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Lived Experiences of Mothers Balancing Work and Family in the Restaurant and Food Services Industry

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Abstract

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Services Industry

by

Brandi M. Fannell

MEd, University of Phoenix, 2007

BA, George Mason University, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Industrial/Organizational Psychology

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Abstract

Women account for over half of restaurant and food service employees in the United States. The hours required to manage obligation to both jobs and families impact work–life balance among this population, which can lead to burnout behaviors such as complaints, turnover, and absenteeism. Guided by both self-efficacy and role conflict theories, a phenomenological study was conducted to understand work–life balance, engagement, and job satisfaction among working mothers in the restaurant and food service industry. Working mothers with children between ages 5 months and 17 years, who were employed full-time at casual restaurants and similar food service organizations, were interviewed virtually via Zoom and Google Meets. Collected data were analyzed following a modified van Kaam approach, and the analysis identified four themes: (a) high commitment, (b) setting boundaries, (c) making sacrifices, and (d) flexibility. The findings reveal participants enjoyed their jobs and had a high sense of commitment. Participants also stated that to meet both family and work obligations they needed to create boundaries or continue to sacrifice family life. All participants reported a desire for a flexible work schedule. The findings in this study have potential implications for positive social change for these employees and the organizations that employ them. Restaurant and food service industry employers can implement policies and programs like flexible and fair scheduling and emergency childcare resources to create an inclusive environment where working mothers can succeed and thrive. Such efforts can reduce the turnover in this industry and increase engagement and profitability benefiting employees and employers.

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Dedication

I dedicate this to my son, Christian who has motivated me to succeed since the day he was born. I started this journey when you were just four years old, and you were always so patient and adaptable even though you did not understand why your mom was always on her computer. Now, you are 18 and your routine "you not done yet?", comments over the last two years helped pushed me towards the finish line. Thank you honey, I love you always. Lastly, to every hard-working mom in the incredibly challenging and sometimes thankless food service industry, you all are amazing!

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I would first like to thank God for His grace that has literally carried me through this journey and enabled me to see this thing through. I also thank my parents for their continuous support and example of hard work and perseverance despite adversity. To Dr. Schmidt, thank you so very much for your support throughout this entire process, most of all for volunteering to be my Chair to help see me through to the finish line this second time around all these years later. And I heartfelt thank you to my small circle of friends and the colleagues who encouraged me to keep pushing and held me accountable to my daily writing and researching goals.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

According to a 2018 McKinsey and Company survey, women represented 53% of workers in the food industry compared to 48% of other industries, and two million restaurant workers (roughly 15% of the industry) were mothers. In 2019, there was approximately 76.8 million working women in America, which equated to roughly 47% of the U.S. workforce at the time (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Despite 865,000 women leaving the workplace in 2020, women still make up 49.7% of the total workforce (Ewing-Nelson, 2020). As the economy has tried to rebound from the effects of mass business closures, 42.5% of the jobs added since the start of the coronavirus pandemic have been in the hospitality and food service industry, with 60% of those jobs being filled by women (Ewing-Nelson, 2020). To date, there are over 23.5 million working women in the United States; five million women work in the restaurant and food services industry, making up 52% of that industry's workers, and one third of all working women are also mothers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

While women have been rapidly increasing their presence in the workplace and challenging traditional gender norms, the charge of balancing multiple obligations and responsibilities related to parenting and providing for one's family continues to fall more squarely on their shoulders (American Psychological Association, 2020). The pressures of the dual roles working mothers in particular face and their quest to attain work–life balance (WLB) is likely to lead to increased stress, burnout, and low engagement at work (Sundaresan, 2014). The idea of WLB first came about in the late 1970s and was loosely defined as the ability to meet the expectations of work and family and any other nonwork

obligations (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). WLB is sought after by most employees in general, and researchers have concluded it has important implications for employee well-being and engagement (Dhas, 2015).

Employee engagement entails an emotional and mental commitment to work (Listau et al., 2017). Engaged employees are intrinsically motivated, bring their whole selves to work, are loyal, and have pride in their organization (Kahn, 1990). Engaged employees are also characterized as being happier, more satisfied, and more productive than their non-engaged counterparts (Gupta & Shaheen, 2017). While many people believe that engagement equates to employee happiness and job satisfaction, happiness is an unreliable measurement that can be attributed to simply having a friend at work, and job satisfaction may help retain an employee but cannot ensure their productivity (Yalabik et al., 2013). Most organizations aspire to achieve employee engagement, offering flexible work arrangements and parental leave options to help their workforce better manage the strain that work responsibilities and family obligations sometimes present. This is an area of opportunity in the restaurant and food service industry as it is prone to burnout, absenteeism, and high turnover.

Background

WLB is the perception of how well an individual's life roles are equal (Haar et al., 2014). Managing work and home life is becoming increasingly more challenging and critical. Recent studies reveal that poor WLB may have a negative impact on overall health (Hoffman & Stokburger-Sauer, 2017).Workers must acquire some sense of balance between work and family or personal life to maintain their health and well-being.

Groysberg and Abrahams (2014) found that 30% of people are ready to quit their jobs to achieve WLB. Their study further revealed that women found it more difficult to manage work and home life—more so after the onset of motherhood. In the food service industry, over 71% of women are servers and bartenders. The typical work schedules for such positions include nights, weekends, holidays, and often 10-hour shifts. Demanding schedules not only can contribute to imbalance but also can negatively impact job satisfaction (Hsu, 2011). Job satisfaction can be a driving force of employee engagement, which is not independent of WLB (Pandita & Singhal, 2017) and influences employees' intention to stay (Hoffman & Stokburger-Sauer,2017).

Employee engagement is an employee's total investment of themselves at work (Kahn, 1990) and is one of the biggest challenges for organizations in the United States. Only approximately 35% of employees indicated feeling engaged at work (Gallup, 2019), and that number only increased one to two percentage points year over year for more than a decade. In a cross-lagged longitudinal study by Yalabik et al. (2013), engagement was positively associated with job satisfaction, acting as an antecedent rather than an outcome. Yalabik et al.'s results show instances of engagement acting as a mediator between job satisfaction and burnout behaviors like turnover and absenteeism.

In a study of self-efficacy on engagement for restaurant workers, Liu et al. (2017) found that employee engagement was more likely for women due to the nature of their roles; however, perceived WLB was less likely because of the higher levels of pressure and stress women place on themselves due to their double roles at work and with family. Liu et al. also found that work–family conflict was heightened for women with low self-

efficacy. Self-efficacy can be simply summed up as belief in one's ability to achieve a goal (Bandura, 1986). Virga et al. (2015) examined the relationship between WLB, self-efficacy, job demands, and engagement. The researchers found that self-efficacy and adequate job resources have a positive relationship with engagement, that self-efficacy has a significant negative relationship with job demands in instances of poor WLB, and WLB enables employees to be more engaged. Because the restaurant and food service industry is predominantly composed of women, and women continue to be faced with the difficulty of balancing work and home life demands, a key engagement and retention strategy may be to provide resources and support that enable women in this industry, particularly those with children. The transformation of organizational culture can be a worthwhile investment to foster employee engagement, making WLB possible (Knight et al., 2017).

Problem Statement

Employee engagement is defined as bringing one's whole self to work (Kahn & Fellows, 2013). In practice within organizations, employee engagement is described as being highly involved in, enthusiastic about, and committed to one's work. Employee engagement continues to be a challenge for many U.S. organizations (Harter, 2020). A Gallup (2019) report showed that only about 35% of employees are actively engaged at work, and that percentage was deemed a record-high. With competition for talent, organizations often focus on employee engagement programs and perks; continued research has shown its correlation with effective performance and job satisfaction (Bakker et al., 2008). Employee engagement has been found to greatly influence

employee intent to stay (Liu et al., 2017). However, even engaged employees may still leave an organization due to personal circumstances or outside demands (Lu et al., 2016).

WLB is defined as the perception of how well an individual's life roles are balanced (Haar et al., 2014). The incorporation of mothers into the workforce has greatly affected the WLB of women as they navigate two full-time jobs: their career and family (Sundaresan, 2014). Often, the roles women have within work and outside of work conflict with one another, and this conflict causes women to experience higher levels of work and family stress than men experience (Liu et al., 2017) This conflict causes women to make certain adjustments to their work schedules, childcare arrangements, social lives, and even future job selection to successfully manage work and family responsibilities (Chalawadi, 2014). While married women may share the load of familial responsibility, single mothers may find WLB even more difficult to achieve (Robbins & McFadden, 2003). Additionally, working single mothers have been found to be less happy and more stressed than married women with children (Van Gasse & Mortelmans, 2020).

Currently, women make up more than 50% of the U.S. workforce, and their increased participation has been cited as the cause for an increasingly blurred line between professional and personal lives (Kinnuenen et al., 2010). In the food and beverage industry, women make up 53% of the workforce (McKinsey, 2019) and report strong feelings of obligation to both work and home (Backett-Milburn et al., 2008), which can pose a threat to successful WLB. In addition, the high demands and long hours of the restaurant industry are a contributing factor for the high turnover many restaurants and food service organizations face (Cain et al., 2018). Demanding work and the strain of

fulfilling dual responsibilities at work and at home can lead to disengagement and burnout (Baaker & Letier, 2007). Burnout in some research is seen as an antonym of engagement due to poor WLB (Wood et al., 2020).

Early studies concluded that contrary work and home demands can create strain and decrease engagement, whereas more recent studies indicate that the proper support and availability of resources can increase engagement, reduce burnout, and lower turnover (Peeters et al., 2009). Further, policies such as flexible work schedules and parental leave options have been found to foster higher levels of WLB for employees (Chen & Powell, 2012). Therefore, this research fills a gap in understanding the challenges of working mothers in the restaurant industry and what is needed to provide better WLB and prevent burnout.

Purpose

The intent of this phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of working mothers in the restaurant industry with the aim of understanding the challenges they face in managing WLB. Additionally, I sought to identify what factors contribute to perceived WLB and how role strain may or may not impact job satisfaction. The goal was to understand what restaurants and food service organizations can do to retain their employees, especially women with children, help them stay engaged, and prevent burnout. Possible solutions or strategies for this include policies, programs, and processes that promote a culture of support and provide needed resources for working mothers in the restaurant and food service industry.

Research Questions

The qualitative research questions (RQs) that guided this study to address the identified gap in the existing literature were:

RQ1: How do working mothers in the restaurant industry perceive their engagement at work?

RQ2: How do working mothers in the restaurant industry try to balance work and family?

RQ3: What is job satisfaction for working mothers in the restaurant industry?

Theoretical Framework

The framework for this study was self-efficacy and role conflict theories. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to accomplish a goal or handle a situation successfully (Bandura, 1986). In the context of work, employees with high levels of self-efficacy work hard, perform under pressure, and are resilient in the face of adverse events (Cinamon et al., 2007). Self-efficacy has been determined an antecedent of employee engagement; low levels of self-efficacy can lead to an inability to cope with job challenges and to ineffective performance (Carter et al., 2018). A mother's self-efficacy level can also contribute to how she is able to combine work and family responsibilities (Schwarzer & Knoll, 2007). In essence, self-efficacy is the ability of women to meet both the demands of work and home life. Survey data of over 1,000 restaurant industry employees indicated a strong relationship between self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and commitment, with findings suggesting a higher level of self-efficacy is connected to higher job satisfaction and commitment (Niu, 2012).

