent education groups to settings such as the workplace or day-care center” (p. 109). I have provided an example below of how a program geared toward mothers living in dual-career families could potentially be configured.

The workshop, entitled “Keeping Your Balance,” would be a 4-week workshop, each session covering a different content area. The workshop would take place every

Friday afternoon for a month during the lunch hour of 12:00-1:00 p.m., and participants would be encouraged to bring a bag lunch with them to the session. Because the session would be held during the lunch hour, participants would not have to find child care or otherwise take time away from life at home. The first session would be a session on the topic of “self-care” and would teach participants about the concepts of self-care as well as specific ways to practice self-care. The second and third sessions would teach basic parenting education and would focus on parenting styles, how to handle behavior issues in young children, and a discussion of the typical developmental trajectories of young children. The fourth session would teach effective time management skills and would focus on various time management techniques as well as ways to decrease stress levels when dealing with time pressures. Each session would include an icebreaker activity and a mixture of mini-lectures and group activities. Participants would have ample time at the end of each session to ask questions about any of the topics discussed.

#### *Implications for Future Research*

As I reflected on the conclusions of the present research study, it was clear to me that several have been discussed at length in the empirical literature. Both the struggle of balancing the various aspects of home and work (Duxbury, Lyons, & Higgins, 2008; Glynn, Maclean, Forte, & Cohen, 2009; Hochschild, 2003) and the struggle of dealing with issues related to time (Hochschild, 1997; Milkie, Raley, & Bianchi, 2009) have been discussed thoroughly. In addition, the impact of spousal support and support from other family members on managing the dual-career lifestyle has been documented frequently (Edwards, 2006; Rao, Apte, & Subbakrishna, 2003; Thorstad, Anderson, Hall,

Willingham, & Carruthers, 2006). However, empirical literature dedicated to the impact of other types of support networks, such as paid help and others in the greater community, lags behind that of literature dedicated to the impact of family and spousal support and would be important to explore. Perhaps a phenomenological exploration of the experience of having a network of support would be a good first step. It would be interesting to explore whether individuals such as staff members at a child care center were figural in the lives of other mothers living the dual-career lifestyle. Would other mothers focus primarily on the support on spouses or would others emerge as figural to the experience of having support? In addition, it would be interesting to explore whether other mothers would denote a lack of support and how this would be portrayed in their experience. For mothers in the present study, a lack of support proved challenging, both in terms of dealing with issues of time and in balancing various aspects of daily life. Would other mothers experience a lack of support in the same way? Would they see a need for support at all? These are questions that could be explored in a study examining the role of support in the lives of dual-career mothers.

A second area that has received little attention in the empirical literature is that of the impact of individual personality characteristics on managing the dual-career lifestyle. Again, a phenomenological investigation of this experience would be a good place to begin. It would be interesting to learn whether other mothers view their personality traits as figural in their experience of living the dual-career lifestyle. Would other mothers have similar personality traits to those in the present study or very different ones? In addition, would other mothers view their personality traits as important in navigating the

dual-career lifestyle or would they see personality traits as having little impact? Finally, it would be interesting to learn whether other mothers would view their personality traits as a potential hindrance in managing the dual-career lifestyle. All of these questions could potentially be answered by further investigating this topic.

Although not connected directly to the findings of the study, an exploration of other similarly related topics would be an important follow-up to the present study. First, it would be interesting to conduct a study on the experiences of mothers living in dual-work families. Participants in the present study were highly educated women devoted to their careers. Would findings from this study be similar if one were to investigate those mothers living in dual-work families who are not as highly educated and who are working full-time jobs primarily to make ends meet? Second, it would be interesting to conduct a study on the experiences of fathers living in dual-career families. This was a suggestion many of the participants in the present study made at the end of their interviews. Ashley said, “I’d be interested in a comparison study, to see what fathers say. Does it stress them out when the wife works? Does it stress them out more or less?” It would be an interesting study indeed, especially since much of the existing empirical literature focuses on mothers in dual-career families and not fathers (other than to say they do not particularly help their wives as much as they should). Next, it would be interesting to conduct a study on the experiences of fathers in dual-work families. Would these fathers have similar, or differentiated, experiences from those fathers in dual-career families? Finally, it would be interesting to conduct a study exploring the experiences of single mothers who are both working and parenting. How might their experience be

similar to or different from those mothers who participated in the present study? Would they experience a greater degree of difficulty in trying to balance work and family life? How might support networks impact their experience? Those are questions that could be answered in a study exploring the experiences of these mothers.

### *Limitations of the Study*

The primary limitation of the study was that the participants were demographically homogeneous. All 10 study participants were Caucasian, the majority were highly educated, and all had access to resources that made the dual-career lifestyle plausible. In addition, all participants had given birth to their children (there were no families with adopted children included in the study) and all were in heterosexual relationships. Further, participants were chosen utilizing one childcare center in one specific city. Additionally, it must be noted that participants in the present study had a great number of resources at their disposal, a luxury many do not have. Finally, volunteer bias must be taken into consideration when noting the findings of the study.

### *Summary*

The purpose of the present study was to explore the lived experiences of mothers in dual-career families. Study findings suggested that mothers faced certain struggles as they tried to manage the dual-career lifestyle, but it was a lifestyle they chose freely because of the primary benefit of working in a career that was fulfilling. It would behoove both practitioners and family scholars to be aware of the findings of this study as they plan interventions and research studies surrounding this topic. It is my hope that

through this research study I have shed greater light on the experiences of mothers living in dual-career families, a topic that deserves attention.

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## VITA

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