SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF WORKING WITH

STUDENTS WHO IDENTIFY AS TRANSGENDER

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Lois Sias Joubert. Your unwavering support and guidance set the foundation of greatness for me. You believed in me before I even knew how to believe in myself. I am thankful for you being able to see me walk across the stage once, before your transition to my Heavenly angel. Grandma, I continued to push further with a second degree, and now my Doctorate. Your strength, values, and virtues live on strongly within me. As I accomplish this goal, my thoughts are always with you. I love you.

ABSTRACT

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Purpose

Students who identify as transgender often are met with harassment and bullying in schools due to their gender expression or sexual orientation. Researchers suggest that when educators intervene, school bullying can be reduced. However, to effectively provide academic and social support, teachers' first must be aware of their own biases and perceptions of marginalized students. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore secondary teachers' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender. Understanding teachers' perceptions and experiences in working with students identifying as transgender revealed strategies for preparing educators to support safe school learning environments for all students.

Methodology

A purposeful criterion sampling scheme was used to select six secondary teacher participants. A qualitative phenomenological design was utilized to explore teachers' shared experiences and perceptions of working with students identifying as transgender. Semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary data source. Interviews were transcribed, and data were analyzed to identify common themes in teacher participants' perceptions and experiences.

Findings

In addressing the research questions in this study, four major themes emerged including: (a) school wide support, (b) teacher preparation and training, (c) teacher

behavior, and (d) the notion of a *new normal*. Each emergent theme and subtheme provided insight into the teacher participants' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender.

Implications

The findings from this research study indicated a need to: increase school-wide supports for students identifying as transgender, provide educator training, cultivate teachers' acceptance of all students, respond to gender-identity related bullying incidents in schools, and develop awareness of the "new normal" around gender identification in today's schools.

KEY WORDS: Phenomenology, Transgender, Gender identity, Gender expression, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Sexual orientation, Gender non-conforming

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have your love and support through this journey. You kissed away the tears and made me laugh when all I wanted to do was give up. Thank you for being my rock, my support, and my best friend. I love you. My son, mommy did this for you! I want you to know that when you put your mind to something, nothing can stop you! You may have some bumps in the road but keep persevering and that goal will be yours. I love you.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

In 2016, Gavin Grimm, a 17-year-old high school senior, filed a lawsuit against the school board in his county for a discriminatory policy mandating that students who identify as transgender use separate restrooms from their peers. Gavin Grimm, a transgender male, identifies as male but was assigned a female gender at birth. Gavin's lawsuit was filed with the support of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), as a violation of Title IX of the U.S. Education Amendment of 1972 and prompted a national debate on the treatment and school accommodations of students who identify as transgender. Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972 prohibits educational institutions from engaging in discriminatory practices based on sex and applies to all universities, colleges, elementary, and secondary schools who receive federal financial assistance (Federal Register, 2000).

Schools should be safe places for all students, regardless of gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation; however, transgender youth typically face harassment and discrimination based on gender expression at levels higher than their non-transgender peers (Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; Wernick, Kulick, & Inglehart, 2014; Wimberly, 2015). Societal norms of gender expression can be observed in school environments across the United States. Students who identify as transgender report feeling unsafe in schools and experience bullying and harassment due to their gender expression (Kosciw, Palmer, Kull & Greytak, 2013; Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009). Young children frequently hear expressions like "you throw like a girl" or "tomboy" from their first days in school. Anti-gay epithets are commonly used to question the

masculinity of a boy, and are the subject for harassment for many girls who appear to be to masculine (Meyer, 2008). This type of name-calling and bullying on the basis of gender expression often is the first type of harassment that students experience (Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009). Upon entering middle school, students who identify as transgender or gender non-conforming tend to face even greater harassment as these students are less favorable of same sex attraction (Wimberly, 2015).