Role conflict theory explains that every employee simultaneous occupies multiple roles within and outside of work (Goode, 1960). Role conflict arises when an employee must deal with incompatible demands, like that of work and family life. Role conflict is cited as a stressor in the workplace and a hindrance to employee well-being (Colombo & Ghislieri, 2008). In a study on the antecedents of work–family conflict, role overload and role conflict were found to be determining factors for dissatisfaction with work, low engagement, and burnout behaviors such as lateness and absenteeism (Michel et al., 2011). Through the lens of role conflict theory, I explored what factors contribute to perceived WLB and burnout and how role strain may or may not impact job satisfaction.

Nature of the Study

I chose a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach for this study. Husserl developed phenomenology in the early 20th century to focus on the lived experiences of individuals (Groenewald, 2004). The goal of phenomenological research is to understand such lived experiences from the perspective of the subject. I used hermeneutic phenomenology, an interpretive approach of research to both describe the lived experiences of participants and the meaning or interpretation of their experiences (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). The rationale was to explore the lived experiences of my participants and discover and/or identify how they interpret those experiences and what meaning they attribute to them (Groenewald, 2004).

I examined the feelings participants have about their job satisfaction and engagement and the different factors on their work and family roles and WLB. The aim was to collect, analyze, and report the data as accurately as possible and to understand

each participant's perspective by focusing on reported facts and phenomena (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000) and then isolate themes to interpret and derive the meaning of said experiences (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). A phenomenological design through narrative inquiry allowed interviews to be the primary form of data collection and analysis.

Definition of Terms

Various terms are used throughout this study, the definitions for each are listed here:

Absenteeism: Chronic or habitual workplace absence that is usually unannounced and unexplained (de Luca, 2019).

Burnout: Emotional depletion caused by ongoing unmet expectations and chronic job stressors (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Employee engagement: Emotional and intellectual commitment toward a job or organization (Medlin & Green, 2008).

Employee performance: A person's accomplishments at work when contributing at the required level of effort expected (Pradhan & Jena, 2017).

Job satisfaction: An individual's internal state, perception, and attitude about the work they do (Judge et al., 2020).

Organizational commitment: Psychological attachment an individual may have toward the organization they are employed by. Factors such as satisfaction, role strain, turnover, and job performance have been shown to have a correlation with an employee's organizational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Retention: The ability of an organization to keep members of their workforce and prevent turnover (Allen, 2008).

Role conflict: Conflict that arises due to competing demands in various domains of life such as work, home, church, etc. (Kahn et al., 2010).

Role strain: Challenges or stress that arise when an individual is unable to meet demands of a specific role they fill (Goode, 1960).

Self-efficacy: An individual's belief in their own ability to succeed (Bandura, 1986).

Turnover: When employees leave an organization and that organization needs to replace the employee (Tett & Meyer, 1993).

Work–life balance (WLB): How an individual maintains both work and family obligations (Westman & Burke, 2013).

Work–life conflict: Result of mutual incompatible demands in the work and family domains of life (Greenhaus, 1988).

Assumptions

One assumption of this study was that all participants would be open and transparent during the interview; they were made aware that the process and the results would remain anonymous. Another assumption was that both single and married women of various education levels would be represented in the participant sample. Lastly, there was an assumption that the data collected would be robust and varied enough to address the research questions posed.

Scope

The scope of this qualitative study includes conducting interviews with working mothers in the restaurant industry within the Washington, D.C., metro area. Because the results in a qualitative study cannot be generalized, I did not set any specific criteria for my sample other than what was previously outlined. Although COVID-19 pandemic restrictions had been lifted by the time interviews were conducted, all participants were facing staff shortages and working double shifts, which made scheduling in-person interviews challenging. The most convenient option for all participants was to conduct the interview remotely. While not being able to conduct interviews face-to-face was a slight drawback, the ability to conduct interviews remotely enabled more interviews to be completed in a shorter time span and may have shortened the total time spent during data collection.

Limitations

One of the main challenges to this study was recruiting participants to interview. To counter this, I employed snowballing (Groenewald, 2004) and asked participants to recommend other participants to the study. In addition, the sample only represents women working in the restaurant industry in an area geographically near where I am located. Lastly, it was slightly challenging to remain objective as a researcher because I was previously employed as the head of talent for a restaurant group, and as a mother, I remember my experiences working in the restaurant industry and how it affected my engagement and job satisfaction. Groenewald (2004) indicated that phenomenological

researchers cannot be detached from their own beliefs and should not pretend to be. Experience may present a bias, but it can also provide added value in data analysis.

Significance of the Study

Managing conflicting demands at home and at work is a common occurrence in the lives of many women. For those in the food service industry, the nature of the job may make it difficult to navigate the associated challenges of balancing competing claims on time and energy. Backett-Millburn et al (2008) discovered that women in the food industry are motivated to maintain their moral identities as good mothers and good employees; therefore, they silently tolerate issues and handle stress. While work–life conflict affects many people regardless of their gender or occupation, it may be most pronounced among single parents, women, low-income families, and employees who have caregiving responsibilities for children (Jang & Zippay, 2011). Such groups are the restaurant and food service industry's employee base. Additionally, the late nights and long work hours for women in the restaurant industry will continue.

The importance of this study is tied to two main facts: (a) women make up 53% of the workforce within the restaurant industry, and (b) women comprise a significant number of the sole breadwinners in U.S. households (Wang et al., 2013). The restaurant industry is demanding, and workers are subject to long work hours, little to no time off, and working holidays and weekends (Kludt, 2016)—all of which is likely to affect most of their employee base. Researchers have identified these factors as contributors to low employee engagement and burnout (Rich et al., 2010) as well as causes of work–family conflict and role strain (Hammer et al., 2011). There is a need in the restaurant industry to

understand what contributes to employee engagement and WLB to help restaurant industry employers better support and retain their core employee base.

Summary and Transition

While ample literature sheds light on what influences working mothers' ability to balance work and family and the causes of burnout and work engagement of restaurant employees, there is a gap in the research on the impact of WLB on employee engagement and job satisfaction. In this study, I explored the lived experiences of working mothers in the restaurant industry and discovered themes outlining the challenges these women face and how employers may better support, engage, and retain them.

Chapter 1 set the foundation for this study and provided an overview of the research on employee engagement, WLB, and job satisfaction. The theoretical framework for this study was discussed as well as the concepts of self-efficacy, role conflict, and burnout as they relate to the ability of working women (particularly mothers) to fully engage in their work and manage the high demands of work in the food service industry and the demands at home as a parent. This chapter also provided some background on the history and transformation of the U.S. workforce to describe the significance of the role working women have in the economy and the importance of helping them to successfully meet the expectations of work and home. Definitions of all terms used were also provided. To help add context and increase understanding, terms related to similar studies or supportive findings discovered in the literature review and mentioned in later chapters are included in the definition of terms.

Chapter 2 begins with a summative review of the literature related to the problem statement, self-efficacy, and role conflict theory. The chapter contains a synthesis of WLB and employee engagement studies and research on working mothers and women in the food industry. Chapter 3 then details the research methods for this study, including design and explanation for the chosen approach. Chapter 4 provides a description of the setting of the study, demographics of the study participants, and an explanation of data collection steps and the data analysis process. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the study results and their implications and concludes with a briefing on the limitations of this study, recommendations based on findings for employers, and closing remarks.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Employees everywhere are prioritizing WLB in their lives, willing to leave organizations and industries and even switch careers to attain the flexibility necessary to achieve WLB. While the literature does not offer one consistent definition of WLB, research continues to find that WLB furthers job satisfaction, employee engagement, and high productivity (Bhatnagar & Shanker, 2010). WLB also cultivates satisfaction with familial responsibilities and other non-work obligations (Gragnano et al., 2020). For this research, the working definition of WLB is the congruence between an individual's professional and personal life (Westman & Burke, 2013). WLB does not equal an actual balance of time, effort, or energy; is likely to change over time; and is not the same for everyone (Listau et al., 2107).

Since entering the workforce, women have had to carry a larger part of the load of work and home life (Crouter, 1984). Women's responsibilities have increased as have their levels of stress and instances of burnout (American Psychological Association, 2020). A poll found 47% of female employees attribute burnout to workload, and 39% reported feeling burnout just trying to balance their work and personal life (Eagle Hill Consulting, 2020). As working mothers are increasingly urged to find WLB to achieve happiness at home and engagement at work, companies worldwide are compelled to offer more perks to increase employee engagement.

Employee engagement is a multidimensional construct that has more than one meaning in the business world and can be measured in many ways. Historically, women tend to be more engaged and have higher job satisfaction than men do, and organizations

are seeing higher levels of employee engagement than have ever been reported (Gallup, 2021). Nonetheless, employee well-being is declining and burnout is rising. In the restaurant and food service industry, women make up over 50% of the workforce and more than a quarter are supporting children; engagement levels have typically run parallel to those of other industries, yet burnout is much more common (Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, 2013). Restaurant and food service workers tend to deal with more chronic stress with regular issues like scheduling, safety concerns, customer behavior, understaffing, and lower wages. With the job instability and safety concerns that COVID-19 brought, restaurant employees face more than the usual amount of physical and mental strain, which causes burnout to be an even greater concern. For mothers, the competing priorities of work and home and the increased unpredictability of both their own work schedules and the status of schools or childcare cause significant stress (Arvelund, 2021). With few options and a family to support, many working mothers in this industry have no choice but to continue on despite the stress and burnout.

Literature Research Strategy

The literature reviewed and referenced for this study came from a variety of sources found in online databases such as ProQuest Central, PsychARTICLES, ERIC, and SAGE Journals. Google Scholar was used as an additional resource for locating articles and finding full-text versions of articles not available in the primary databases searched. Keywords included *work–life balance, employee engagement, working mothers* and *job satisfaction*. Terms and combinations of words like *female restaurant workers, food service,* and *burnout* were used to narrow search results.

Theoretical Framework

Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to accomplish a goal or handle a situation successfully (Bandura, 1986). In the context of work, self-efficacy can influence employee motivation and performance, as employees with high levels of self-efficacy have been found to be hardworking, able to perform under pressure, and are resilient in the face of adverse events (Cinamon et al., 2007). Past research indicates self-efficacy as an antecedent of employee engagement. Additionally, employees who may consider themselves burnt out have reduced efficacy, an inability to cope with job challenges, and poor work performance (Chan et al., 2017).

Self-efficacy also influences an individual's ability to balance work and family life (Erdwins et al., 2004). Erdwins et al. (2004) found that mothers who were confident in their role as a parent were less burdened by their dual responsibilities. Pearson and Bieschke (2001) noted that those who possess confidence in their abilities will handle challenging situations with ease and calm, while individuals who question their ability will act or perform with uneasiness and worry. This approach then increases the likelihood of failure.

Schwarzer and Knoll (2007) indicate that self-efficacy even impacts the perception of work and family demands; thus, when self-efficacy is present, individuals interpret any such demands as positive as opposed to negative or stress inducing. Survey data of over 1,000 employees in the restaurant industry supports a strong relationship between self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and commitment; findings suggest the higher level

of self-efficacy, the higher the job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Niu, 2012).

Role Conflict Theory

Greenhaus (1985) once defined WLB as satisfactory performance at work with minimum role conflict. Role conflict theory explains that every employee simultaneously occupies multiple roles within and outside of work (Goode, 1960). Role conflict arises when an employee must deal with incompatible demands, like that of work and family life. Role conflict is cited as a stressor in the workplace and a hindrance to employee well-being (Colombo & Ghislieri, 2008). According to Lowe (2005), 1 in 4 employees in Canada report high levels of work–family stress due to role conflict. In a study on the antecedents of work–family conflict, role overload and role conflict were found to be determining factors for dissatisfaction with work, low engagement, and burnout behaviors such as lateness and absenteeism (Michel et al., 2011). Through the lens of role conflict theory, I explored the factors that contribute to perceived WLB, job satisfaction, and engagement.

Key Study Variables

Work–Life Balance

The concept of WLB originally came about in the 1930s as organizations started to implement programs and policies that allow employees the flexibility to handle personal matters or address issues on the home front (Meenakshi et al., 2013). Later, during the women's liberation movement, maternity leave and flexible work hours became popular to accommodate working women with children (Raja & Stein, 2014). At

the same time, work demands began to increase and encroach on what would be considered *family time*. The existence of flexible work accommodations seemed to only solidify the expectation for working women to maintain primary responsibility for child-rearing and managing the household. In the late 20th century, the notion of women having it all—a successful career, husband, children, etc.—became mainstream with magazines and books that issued tips for working women on how to make the most of their time (Alqahtani, 2020).

The term *WLB* today indicates a need to effectively manage the competing priorities of work and home life (Wood et al., 2020). This means being successful at work, satisfying the demands of personal life, and at the same time, avoiding any spillover from one aspect of life into the other (Naithani, 2010). Better WLB not only raises job satisfaction and engagement but also fosters contentment with family life and mental well-being (Gragnano et al., 2020). Research has revealed that when employees feel as though work is infringing upon their home life, they tend to be more stressed and distracted and experience burnout (Meenakshi et al., 2013). However, when there is healthy maintenance of boundaries between work and home, employees are more productive at work and committed to organizational goals or engaged (Jaharuddin & Zainol, 2019).

Employee Engagement

While the term *employee engagement* was pioneered by Kahn (1990), various works contributed to the evolution of the current understanding of employee engagement. Employee engagement is the physical, cognitive, and emotional commitment to a work

role (Kahn, 1990). Kahn found that an engaged employee will exert discretionary effort at work for the betterment of the organization they are a part of. Meyer and Allen (1990) conceptualized *organizational commitment* as psychological attachment to an organization an individual belongs to. Meyer and Allen's (1996) model of organizational commitment was comprised of three components: (a) affective commitment, (b) continuance commitment, and (c) normative commitment. *Affective commitment* is an employee's identification and emotional attachment to their employer. Employees with a high level of affective commitment stay with their organization out of a pure desire to be part of the team (Allen & Meyer, 1996). *Continuance commitment* is an employee's awareness of the consequences of leaving the organization. An employee with continuance commitment will only stay with their employer out of necessity. Finally, *normative commitment* is feeling obligated to stay with an organization (Allen & Meyer, 1996).

Employee engagement is an evolving, and multidimensional construct (Gallup, 2020) and an attachment and a demonstrated commitment (Knoll & Redman, 2016). Employee engagement is touted as both the key to organizational effectiveness and an antecedent to employee well-being (Truss et al., 2013)). Engaged employees not only go the extra mile to achieve company objectives, they also exhibit more confidence and have a more positive outlook compared to employees who are not engaged (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). Research also reflects that employee engagement is directly connected to high job satisfaction and high productivity (Knight et al., 2016).

Under Meyer and Allen's (1991) theory of affective commitment, employees are likely to exert extra effort and act in the organization's best interest because of affective commitment. Employees' desire to stay with their employer is because they have found the organization provides them with positive work experiences they value. The presumption is that by staying with the organization, such things will continue (Meyer et al., 1989). Mowday et al. (1979) suggested that this commitment is both a psychological state and behavioral persistence and these two constructs are involved in an ongoing reciprocal influence process. Highly productive employees are most likely to be or become engaged because they develop positive feelings toward their job, which then makes them want to continue to be productive or perform at a high level (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is one of the most studied job attitudes (Camp, 1993). Edwin Locke first introduced job satisfaction in the range of affect theory in 1976, which continues to be the most well-known (Aziri, 2011). The theory's central tenet is that job satisfaction is a function of the gap between what an individual desires in a job and what an individual experiences in a job (Thompson & Phua, 2012). Job satisfaction is a pleasurable emotional state resulting from one's job or work experience and the general feeling that someone has toward their job or specific job-related tasks (Hodson, 1991). According to Saari and Judge (2004), job satisfaction is defined as the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral response one has to their work.

Job satisfaction is still considered a key component for employee productivity and retention; satisfied employees take fewer sick days, miss fewer days of work, and perform at a high level (Heimerl et al., 2020). According to Davis (1992), the following factors affect job satisfaction: the structure of rewards offered, the physical environment of the workplace, and the employee's family responsibilities. Maslach et al. (2001) supported this and pointed to the distinction that job satisfaction does not include a person's relationship with their work or job itself. In other words, a person's relationship to their work—not just their employer—is engagement.

Studies continue to support a strong link between job satisfaction and engagement (Shuck et al., 2021). Many organizations, however, conflate these two ideas. Job satisfaction does not equate to employee engagement. An employee may have high job satisfaction due to an aspect of their job they find pleasing (Hulin & Judge, 1993). They may have a best friend at work or may have a job that requires little of them. Engaged employees are satisfied with their jobs yet also are connected to their work in a way that goes beyond a positive or negative aspect. Job satisfaction is a critical piece to employee retention and can be leveraged to drive employee engagement (Villanueva & Djurkovic, 2009). Job satisfaction is a consequence or result of employee engagement and both need to exist for the best workforce performance and the prevention of burnout (Madan & Srivastava, 2015).

Burnout

Hallberg and Schaufeli (2006) further define burnout as the manifestation of prolonged work strain, dissatisfaction with one's work, and diminished self-efficacy.

Burnout was first introduced by two researchers in the 1970s: Herbert Freudenberger and Sigmund Ginsburg (Leone et al., 2011). According to Freudenberger (1974), who worked in a hospital setting at the time, being burned out is the experience of exhaustion because of excessive demands on one's energy and resources at work. The term is now used by employees and managers across industries to describe feelings of distress, fatigue, and detachment (Anthony-McMann et al., 2017).

In his work, Freudenberger determined that burnout is more likely to occur in people who are "dedicated and committed" (Bakker & Costa, 2014). This is consistent with a recent Gallup study (2020) that found that with the increase employee engagement the past year there is also a higher occurrence of burnout. In essence, the more engaged or committed employees become to their work, the more risk there is of feeling physically or emotionally depleted. Some research has reflected that working mothers are at great risk of burnout and even more so than women who are not mothers or working fathers (Chan et al., 2016).

The reasons for this include greater family demands and more demands on their resources, especially single mothers who tend to have a limited supply (Rupert et al., 2015). Working mothers in the food industry who must invest energy and time to meet the demands of long shifts, double-shifts, low job flexibility, and stressful situations with customers and guests may not have anything left to handle the responsibilities or needs at home. This, inability to manage leads to role conflict, feelings of imbalance in work-family life, and has the potential to culminate in burnout (Balogun, 2019). Burnout is an issue for individuals and organizations as it not only has a negative impact on physical

health it contributes to depression, poor job performance, absenteeism, and turnover (Kosan et al, 2019). If burnout is not addressed, it can result in a loss of productivity or quality of work, as well as declines in employee morale, health, and wellness (Chandrachud & Gokhale, 2019). All of this can lead to a significant cost in terms of absenteeism or turnover, productivity losses, or healthcare expenses (Lee & Shin, 2005).

Burnout was initially studied extensively in what is referred to as 'helping professions' such as nurses or physicians, and teachers since they are in constant contact with others (Patel, et al., 2021). However, burnout in the food service industry is under-researched as individuals in this industry are also constantly in contact with others and their work can be emotionally taxing (Cain, et al., 2017). Chiu and Tsai (2006) noted that burnout is common among employees who are unable to meet high demands on their energy, time, and resources, as well as among employees whose work requires interpersonal contact. Additionally, work that is emotionally taxing, such as constantly dealing with difficult customers, can result in elevated stress levels and predispose those employees to burnout (Pienaar & Willemse, 2008).

Burnout research has also expanded to include what is considered its polar opposite- engagement (González-Romá et al., 2006). Engagement is defined by Schaufeli et al. (2002) as the experience of positive emotions and fulfillment because of one's work. In their research, they demonstrated that burnout and engagement are distinct but related constructs whereas the core dimension of burnout is draining of energy (Shirom, 1989), engagement is a high level of vitality and sense of commitment to work (Bakker et al., 2006). And to some researchers who study employee engagement, burnout is simply a

loss of engagement with one's job (González-Roma et al., 2006). For instance, Cordes and Dougherty (1993) determined burnout results in negative employee attitudes or behavior toward customers, work, and the organization to include decreased service quality, job involvement, and/or performance as well as increased absenteeism and/or turnover.

Work Life Balance and Employee Engagement

There is limited scholarly research measuring WLB in conjunction with employee engagement (Wood et al., 2020). However, there is a plethora of research on both constructs that demonstrate strong linkages to job satisfaction, employee wellbeing, and organizational commitment. For example, in a cross-lagged longitudinal study by Yalabik, et al. (2013) the researchers found that engagement was positively associated with job satisfaction, acting as an antecedent rather than an outcome as results showed engagement mediated the relationship between job satisfaction and disengaged behaviors like turnover and absenteeism. Additionally, Pandita and Singhal's study (2017) hypothesized that there was no correlation between employee engagement and WLB and that both constructs were independent of one another. Instead, they found that WLB and engagement are indeed dependent on one another and that there are engagement factors that drive a satisfied work and home life.

With the advances in technology, the lines between work and home life have become blurry (Mathur, 2017), making it easier for each to influence the other. Schieman et al. (2021) concluded that work-family conflict dramatically impacts engagement with work and overall employee wellbeing. As such, WLB policies and practices have become

popularized as companies realize that it is a shared responsibility of the both the employer and employee.

Individuals must identify effective strategies to manage the demands of their professional and personal lives and organizations must create the environment or structure for WLB to exist (Qi et al., 2018). Additionally, WLB policies have been shown to improve job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which are two key drivers of employee engagement (Azeem & Akhtar 2014). Bedarkar and Pandita (2014) show a strong correlation between WLB, employee engagement and retention thus leading to the belief that engagement and satisfactory WLB are required to prevent turnover.