The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) is a national education organization committed to ensuring schools are providing a safe place for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students. GLSEN conducts national school climate surveys to report information on middle and high school LGBT students' experiences in their school environment. GLSEN commissioned three researchers to conduct a national survey, in 2009, specifically targeting the experiences of 295 middle and high school students who identified as transgender. Students who identify as transgender were twice as likely to report feeling unsafe in schools with 90% of students describing their schools as *hostile environments* and more than half reported hearing negative comments related to gender. Eighty-nine percent of students who identified as transgender reported verbal harassment due to gender expression, 55% described physical harassment including being pushed or shoved, and 28% reported being physically assaulted with a weapon and punched or kicked, resulting in 15% of the students surveyed leaving the K-12 school system (Greytak et al., 2009; New York State Education Department, 2015).

Additionally, 39% of students who identified as transgender reported hearing school staff members making negative remarks about gender expression and less than a

fifth of those staff members were reported to have intervened when they observed gender-related harassment or overhearing negative remarks about gender expression or identity (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016). Students who identify as transgender reported to school staff or administrators that they had been harassed or victimized and described the incidents were ignored or not adequately addressed (Frederico & Sehgal, 2015). The academic success of students who identify as transgender can be hindered due to hostile school climates (Frederico & Sehgal, 2015).

Overall, students who experienced gender-identity related harassment in school reported lower feelings of belonging to the school community in relation to their non-transgender peers (Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; Kosciw, et al., 2013). This poor sense of belonging in school has long standing academic consequences for students who identify as transgender. Reports of increased absenteeism, high drop-out rates, low educational aspirations and academic performance are all negative repercussions of student harassment (Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; Frederico & Sehgal, 2015). According to Greytak et al., (2009), 56% of students who identify as transgender reported missing school for safety reasons. Additionally, 40% of these students thwarted plans to attend a post-secondary institution as a result of their experiences with high levels of harassment in high school Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; Kosciw, et al., 2015).

Educators, including school administrators, teachers, and staff members are responsible for intervening when they observe harassment, yet many school staff members do not intervene and, in some cases, might even contribute to students' discomfort (Kosciw et al., 2013; Meyer, 2008). Bullying behavior towards students who identify as transgender has been linked to an increase in damaging mental health

outcomes including post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, thus preventing many of these students from reaching their academic potential (Wernick et al., 2014; Wimberly, 2015). Bullying behavior based on gender expression can prevent healthy development of these students (Wernick et al., 2014). Some scholars suggest that educators, and specifically teachers a part of the majority, often are unaware of their own beliefs, biases, and perceptions of students who identify as transgender, and thus have difficulty relating to stereotyping and prejudice (Perez, Schanding, & Dao, 2013; Meyer, 2008). Teachers' lack of awareness of the needs of marginalized students can contribute to an inability to notice or a tendency to ignore harassment or bullying of students (Perez et al., 2013). In some cases, teachers may even instigate or contribute intentionally and unintentionally to teasing or marginalizing students who identify as transgender due to a lack of information on the negative effects of their actions (Dessel, Kulick, Wernick, & Sullivan, 2017). The focus of this study was to examine the perceptions of secondary teachers' who work with students who identify as transgender. Ideally, understanding secondary teachers' perceptions of students who identify as transgender will reveal strategies for preparing teachers to notice and prevent student harassment, as well as intervene when they witness bullying as efforts to ensure safe learning environments for all students.

Statement of the Problem

When compared with their peers, students who identify as transgender experience higher rates of ill-treatment and bullying in schools. In fact, students who identify as transgender frequently encounter experiences of harassment and discrimination related to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and how they choose to express their gender

(Greytek et al., 2009; Dessel et al., 2017; Wernick et al., 2014). Providing students with a safe environment for learning, and serving as an ally and role model are important dimension of a teacher's role in supporting students who identify as transgender (Vega, Glynn-Crawford & Van Pelt, 2012). However, teachers have been found to be inconsistent in addressing homophobic remarks and often do not intervene to address negative behaviors and responses to students who manifest alternative gender expressions (Greytak et al., 2013; Meyer, 2008). Teachers are often not confident in their ability to address bullying and report a lack of knowledge in the protocol of reporting bullying based on gender expression. Additionally, there is a feeling of a lack of support from administration (Vega et al., 2012; Meyer, 2008). Moreover, educational leaders rarely provide sufficient support to thwart anti-transgender bias among school personnel and are unprepared themselves to address the special needs of students who identify as transgender (Greytak et al., 2013). Therefore, teachers themselves must be aware of their own perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender, attempt to address their own biases, and provide support to students who experience marginalization and harassment because of their gender identity (Perez, et al., 2013).