Employee Engagement and Work–Life Balance Among Working Mothers

Motherhood is one of the biggest challenges for working women (Hakim, 2006). Mothers' participation in the workforce is at an all-time high. In 2020, 81% of mothers with children under the age of 18 worked full time, up from 47% in 1975. In 2005, 63% of women with children under the age of 6 worked outside the home, but today, 76% of working mothers have children under the age of 6. (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020). When it comes to WLB, because women have historically identified more readily with the role of caregiver rather than employee, working mothers experience more work–life conflict than working fathers (Maji, 2019). The stress that working mothers experience is frequently associated with the practical burdens associated with maintaining "the second shift," during which many women perform most of the unpaid work, such as housework and childcare, following a shift of paid employment (Wharton, 1994). Further, it is

typical for working adults to play more than one role, who they are in their professional life- employee, and who they are in their personal life.

Super (1980) indicated that the need to balance various roles concurrently is a reality for most people at various points in their lives. However, rather than transitioning from one role to the next, women perform an accumulation of disparate roles concurrently, each with its own set of pressures (Feeney & Stritch, 2017). This multiple role-playing that working women, especially mothers, must endure has caused role strain, role conflict, and for some, role overload (Reddy et al., 2010). For working mothers, work and family life have increasingly become adversarial spheres, both consuming an equal amount of energy and time often leading to some form of conflict (Jang & Zippay, 2018). Such conflict is then exacerbated by the cultural contradictions of motherhood, because as women are increasingly encouraged to pursue self-fulfillment through demanding careers, they also face increased pressure to sacrifice themselves for their children (Backett-Milburn et al., 2008). Additionally, working mothers can face difficulties in obtaining adequate and affordable childcare (Feeney & Stritch, 2017).

Studies on women's perceptions of success in balancing or juggling their many responsibilities have revealed only the individual determinants of their work–family balance. Some of these determinants are job flexibility, job satisfaction, a positive relationship with a spouse, and a sense of engagement at work (Favero & Health, 2012). Research on engagement has found supporting evidence that an individual's home life has a significant impact on their employee engagement, and vice versa (Halbesleben, 2010; Chan et al., 2017). Additionally, there is connection to engagement and WLB in

that one can influence the other because of the time and effort obligations to work and family require (Iqbal et al., 2017).

Work–Life Balance and Employee Engagement in Restaurant and Food Services

Often opportunities in the food service industry are low-skilled, underpaid, and seasonal, attracting many female employees who more than likely have caring responsibilities. Approximately 60% of the hourly workforce in food service are women and turnover in this industry is notoriously high (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Those employees who remain find themselves having to work extra hours, taking on extra work, or help train the new arrivals. Additionally, workers in this industry face other varieties of stressful and challenging scenarios, such as having to maintain a pleasant demeanor when coping with a demanding customer or dealing with personal issues or stress. These factors have set the expectation for most owners that employee satisfaction with their jobs would be low (DiPietro & Pizam, 2008). Additionally, turnover is usually an indication of low employee engagement or disengagement, yet within the restaurant and food service industry many organizations report normal levels of employee engagement (Orlowski et al., 2020). And as the research findings show, employee engagement is a precursor to job satisfaction. Further, in a study of self-efficacy on engagement for restaurant workers, Liu, et. al (2017) found that employee engagement was more likely for women due to the nature of their roles, however, perceived WLB was less likely because of the higher levels of pressure and stress women place on themselves due to their dual roles work and at home.

Summary and Transition

In this chapter the literature review focused on the key study variables of job satisfaction, employee engagement, WLB, burnout and working mothers. All terms were defined and examined and key findings of their relationship to one another were explored and summarized. This exploration and summarization uncovered how closely linked all key variables are to one another and opportunities for more exploration. When it comes to job satisfaction and its history, over three thousand studies had been conducted on job satisfaction alone before Locke, whose definition of job satisfaction is the most widely used, performed his study (Camp, 1993). Shortly after, much attention was on work engagement and organizational commitment which then led to what we now refer to as employee engagement (Chandrachud & Gokhale, 2019). Many organizations have typically focused on job satisfaction and not every worker in the labor force knows what employee engagement is, by name. However, what every employee knows is how they feel about their job and organization as well as their concept and feeling of burnout.

In Chapter 3 the research design and methodology for this study is covered to include interview questions. Details of the phenomenological approach and rationale are discussed. My role as researcher, how data was collected, and the actual research questions are outlined as well. Finally, there is an explanation of the data analysis and ethical procedures.

Chapter 4 starts with a description of the setting under which this study took place and demographics of the study participants. Next, there is an explanation of data collection steps a report on the data analysis process and evidence of trustworthiness. It

concludes with the study results organized by research question, and transition summary.

Chapter 5 details the interpretations of the study results and its implications. It then

concludes with a discussion on the limitations of this study, recommendations based on

the findings, and closing remarks.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to expand knowledge on work–life challenges working mothers face in the restaurant industry and to understand how to foster employee engagement to help employee retention. I explored participants' feelings about their jobs, their work and family roles, and their sense of WLB. I also sought to understand the impact of such factors on their engagement and job satisfaction. This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the research design I selected and the rationale for the decision, as well as a description of the research method used.

Research Design and Rationale

Qualitative research is an approach centered in understanding how people experience their world in a particular context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument for both data collection and analysis. Qualitative researchers seek to make sense of others' experiences by conducting interviews, observing specific phenomena, or even through the analysis of artifacts (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Qualitative research has more flexibility than quantitative research. For example, interview questions can be subject to change, rephrased, or have additional follow-up in pursuit of clarification and accuracy. Qualitative research is inductive in nature rather than deductive. Qualitative researchers leverage their own intuitive understandings and observations, and the data are gathered to form concepts or inform a theory. Qualitative research design allows for findings rich in both depth and breadth. For example, summary results may include direct participant quotes, excerpts from researcher notes, and photos or other media (audio or video) involved (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

Qualitative research has various forms of inquiry. The form of inquiry I chose for this study is phenomenology. I chose a phenomenological study to understand the experiences of working mothers more accurately in the restaurant and food service industry in their own words. Phenomenology is an approach that focuses on understanding the essence of a particular experience or phenomena (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology started out as investigative reporting, with a researcher strictly only capturing perceived experiences and interpretation of phenomena. Phenomenology entails not only the collection of participant perceptions and experiences, but also analysis that involves identifying patterns, themes, and influences (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). There are various types of phenomenological research approaches, and I used hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology is an interpretive approach that both describes lived experiences of participants and the meaning or interpretation of their experience (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015).

The rationale for selecting hermeneutic phenomenology is that I would like to be able to search the surface of the lived experiences of my participants and discover or identify how they interpret those experiences and what meaning they attribute to them (Groenewald, 2004). I sought to discover the feelings participants have about their job satisfaction and engagement and the contributing factors on their ability to manage work and family. Data were collected, analyzed, and reported as accurately as possible. To understand each participant's perspective, I focused on reporting facts and phenomena (Gubrium &Holstein, 2000). The isolation of identified themes helped to interpret and derive meaning from participants' experiences (Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Research Questions

The following research questions for this study were designed to address the current gap in the literature:

RQ1: How do working mothers in the restaurant industry perceive their engagement at work?

RQ2: How do working mothers in the restaurant industry try to balance work and family?

RQ3: What is job satisfaction for working mothers in the restaurant industry?

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher of this phenomenological study, I possessed the role of an observant participant (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017) with the goal of understanding and being able to explain the why of observed behavior as it pertains to certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). I did so by gaining insight into the thoughts, feelings, and motives of the study subjects and examining the world through their eyes (Moutsakas, 1994). To minimize the potential for bias and ensure objectivity during data collection, I documented all expectations separately and prior to any interviews. Being mindful of how my expectations may run parallel to actual findings and noting such expectations, helps to protect the validity of a study (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). Questions were designed to draw out personal experiences and perspectives about work and home life and perceived engagement and self-efficacy. Participant responses were documented and clarifying questions were asked when appropriate. Bias was mitigated by documenting only what I heard rather than recording an interpretation of what I heard.

Methodology

Target Population

The population for this study consisted of mothers who work in the restaurant and food service industry. The sample for this study included mothers who work in fast-casual and casual dining. Cafeterias, cafes, small coffee shops, and bakeries were excluded because their work schedules typically do not align with or follow the same pattern of 10-plus-hour days, weekends, or holidays. Additionally, to secure a homogeneous sample, I administered screening questions to potential participants (see Appendix A).

Sampling Strategy

A critical factor considered in selecting participants was sample size. Generalizability is not a goal of phenomenological research; rather, phenomenology necessitates that a relatively homogeneous group of participants disclose their shared experiences with the phenomenon (Cresswell, 2007). This implies that sample sizes for phenomenological research need not be large. Recommendations vary, and there is no concrete answer as to ideal or appropriate sample size (Vasilieiou et al., 2018). However, a sample size of three to 10 participants has been deemed appropriate.

The main concern in determining sample size is saturation. Saturation is when a researcher has collected all necessary data and further data collection would risk redundancy in the data analysis (Janshed, 2014). Unfortunately, one cannot predetermine when or at what sample size saturation will occur; it varies in each qualitative study.

However, because of a limited time and schedule restrictions, I selected a sample size that was most feasible and conducive to overall capacity and for timely study completion.

Participant Selection

The participants for this research study consisted of women with children who work in the restaurant industry in the Washington, D.C., metro area. Some women were single mothers while others had spouses or live-in partners. As anticipated, all women had various roles at their respective employers. The sample included seven salaried, full-time employees. None of the participants selected worked at the same location, and none worked for the same employer. This study did not include women with only children over the age of 18 or mothers ages 21 or younger.

The following list indicates how I conducted recruitment and data collection steps for this study:

1. I created two lists: (a) all restaurants in the Washington, D.C., metro area that are still open after COVID-19, and (b) people in my network who work in the restaurant and food service industry.

2. I reached out to owners and managers of restaurants in the first list to request permission to advertise the study and solicit participants.

3. I sent an email to those in my network, explaining the study and requesting contact information for potential participants who fit the criteria.

4. I created flyers containing a study description and my contact information for interested parties.

5. I made personal contact with all potential participants to explain the study and administered screening questions. Once participants were screened and met study criteria, I requested participation and scheduled interview sessions.

6. I provided a detailed description of the study, the informed consent form, and participant rights to each participant.

7. I recorded interviews and collected answers to questions and observations manually before transcribing digitally and storing in a secure file folder.

8. I made follow-up contact to all those who participated via text communication or email thanking them for their participation and sharing notes from the interview for their review to confirm accuracy.

Instrumentation

For this research study, I developed open-ended interview questions to send to participants via email. I did so to provide participants with sufficient time to reflect upon their feelings and experiences and to be able to provide thoughtful responses. I then followed-up with all participants for an interview session. Interview sessions were scheduled for 1 hour. To maximize the time allotted for the interview, I created a guide beforehand, listing the core interview questions and supplemental questions to help the participant expound upon what was said.

While instrument validity and reliability are associated with quantitative research, in this study, I used measures consistent with existing literature to ensure the highest possible instrument validity and reliability. For example, I conducted a field test to confirm the intent of the questions would be understood (Givens, 2008). If additional

clarification was needed, I would have rephrased the question set. However, a need for clarification was not found during the field test.

To make it easier to focus more on the participant during the interview, I recorded the interview sessions. This also served to assist in the case that handwritten notes would be incomplete or incomprehensible. However, because the audio recordings did not capture observable data, I maintained notes of all observances as adequately and accurately as possible. Observable data proved to be valuable as it was used as auxiliary to actual interview responses (DiCicio-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Setting

This study was conducted just under 2 years after the start of the pandemic. At this time, many restaurants had just begun to reopen after being forced to close, and others were returning to normal capacity after restrictions were lifted. Study participants all experienced an increase in work hours due to labor shortages and continued COVID-19 infections, which caused several challenges in the scheduling and completing of interviews.

Data Collection

Seven interviews were scheduled for data collection. Interviews were scheduled for 1 hour and did not exceed that duration. Six of the seven scheduled interviews were conducted virtually; five were conducted on Zoom and one on Google Meets. One participant interview was rescheduled a total of four times and then ultimately canceled an hour before the agreed upon time. Later, that participant emailed her responses to the interview questions, which was not requested or expected. I reached out to this

participant to either reschedule or clarify her responses; however, after several attempts, I did not hear back from her again. To preserve confidentiality, interview transcripts and associated notes contained alphanumeric codes rather than participant names (Archibald et al., 2019).

Each interview began with a brief overview of the purpose of the study and informed consent forms. Each participant was a mother who worked full-time in the restaurant industry for at least 1 year within the previous 6 months. Six of the seven scheduled interviews were conducted virtually based on participant comfort level. One participant agreed to an in-person interview; however, due to a work schedule conflict, they requested a virtual interview. Then, an hour before the scheduled interview, the participant instead sent written responses to the interview questions and did not respond to any follow-up correspondence via phone, text, or email.

During the virtual interviews, I attempted to put each participant at ease by beginning with some small talk and brief conversation unrelated to the study, sharing background information or briefly discussing current events. I also asked permission for the interview to be recorded, shared that I would be taking notes and that pseudonyms would be assigned. I listened to and observed participants as they shared their experiences and responded to the questions in the interview guide. Each of the virtual interviews were either audio or video recorded; not all participants selected to turn their camera on. The recorded interview files were initially saved on my hard drive before being transferred to the Google Drive along with any typed interview notes. Review of

the interview guide responses and observation notes of each interview session were part of the data organization process.

Initially, I planned for the interview responses to be automatically transcribed for virtually recorded sessions, and that those from audio recorded sessions would be transcribed manually. However, instead I used NVivo to transcribe both the audio and video files that were recorded and saved. All data collected from the interviews was then organized, summarized, and coded for easier understanding and identification during the analysis stage.

Data Analysis

Husserl (1931) first conceptualized and theorized phenomenology to comprehend the context of participants' lived experiences and the meaning of those experiences. I started the data analysis by bracketing my own judgments and preconceptions of the phenomenon being studied (Yuksel & Yildrum, 2015) to accurately assess such meaning. Creswell (2013) advised researchers to begin data analysis by describing their own personal encounters with the phenomenon under investigation. He said, "The researcher [should] begin by providing a detailed account of his or her own encounter with the phenomenon" (p. 193). I found this helpful as it helped to avoid interjecting my own personal experiences into the stories of the participants' lived experiences.

The remaining steps of data analysis conformed to a modified van Kamm psycho phenomenological model (PPM) as explained by Moustakas (1994). This method of analysis was selected to provide an in-depth and rich understanding of each participant's narrative and maintain the integrity of their stories. Van Kaam's model of analysis

requires that each interview was treated as its own dataset, so all steps in the process were performed for each interview. Due to this requirement, which is very time-consuming, the process of data analysis occurred while data collection was still taking place.

After bracketing of my own judgments and preconceptions. I journaled and created mind maps related to the research questions and some of the interview questions. The purpose of participating in this exercise was to separate my own thoughts and biases about the specific phenomenon to avoid interjecting my own experience into the responses of the participants (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). Next, I consumed myself with the transcripts, notes, and recordings of the interviews. Interview responses were read and listened to repeatedly to become familiar with the content and spirit of the responses. Listening to the interviews also helped to notice and indicate changes in tone, volume, pace, and even recognize silence or other things that perhaps I did not record in my observation notes. The remaining steps of the modified van Kamm method of horizontalization, reduction, clustering, and validation were conducted on all data for each participant.

Horizontalization

Every statement made in the participants' responses was treated with equal value and used to create a list of horizons. This was done by printing the interview transcripts and then highlighting the responses contained in them and in my observation notes that were relevant to the experience of the participant. This was basically a process of precoding and labeling (Saldana, 2016). After doing this, I created a list of all the

highlighted words, phrases, and statements. Figure 1 is an example of the

horizontalization step carried out.

Figure 1

Sample of Horizontalization Taken From a Participant Interview

Researcher: How do you feel when things are out of balance?

Participant AB1: I don't know. It feels very like chaotic, and my stress level gets higher, and I have a hard time, I guess, just managing things in general. So usually that's a good indicator for me just to be like, OK, I'm sort of spinning here, like in general, so something's off balance.

Researcher: How do you feel you might prioritize your job over your personal life?

Participant AB1: It shows all the time by me never calling out or taking off. And when another manager needs to switch schedules I always just say yes without even confirming at home. Just always being available to work and making that decision.

Reduction

In this step the list of horizons created in the last step were reviewed to determine

the importance of each statement to the participants' lived experience. Consideration was

given as to whether each statement made in the participant responses was necessary to

include. The purpose of this step is to shed irrelevant codes from the data. Also, in this

step I followed the recommendation that repetitive or vague statements be removed from

the list (Moustakas, 1994). What was left were considered potential themes of the study.

Clustering and Thematizing

Again, the list of horizons, or codes, were reviewed and those that were

categorically similar were grouped together into themes. An example of this clustering

step is presented in Table 1. While participants were asked specifically, how they feel

about your job, each participant mentioned or conveyed different feelings about their job

at different points of the interview.

Table 1

Sample of Clustering and Thematizing from Participant Interviews

Feelings about job
Miserable
Going through the motions
Having a hard time
Out of element
Not confident
Unhappy

Validation

This final step of the modified van Kaam method entails comparing the themes

that were identified from one data collection method to another. In this instance interview

transcripts were compared to observation notes to ensure accuracy and verify the clusters

and themes are represented in both sources of data.

Trustworthiness

It is important for all research to be credible and reliable. As a first-time

researcher, it was important to show forth as credible and trustworthy to all participants.

To do this, a rapport was first established with each participant. My own experience of

working in the restaurant industry and being a mother was also shared. Revealing this

information helped to set aside bias and protected the validity of the study (Grimes &

Schulz, 2002). To further limit bias, I made sure to stick to the interview guide for each participant and refrained from asking leading questions. I also paraphrased or offered the interpretation of each participant response to allow the opportunity for further comment, clarification, or correction. Actual responses during the interview were audio or video-recorded and interview notes were made available for reference and provided to participants for their awareness and review.

The four components of trustworthiness are: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. A description of the strategies implemented across these components follows.

Credibility

A credible study is one where the results accurately depict the reality they were designed to explain. Errors in data transcription and reliance on honesty from participants are potential risks to credibility. To minimize these risks, participant honesty was encouraged, participants were informed that their identities would be kept confidential. To guarantee proper data transcription, the researcher requested that participants review the interview notes immediately after the interview concluded and make any necessary clarifications. This type of member-checking approach contributed to the accuracy of participant responses by providing a second opportunity for participants to evaluate and reflect on their answers During data analysis, the convergence of participant replies on consistent meanings and essences contributed further to establishing credibility.

Transferability

Transferability is how well the results of a study would apply to different groups or samples. To help future researchers figure out how transferable the data is, direct quotes from the transcripts have been used to give detailed descriptions of the data that can be compared to the answers of other samples.

Dependability

The extent to which a study's findings could be replicated in the same research environment later is dependability. In this study, dependability was verified by the form of member checking. Allowing participants, a chance to reconsider and revise their statements later and in a different context (on their own, outside of the recorded interview) enabled the identification of any perceptions that may have altered since the interview. Participants did not change their responses.

Confirmability

The degree to which the findings, rather than the opinions and experiences of the researchers, reflect the opinions and experiences of the participants is known as confirmability. During both the gathering of data and the analysis of said data, the researcher utilized bracketing. The process of bracketing required becoming aware of any possible prejudices or preconceptions and making a conscious effort to suspend them to reduce the likelihood that they would cause the results to be skewed.

Ethical Procedures

The integrity of the research was preserved by adhering to the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association and Walden University's Institutional Review

Board, approval number #12-03-21-0076886. Permission was obtained by the appropriate governing bodies to conduct the study and written consent was also obtained from all participants. Participants were thoroughly informed of the purpose of the study, its process and procedures, and any possible risks. Steps were taken to ensure confidentiality and privacy of collected data and these steps were explained to participants beforehand for reassurance and to build confidence in me as the researcher. Participants were also reminded, as per the consent form, prior to the start of the interview that their participation was voluntary, and that they possessed the right to refrain from answering any questions and could withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without penalty (Pollock, 2012). While there were no incentives given for their participation, I thanked each participant for their time and participation immediately after the interview and informed them that they would receive a summary of findings after publication.

Summary and Transition

In this chapter, the research questions were restated, and an overview of phenomenological research design was described. Phenomenological design was selected and deemed most suited for this study because of the focus on the lived experiences of mothers who work in the restaurant industry. Data collection did not happen completely as planned since one of the planned interviews was repeatedly rescheduled before ultimately being canceled and the participant submitted her responses to the interview questions through email. Each step of the researcher's data analysis was explained in detail including the provision of examples of horizontalization and clustering. The researcher preserved the integrity of the study by sticking to all the ethical standards and

expectations of the American Psychological Association and Walden University's Institutional Review Board. This study offers the opportunity to uncover and interpret themes and meaning in the common experiences that working mothers in the restaurant industry may share. Implications for further study were identified. Recommendations on engagement and retention strategies for employers were made based on the actual data collected.

Chapter 4 begins with a description of the setting under which this study took place and demographics of the study participants. Next, there is an explanation of data collection steps, a report on the data analysis process mentioned in this chapter and evidence of trustworthiness. It concludes with the study results organized by research question, and transition summary. Chapter 5 includes interpretations of the study results and its implications. It begins with a review and discussion of the findings presented in this chapter. Next, it includes an interpretation of the findings and how they may confirm or disconfirm the conclusions of previous researchers. Chapter 5 then concludes with a briefing on the limitations of this study, recommendations based on findings for employers and closing remarks.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore and describe the experiences of working mothers in the restaurant industry in their pursuit of WLB. The study was conducted to understand and compare perceived WLB, engagement, and satisfaction with work. Three research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How do working mothers in the restaurant industry perceive their engagement at work?

RQ2: How do working mothers in the restaurant industry try to balance work and family?

RQ3: What is job satisfaction for working mothers in the restaurant industry? This chapter includes a description of the study setting and demographics of the study participants. Next there is an explanation of data collection steps and the data analysis process, followed by evidence of trustworthiness, the study results organized by research question, and a transition and summary.

Demographics

The study sample included seven participants who all identified as women. Five of the seven women had two children, and two participants had one child. All participants had at least one child under the age of 17. Participants worked in either fast-casual or casual full-service in management positions and worked on average 50 hours per week. The average tenure of the participants was 14 years. Two of the seven women reported being the only adult member of the household and did not share childcare responsibilities

with another adult. All but two participants did not share childcare responsibilities with

anyone outside the home (see Table 2).

Table 2

Participant Demographic Data

Participant	# of children	Age of children (years)	Work role	Experience (years)
IJ5	2	11 and 20	Executive chef	20
EF3	1	6	Kitchen manager	20
MN7	2	9 and 16	Supervisor	10
GH4	2	8 and 1.5	Assistant general manager	16
AB1	2	18 and 15	Manager	9
CD2	1	9	Manager	25
KL6	2	3 and 0.5	Assistant general manager	19

Word Cloud

Figure 2 is a word cloud generated by NVivo displaying word frequencies for the

most frequent terms in the data set containing four or more letters, with stemmed words

(such as work, working, worked) aggregated into the most often used word. The larger

and more centered a word appears in the word cloud, the more frequently the word was

found in the data set. In this case, the data set consists solely of interview transcripts. This

word cloud is a visual depiction of the various concepts contained in the data, which may

indicate preliminary patterns of meaning. The most frequently used words in the data set

were *right*, *work*, and *time*. These words represent the recurring and consistent sentiment

expressed by participants. Participants articulated their emotions and perceptions in

detail. Notable is the limited use of qualifiers and intensifiers.

Figure 2

Overall NVivo Word Cloud of Auto-Coded Themes

Results

The results of the data analysis are organized by research question then, addressed and organized by theme. As mentioned in the data analysis section of this chapter, results used to answer each research question are organized by theme. The discussion of each theme includes relevant portions of textural descriptions of the participants crafted by the researcher.

Research Question 1

The first research question was: How do working mothers in the restaurant industry perceive their engagement at work? One main theme emerged from the data to address this research question.

Theme 1: High Commitment

Data associated with this theme indicate that more participants feel connected to their work and the industry overall. Participants also conveyed having a high sense of duty or commitment to their job yet perceived themselves as being burnt out and

exasperated by working conditions of the pandemic. All participants reported that they loved the restaurant industry, but 28% of participants questioned if they should remain in the industry given how much things have changed. These feelings were perceived as stemming from the increase in hours, fewer perks, new management or ownership, and new or not enough staff.

Participant IJ5 has been with her company for 20 years and loves that every day is a different day. Nonetheless, as with any job, there are good days and bad days. The bad days for her are when she does not receive the schedule that she needs. She often works the night shift yet has requested to work daytime hours so she can spend time with her daughter:

> I love [my job]. I've been working with the company for 20 years, so I do love the job… I do not like the hours. This worked before but not so much now. I need to be around my daughter more.

Participant KL6 indicated she loves the restaurant industry and her job. She characterized herself as being hospitable and friendly and declared that she likes talking to people. To her, the industry is easy, and she is well suited for it. The recent changes the industry has undergone, however, are for the first time making her question if her place in the industry:

> I love my job. I love the industry that I'm in. This industry though is very nurturing for younger adults and sometimes that gets frustrating, you know, because things have changed. Work ethic has changed, and the industry itself is

changing. So, I'm trying to keep up with what is going on. Like, am I really going to keep doing this [job]?

Participant EF3 has been in the restaurant industry for 20 years and has experienced a lot of change, particularly at her company; she has only worked for one company her entire career. Those changes and the fact that her company has stopped giving raises have not been enough to keep her away:

I was 19 when I started working [here]. I'm 38 now, so I literally grew up and had children. I definitely used to love [the company] a lot more because it was fun. And now, the company has got new ownership and some of the things [changing] I feel like I'm just too old for. But I definitely don't mind working here. I'm thankful for my job because I don't have any degrees, and it gave me the opportunity to make money. They pay me pretty well without a degree, so I may leave this company by the end of year but going to stick with the industry.

Participant GH4 loves what she does and up until a year ago could not detach herself from work. This would be in addition to working 60–75 hours a week. The first thing she would do when she woke up or when she arrived home from work was her check email; she was often so focused on work that personal commitments would not occur to her: "I felt I had to be connected all the time, in some way. Family would almost become second without even realizing it…until the kids come to you and ask you to play with them."

Participant AB1, has been with her company for 9 years. Before being furloughed during the pandemic, her job was a place where she felt safe, confident, and "at home":

> Work has been family. I've always been available to work, to take phone calls,
> answer a question from [my] boss. In order to take care of my family, my job has
> to be a priority. I can't jeopardize not having a job.

Summary Results for Research Question 1

Participants perceive themselves as being highly engaged with their work yet also dealing with guilt from neglecting family or prioritizing work. Participants also realize their actions are leading to burnout. Some believe that, as effects from the pandemic wear off, things will return to normal. Others are uncertain about their future in the industry amidst the changes. Figure 3 presents the most frequent terms in the data set related to RQ1, containing four or more letters. The most frequently used words in the data set were *right*, *work*, and *time*. These words represent the recurring and consistent sentiment expressed by participants.

Figure 3

Research Question 1 NVivo Word Cloud
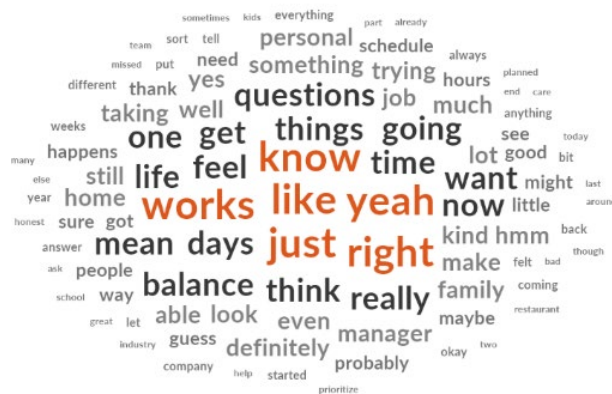
Research Question 2

The second research question was: How do working mothers in the restaurant industry try to balance work and family? More than one theme emerged during data analysis to address this research question.

Theme 2: Setting Boundaries

Most participants shared that having boundaries and enforcing those boundaries is the only way they can have the balance they desire. Such balance was defined by all participants as keeping work and family separate and knowing that, at the end of the day, they have fulfilled their duties in both roles. Participant AB1 shared that she is constantly trying to have time to be with her family without working, and when at work, to just be at work. She is not always successful with this; in the restaurant industry "you are open 365 days a year, not much left for self or family." It is helpful to at least keep the two roles separate on days off, and that is what she has started to do:

> Learning to say no is the best way I can describe [balancing] and making time [off] a priority... even if I have nothing planned, I'm going to request a random day off because that's what I'm going to commit to my family. And not make work a priority when I have time with them. Like, you know, what I don't have to answer those calls or send text messages… they can wait an hour for the answer. Unless it's an emergency, you don't need that answer right this second. It can wait.

For Participant CD2, maintaining boundaries serves as a check and balance for her because she has a hard time managing things. She shared that her boundaries mean

that work should not interfere with her personal life and that she is allowed to be away

from work on her days off. To that end, she does not want to be contacted on days off.

She has taken steps to ensure that everyone at work is on the same page; her time is to be

respected, unless it is an emergency:

> In setting that boundary and communicating my own personal boundaries is
>
> important. I feel like, in the restaurant industry, especially when you get into
>
> management, we don't work to live; it's like we're supposed to want to live to
>
> work, and I don't agree with that. I work 10-hour days, so when it's my day off,
>
> it's my day off. A lot of times it is looked at as a bad boundary, that's not
>
> acceptable. And, for me, the reason I'm so adamant about it is because …I live
>
> and work for the people in my life that can't be replaced.

> Participant EF3 shared that setting boundaries is necessary; without them, things

in her household can get hectic "with school, after school activities, trying to work, and

trying to be home, there's always something in the calendar." She also shared that

keeping work and home separate is complicated because she tries to be sure to spend an

equal amount of time at home and work:

> As a manager in a restaurant, those hours are not easy, not kind. The schedule
>
> may say 9-5 p.m., but I may be there until 8 p.m. So, enforcing those boundaries
>
> means that there have to be more hands on deck—the village has to be there to
>
> support my staff at work and the nanas and aunties in my family.

> For Participant IJ5, setting boundaries allows her to do things for her family and

loved ones and still be an efficient manager. At the time of the interview, she indicated

that had become harder to do. Participant IJ5 admitted spending most of her time at work. However, she added, "if it is something very important to [my kids], then I have to take care of those things. That is the line."

Theme 3: Making Sacrifices

All participants reported missing personal commitments or events in trying to manage work obligations. Such commitments and obligations included holidays, family dinners, funerals, vacations, and milestones in children's lives. These types of sacrifices were conveyed as commonplace to succeed or progress at work. However, several participants also shared sacrifices they made or are considering making to maintain some sense of balance at home and prevent feelings of guilt regarding family life.

Participant GH4 had a crisis of self, wondering who she was as she found that she had let go of her hobbies and passions in lieu of work and kids. She stated that she has not thought of herself as a whole person in a long time, that she is always thinking about her professional life and has defined herself by her job. It was because of this in fact, that she struggled when she had to take a step back in her career to gain "balance," and expressed feeling some resentment.

> Had to take a step back in my career to get balance. Women seem to always be the one to the have to step back and be home. I feel I have to do less, to be home more and make less money...hardest transition. Thankfully, I have a support system, but I was the sole provider I would hate to have to make that decision.

The sacrifices have been a little different for participant KL6. She changed jobs to maintain some sense of work-life balance. Recently she has changed her schedule

because she started to "hate" that her husband was getting to spend more time with the children than she did. Her current schedule means that her five-month-old must go to daycare, yet she gets to spend that time with the children beforehand and see them off. Unfortunately, this means that she does not get to tuck her kids in bed. So, she has started to look at things differently so that she does not continue to "miss out on a lot":

> I am taking way more risks in getting fired for my family. I have missed more days of work in the last two years than over my entire career. So, if that means I don't get the promotion then... I come to work to take care of my family. I can always find a new job. I can't find another family.

Sacrifices are not always as severe as missed pick-ups or career opportunities. Many participants shared that in trying to manage or "balance" the responsibilities of work and home that they forgo acts of self-care. For example, participant IJ5 shared that she spends most of her time at work and takes off from work to take care of things for her daughter who is in girl scouts:

> I would like to have time for self as well. Able to get my nails done, hair done. As moms we put ourselves on the back burner, trying to do everything, cook, clean, do laundry. I don't have much of it {time}. There's not much time to do anything else when she's home but rest.

Summary Results for Research Question 2

Overall participants conveyed that sacrifice on a professional level is par for the course in pursuit of an improved family life and sense of balance as most felt they gave more time, attention, and energy to work. All participants reported returning home from

work and feeling "too tired" to attend to them at home to-do list or do things like cook dinner or help with homework. In addition, the setting of boundaries, protecting those boundaries and not "allowing" work to interfere with family life and vice versa was something perceived as very important to the participants and a goal they each aspired to achieve. Figure 4 presents the most frequent terms related to RQ 2 data set. The most frequently used words in the dataset set were balance, days, life, and now.

Figure 4

Research Question 2 NVivo Word Cloud

Research Question 3

The third research question was: What is job satisfaction for working mothers in the restaurant industry? One main theme emerged from the data to address this research question.

Theme 4: Flexibility

Data associated with this theme overwhelmingly pointed to participant perceptions of having a flexible or at the very least consistent, schedule as the key to

having an easier to manage home life in which for them, would translate to being content with their job.

Participant KL6 is trying to figure it {her schedule} out now while her kids are still young. She shared that she wants to be there for her kids but still have time for herself and be able to show her kids that they can do the same thing:

> I love this industry. I love my job. But my husband tells me I love my job too much. And my son is starting school so, I might have to change my job. My schedule is not conducive to being able to get my son on and off the bus.

Additionally, for participant MN7, at this point in her life, she says the job she has is close to "ideal." She mentioned that she feels "good with" her job, not so much with her schedule:

> [if] my schedule is flexible I can be with my children in the afternoons and carry out my responsibilities correctly both with my children and at work. I can also work without worrying about my kids… no looking for a babysitter or having to call out [from work] because to pay a babysitter is expensive.

Participant EF3 shared that she has "complicated" feelings about her current job; citing that things are very hectic and tiresome a flexible schedule would not only allow her to:

> As a manager in a restaurant, the hours are not easy, not kind. The schedule may say 9-5pm but I may be there until 8pm. A consistent schedule helps with planning ahead and keeping a routine. When things are known ahead of time, [I] can plan for it. An inflexible work schedule means lot of running around, having to figure out impromptu things like inclement weather, no school, getting a

babysitter. [I] feel stress in my body, tightness in my stomach…anxiety at night.

Thinking about the next day and how to get around [my schedule].

Currently, participant AB1 is not happy with her work schedule. Though she works a minimum of 50 hours a week, her discontent stems from the inconsistency of the schedule in terms of shifts and in and out times. When the schedule is not consistent, she shared that everything feels chaotic, and like there is no sense of control. Additionally, she gets frustrated when others are affected by that inconsistent schedule, specifically when it dampers time with her significant other. AB1 stated that a flexible and consistent schedule:

> "helps with planning. [I] can plan when home, when with family, when with friends. Can plan quality time with the kids and just be productive and able to relax when others not affected by [my] work schedule."

Participant CD2 commented that she now has the flexibility to set her own schedule so that she works mostly during the day, which she thought she would enjoy more than she does because it still eats into a lot of the day, and she misses time with her son. She should be able to get home by 7 p.m. but most nights she is not leaving until 8 p.m. However, she shared that it is much better than before because:

> "working 60 hours a week was really taking a toll on me personally. It just felt really unhealthy. Working that kind of schedule, I don't feel in control of my life. I'm so focused on work, there's no way I'm paying enough attention to the people I care about at home. And I wouldn't want to stay at a job that impacts my personal life to that degree."

Summary Results for Research Question 3

Overall, participants perceived those adjustments to their work schedule was necessary to help them fulfill their dual responsibilities of work and motherhood. Time, not having enough of it or a sense of control over their own time, was conveyed as a major stressor, which would often lead to neglect of the parenting role and result in feelings of disappointment, guilt, or resentment towards their job. Figure 5 presents the most frequent terms in the dataset of RQ 3. The most frequently used words in the dataset set were balance, time, feel, and days. These words represent the recurring sentiment expressed by participants.

Figure 5

Research Question 3 NVivo Word Cloud

To organize and allow for easier navigation of the data, multiple tables were constructed during the analysis phase of this study. These tables helped to detect patterns, themes, and trends in the data. They also ensured that important aspects data collected from the interviews, were not overlooked. Table 3 below, is a visual arrangement that

facilitates a comparison of the themes that were identified with corresponding participant contributions.

Table 3

Thematic Cross-Case Analysis

Theme	AB1	CD2	EF3	GH4	IJ5	KL6	MN7
High commitment	X		X	X	X	X	
Setting boundaries	X	X	X		X		
Making sacrifices				X	X	X	X
Flexibility	X	X	X			X	X

Table 4 below summarizes overall participant sentiment that is associated with each theme, while aligning each theme by research question.

Table 4

Research Questions and Corresponding Themes

RQ	Theme	Participants
1	1	Felt extreme commitment to job and team especially coming through the pandemic
2	2	Having boundaries and enforcing those boundaries would be the only way to have their desired level of work life balance.
	3	Believed choices are to sacrifice time with family to grow in career, or sacrifice career to maintain work-life balance
3	4	Flexible schedules positively influenced overall satisfaction with current job or organization.

Summary and Transition

Three research questions guided this study. The first question was: How do working mothers in the restaurant industry perceive their engagement at work? The results indicated that participants perceived themselves as being highly engaged due to a high sense of obligation or commitment to their work yet needing to address or overcome

feelings of burnout. The second research question was: How do working mothers in the restaurant industry try to balance work and family? The results indicated the setting of boundaries and personal sacrifice were the main ways to attain a sense of balance and peace on both the home and work fronts. The third research question was: What is job satisfaction for working mothers in the restaurant industry? The results indicated that a flexible and dependable work schedule would enable participants to allocate time to the obligations of both roles of employee and mother and contribute to more positive feelings about their job. Such positive feelings would extend beyond their own to that of their spouses and children.

Chapter 5 includes interpretations of the study results and its implications. It begins with a review and discussion of the findings presented in this chapter. Next, it includes an interpretation of the findings and how they may confirm or disconfirm the conclusions of previous researchers. Chapter 5 then concludes with a briefing on the limitations of this study, recommendations based on findings for employers and closing remarks.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This phenomenological study on the lived experiences of working mothers in the restaurant industry was conducted to explore and understand WLB, engagement, and job satisfaction among working mothers in that industry. Key findings of this study suggest that the respondents are committed to their jobs and make sacrifices in their home life for work-related needs. Additionally, participants identified that setting boundaries between work and home life is necessary so that work does not continue to encroach on the time they have with family. Further, participants expressed their desire for flexibility at work and with their work schedule as a key factor in being satisfied with their job. The overall goal of this research was to offer strategies that restaurant and food service organizations can use to keep their employees, especially women with children, engaged and satisfied in an industry prone to high turnover. Such strategies would include policy recommendations, programs, and initiatives that provide the support and culture that working mothers need to be successful. In this chapter, I present my research questions for a final time and then set forth my interpretation of the findings of this study in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Next, I discuss the observed limitations and delimitations. The remaining sections are then recommendations and a conclusion.

Research Questions

For this phenomenological study, the central research question was: What are the lived experiences of working mothers in the restaurant industry? To garner more focused findings and address the gap in the literature, I designed the following research questions:

RQ1: How do working mothers in the restaurant industry perceive their engagement at work?

RQ2: How do working mothers in the restaurant industry try to balance work and family?

RQ3: What is job satisfaction for working mothers in the restaurant industry?

Interpretation of Findings

Theoretical Framework

Analysis of the participants' narratives led to my interpretation that the findings support prior research that showed a strong relationship between self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and job commitment (Niu, 2012). The general tenets of self-efficacy were also shown through the sense of personal competence that each participant possessed (Bandura, 1986). Despite the challenges participants face and their own discontent with the circumstances of working in the restaurant industry during and post COVID-19, participants strongly believe they possess the ability to successfully handle the challenges in front of them. Pearson and Bieschle (2001) noted that those who possess confidence in their abilities will handle challenging situations with ease and calm; whereas individuals who question their ability will act or perform with uneasiness and worry. Such an approach then increases the likelihood of failure. The findings of this study extend that research in that 100% of the participants exuded calm, composure, and competence when discussing day-to-day work life, difficult situations, and how they communicate with supervisors, coworkers, staff, and customers.

While some literature indicates that self-efficacy enables individuals to perceive the conflicting demands of work and family as positive and non-stressful (Greenhaus et al., 2003), my findings do not support this. All participants expressed feeling stressed, anxious, and frustrated when discussing the responsibilities held at work and at home. Participants also had a shared perception of stress and overwhelm when faced with being unable to fulfill the duties of work, home, or both.

In terms of role conflict theory, my findings were ambiguous toward the literature. Houle et al. (2009) found that as the interference between work and family increased, (a) the more women felt exhausted and tense, (b) the less they were committed to their employer, and (c) the more likely they were to consider quitting their job. While all participants shared feeling physically or mentally exhausted, *tense* was not a sentiment revealed during the interviews. Additionally, in spite feelings of exhaustion, just 28% of respondents in my study noted considering or had considered quitting their job. All participants demonstrated high commitment to their job and their teams.

Conversely, my study findings did confirm previous literature that working mothers experience unique challenges regarding work and family roles and thus experience work–family conflict (Dizaho et al., 2016). The participants in my study detailed several challenges regarding their work and family roles. One participant described how, as a single mother with a child who just started primary school, she repeatedly is faced with either going to work to provide for her child or doing what is best for her child in the moment. For example, when her child woke up with a low-grade fever and no other symptoms, she had to decide whether to send them to school or keep

them home and report this to her employer. This would then require her to quarantine at home for up to 10 days, which would be considered unpaid leave. She conveyed it would be ideal to keep her child home, but she could not afford to go without pay for 10 days. Additionally, my findings signify confirmation that role-related factors, such as role conflict and role overload, have a negative impact on WLB (Thakur & Kumar, 2015). All respondents intimated a belief that they either did not have WLB or did not have good WLB. The perceived causes repeatedly mentioned were the number hours worked each week and not being able to take any days off.

Identified Themes

The overall findings of the study expose an array of feelings and experiences that these working mothers have related to their jobs, responsibilities at home, and striving toward WLB. Many of the feelings conveyed were negative in nature; participants did not view themselves as having WLB and did not see WLB as a possibility without having to walk away from a job in the industry they enjoy and where they have spent a significant portion of their career. Similar negative sentiments were expressed regarding how satisfied participants are in their current jobs with the overwhelming cause being the number of hours they work. Ironically, despite the less than desirable circumstances of working more hours than preferred or missing quality time with children and family, all participants expressed sincere and utmost dedication to their jobs and fondness for their profession and industry.

Theme 1: High Commitment

The first theme that stemmed from the findings is participants' high commitment and sense of duty to their jobs. Each participant referred to a willingness to put forth their best efforts to fulfill their work obligations and conveyed dedication notwithstanding challenges they may have encountered. Participants indicated having a hard time detaching themselves from work, making themselves constantly available to work demands. This tracks with Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) and Chan et al. (2012) who found work demand predicts work engagement and implied that work needs to have a certain level of demand to engage employees; exceeding or failing to meet a certain level of demand risks employee disengagement or burnout.

In the research question related with Theme 1, I attempted to understand how respondents view their level of engagement at work. The findings extend the research of Pandita and Singhal (2017), in which it was hypothesized that engagement and WLB were independent entities. Nevertheless, Pandita and Singhal found that WLB and engagement are interdependent, and engagement can lead to a satisfied work and home life. Instead of refuting their premise, my findings of high commitment in the face of obstacles and participants' lack of WLB would validate it.

Theme 2: Setting Boundaries

The second theme generated from data analysis is the importance of setting boundaries. The research question related to the second theme asked how working mothers in the restaurant industry try to balance work and family. Fifty-seven percent of participants relayed that the primary path to obtaining WLB was setting boundaries. For

participants, setting boundaries is not a mere desire but is key to experiencing the type of balance between their professional and personal lives they need. These sentiments track with previous literature into boundary theory as it applies work and personal life. Researchers found that working adults who set boundaries around their home and work life and ensure they stay separate experience less work–family conflict than working adults who set boundaries but allow interference (Bulgar et al., 2007). Additionally, Allen et al. (2021) suggested that individuals are more likely to feel effective in both their work and home life when there is boundary management.

WLB has been a major issue for employers and employees for decades (Greenhaus & Kopelman, 1981). Original research on WLB began in the 1960's and focused on working mothers as at this time there was a significant increase in the number of women who had become part of the workforce (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) in the United States. And, because of several waves of research, HR departments began to address the issues of WLB by creating programs to support working mothers (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Such programs were based on (1) helping women to prevent spillover, a phenomenon where work responsibilities affect family obligations and vice versa (Pleck, 1995), and (2) helping workers create, preserve, and alter boundaries between the work and nonwork aspects of their lives (Ashforth et al., 2000). Thus, the present study's findings that setting boundaries help working mothers achieve work-life balance can be supported by the literature.

Theme 3: Making Sacrifices

An equal number of participants shared that making sacrifices was how they try to balance work and family as those who indicated setting boundaries was the way to achieve work-life balance. It was also noted that one participant believed that both setting boundaries and making sacrifices were required for achieving balance, while the responses of the remaining six participants clearly fell into one of the two themes generated from the second research question. Each participant detailed numerous occasions where they had to miss out on personal commitments such as family gatherings, birthday celebrations, weddings, funerals, medical appointments and even dinners at home due to work obligations. Several participants even noted that they missed personal commitments and events "all the time," because of work. In these instances, work intruded on family life via scheduling emergencies such as staff call-outs and shift shortages. This would mean that the study participants either had to go to work on their scheduled day off, stay at work past their scheduled end time, or both each day or multiple days in a given week. In extreme cases, a third of participants reported having to work double-shifts for 2-3 consecutive days. Lastly, the working mothers in this study reported having to forgo planned vacations and even ultimately decided against using their accrued personal time off (PTO) or sick days to help fill in a gap at work. One participant even went to work sick with COVID during the pandemic when restaurants were just starting to open again, because none of the hourly staff wanted to return to work.

Besides personal commitments, making sacrifices showed up in participant responses in the context of career choices. Two participants shared that they had to decline roles and opportunities for advancement to retain some semblance of work-life balance, while one participant described struggling with having to take a step back her career to "get work-life balance." Finally, another woman recalled having to "let go of" her hobbies and passions to "do less and be home more."

A review of relevant research revealed that for women, work often interferes with family life (Sundaresan, 2014). Working women appear to suffer conflict because of greater job spillover into the home than home spillover into the workplace (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014). In addition to attempting to thrive in one environment, working women are frequently required to make compromises or sacrifices in another because both domains have different and conflicting demands that cannot go unmet (Guest, 2002). This literature thus confirms this aspect of my study's findings.

Theme 4: Flexibility

Research question 3 was what is job satisfaction for working mothers in the restaurant industry? This study's concluding theme that emerged from the findings expands on prior research emphasizing the requirement for working women to have schedule flexibility to be satisfied with their jobs. The association between a lack of workplace flexibility, work-family conflict, and depression has been validated by research (Googins, 1991). To aid workers in striking a healthy work-life balance, flexible work schedules were developed (Sussanna & Rashad, 2014) as women with rigid work schedules reported greater work-family conflict and dissatisfaction. In the context of this

study, the participants regarded flexibility as either working less hours or having a pre-determined set schedule that would not change with less than two weeks' notice. This flexibility was desired to help manage responsibilities at home and set expectations with participants' spouses, co-parents, and dependents. For 71% of this study's participants, having a schedule that requires long hours that are unpredictable and consistently subject to change was a key source of job dissatisfaction.

Limitations

In addition to the limitations cited in Chapter 1, there were other factors that impacted this study and results. First, the women in this study were in operational roles and did not hold corporate positions. Then, there is the accuracy of responses to the interview questions and the reliability of the participants' memories. Some of the interview questions required participants to recall how they felt when they faced a particular situation or challenge. It cannot be known for a certainty if the expressed sentiments were specific to what was felt in the moment, or if the participants were relaying their current thoughts and feelings about what occurred. Another limitation of this study is that there can be no causality established from the results. Next, the data cannot be generalized or applied to all working mothers, and the number of participants do not necessarily represent all mothers in who work in the restaurant industry. Lastly, and as indicated in Chapter 1, my previous experience as a working mother in the restaurant industry presented possible bias. However, in the middle of completing my research, I switched jobs and re-entered the restaurant industry. While phenomenological researchers cannot detach themselves from their own beliefs and should not be pretend to

as it can provide added value in the data analysis (Groenewald (2004), there was some potential for bias while conducting the virtual interviews.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendations are based on this study's findings and informed by the extensive literature review. The results of this study indicate that changes to workplace policies and restaurant culture are needed to better accommodate working mothers. First, regarding policies a decrease in work hours for restaurant employees is necessary. Currently, the typical schedule of a restaurant manager, like those in this present study, is 50 hours per week. A decrease in work hours would decrease work-family conflict as confirmed by the literature review, while also fostering greater work-life balance, improving morale, and positively influencing overall job satisfaction. With turnover being an ongoing and rising issue in the restaurant industry, this change in policy would anchor any retention strategy.

A second policy change recommendation is regarding paid time off and personal leave. Working mothers in the restaurant industry are often choosing between their health and the health of their dependent or their paycheck. Paid and job-protected leave specific to dependent care should be implemented so that a working mom can provide care to a sick child or infant without worrying about their job. The culture change associated with this policy recommendation is for those in supervisory positions to create a climate at work that is supportive of working mothers.

A third policy recommendation is to help provide quality childcare options for working mothers. This can be done by offering subsidized or discounted childcare for employees or providing a listing of local, affordable childcare options to working mothers upon hire. The last policy recommendation is a minimum time-off policy that would require

employees to use their leave by the end of each year. The associated culture change is for employers to create an environment where employees feel safe in using their leave or paid time-off. This would need to be done through senior management and other tenured staff leading by example and taking time-off. Additionally, senior management and those with staff reporting to them should demonstrate setting boundaries by not answering calls/emails on days off neither reaching out to their own staff members when they are off from work.

Recommendations for Future Research

Next are recommendations for future research. This study's purpose was to focus on how working mothers in the restaurant industry manage work and family. The findings of this study brought forth valuable insight yet further exploration of the identified themes and their correlation to work life balance would be helpful. Additionally, converting this research to a mixed-methods study and using the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) to further examine the role self-efficacy plays on working mothers balancing work and family could be helpful. A third recommendation for further research is a comparative study of working single mothers versus working married women with children to identify any additional themes. The final recommendation for future research is a longitudinal study of working mothers in the restaurant industry throughout their time raising children to provide insight into how their attempts to balance work and family may change as their child ages.

Implications

This study has several implications for social change that could be advantageous for companies, employees, and society at large. The findings of this study reveal the perceived and experienced engagement of working mothers in the restaurant industry and could be used to guide the development of change strategies that would increase

employee support to help foster commitment and promote feelings of being valued. In addition, organizational leaders and supervisors can obtain a deeper grasp of what instigates low engagement and job dissatisfaction and put in place checkpoints during the employee lifecycle to be able to identify issues in the early stages. This study may also serve to stimulate social change with restaurant companies incorporating decision- and policy-making practices that consider working mothers, their contributions and impact beforehand. Further, the investigation of the lived experiences of working mothers in the restaurant industry, and how they balance work and family, may provide a deeper understanding of related phenomena, for working mothers in across industries.

Reflexivity

As the solitary researcher, awareness of personal bias and routine reflection throughout the research process was vital. Early on, when developing interview questions, phrasing was carefully analyzed and re-examined to ensure participant responses would not be inadvertently influenced. Prior to data collection, I reflected on my experiences as a working mother and journaled my own responses to the interview questions. Doing so would allow me to focus on each participant's response rather than be interrupted by my own thoughts and opinions.

During the interview sessions, while establishing a rapport, I shared my background working as a corporate executive in the restaurant industry and being a single mother. This was done, to first create an atmosphere of openness and trust with the participants, secondly, to establish that as an interviewer I would be listening with a more empathetic ear rather than judgmental ear, and lastly, to communicate that I understood

the language, culture, and politics of working in the restaurant industry. This helped with participants not feeling as if they would have to spend too much time explaining themselves and could just focus on their thoughts about each question they were asked.

During data analysis, to provide an accurate reflection of the participants' experiences, member checks and repeated assessment of the recordings of the interviews helped to prevent my personal sentiments and experiences from influencing the narratives of the participants. Only the words and attitudes of the participants were in the forefront of my mind. Being consumed by the participants' stories led to uncomplicated clarification of themes and then later discernment of how the literature and findings were related.

Conclusion

There is limited scholarly research measuring WLB in conjunction with engagement, yet various research demonstrating strong linkages to job satisfaction and engagement. As such, at the beginning of this study, I subscribed to the belief that working mothers who were satisfied with their jobs and engaged at work would also have "good" WLB. The results of this study not only challenged that belief it made me question how I define WLB and if it is a construct that every working mother must define for themselves rather than strive towards it.

Overall, the findings of this study provided insight into how working mothers in the very grueling industry of restaurant and food service perceive work-life balance and what they believe they must do or what must exist for them to reach this elusive status. The review and understanding of the lived experiences of this study's participants should

encourage an examination of current workplace policies and practices and illuminate the need for systemic change, especially with how much the talent landscape has changed in this post-COVID era. If restaurants want to return to pre-pandemic sales and be successful, then incremental policy and cultural change is needed to create work environments where women, most of its workforce, can thrive.

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Appendix A: Participant Screening Questions

Screening Questions

1. How long have you worked in the restaurant industry?

2. What type of restaurant do you currently work in?

3. Do you currently work in more than one restaurant?

4. What is your current position at the restaurant?

5. How many hours a week do you work?

6. How many days a week do you work?

7. How many hours do you work each day, or does it vary?

8. Do you work a regular shift each day or does it vary?

9. Is this job your main source of income?

10. Do you have children? If yes, what are their ages?

11. Are you the only adult member of the household?

12. If no, do you share responsibilities for childcare with that adult?

13. If yes, do you share responsibilities for childcare with an adult outside of the home?

14. Do you use day care and/or after school care for you children?

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. What does work-life balance mean to you?

2. What does the ideal WLB look like to you/in your life?

3. How would you describe your work life balance?

4. What are some signs in your life that everything is in balance? Out of balance?

5. How do you feel when things are out of balance?

6. Describe an experience at work when you were feeling like work and home were out of balance.

7. How do you feel about your job?

8. Are you satisfied with your work schedule?

9. How many hours a week do you work?

10. What might be the cause of a bad day at work for you?

11. How does that affect you at home?

12. Have you ever missed a personal commitment or event because of work?

13. What are your feelings about the impact your job has on your family/life outside of work?

14. How do you feel you might prioritize your job over your personal life?

15. How do you feel you might prioritize your family over your job?