As LGBT rights are increasingly visible in mainstream media, research is emerging on working with students who identify as transgender; however most of this research has been conducted on students in Higher Education. Little research has been conducted on teachers in the K-12 setting. This population is crucial to the literature because K-12 teachers interact with more students who identify as transgender than post-secondary educators (Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; Kosciw, et al, 2015) during traditionally difficult transitional periods of adolescence.

Purpose of the Study

Students who identity as transgender often experience problems with physical, emotional and sexual harassment in addition to discriminatory instances and derogatory language in the school environment (Greytak et al., 2009). Shi and Doud (2017) discovered that support from school personnel had a positive effect on the academic achievement, emotional stability, and motivation to attend a post-secondary school for students who identified as transgender, even if they can identify at least one supportive person in the school environment. The purpose of this study was to examine secondary school teachers' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender. Ideally, a better understanding of secondary teachers' perceptions of transgender students will uncover potential support and intervention strategies to provide a safer environment and a greater sense of belonging for transgender students (Meyer, 2008).

Research Questions

To gain an understanding of secondary school teachers' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender, a qualitative study was used. The following research questions were used to guide this study: (a) What are select secondary teachers' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender? (b) What kinds of school-wide supports do teachers describe as necessary to support the success of students who identify as transgender?; (c) What professional development needs do select secondary school teachers report might assist them in supporting the success of students who identify as transgender?

Significance of Study

Students who identify as transgender often face greater marginalization and harassment than their lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) peers. Transgender students often do not have access to the same support systems and protections in school as LGB students, and little attention is paid to gender identity and expression (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey & Russell, 2010). Although previous studies have recognized the maltreatment of students identifying as LGBT, limited research has focused on the experiences of transgender students (McGuire et al., 2010). Therefore, more studies are needed to understand how teachers can better support transgender students, particularly in K-12 schools.

Students who identify as transgender frequently encounter experiences of harassment and discrimination related to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and how they choose to express their gender (Greytek et al., 2009; Dessel, Kulick, Wernick, & Sullivan, 2017; Wernick et al., 2014). Additionally, these students have reported difficulties in school that are related to discriminatory behaviors by school staff. Per McGuire et al. (2010), students who identify as transgender experience anguish when school officials use the students' birth name instead of their preferred name. Moreover, students experience harassment from teachers who mock them, call them names, or insist students behave in gendered ways that reflect their birthed gender.

According to previous research (Shi & Doud, 2017), a supportive adult in school can help alleviate school problems for LGBT youth. Transgender students reported a greater sense of belonging to their school community when they were out to their peers and school staff (Greytak et al., 2009). Transgender students were mostly out to their

peers, but 45% reported being out to school staff and 36% reported being able to identify more than one supportive staff member (Greytak et al., 2009). Therefore, teachers must understand their perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender in order to provide a support system in schools.

Secondary students who identify as transgender need mentors and support from teachers to assist in alleviating harassment and targeting troubling academic challenges, high absences, and dropping out of school. This study focused on secondary school teacher's perceptions in working with students who identify as transgender. Limited research is available on secondary teachers' attitudes about and behaviors toward students who identify as transgender. Specifically, additional research is needed to aid in the lack of literature surrounding students who identify as transgender in the K-12 setting. This study was timely given recent government and school-level policies proposed to either prohibit or address the needs of transgender students. Insights gained from these select secondary school teachers in this study will aide in providing effective programs to support teachers in working with students who identify as transgender. Additionally, this research provided an understanding of possible barriers and motivators that contribute to secondary teachers' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender (Meyer, 2008).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used to ground this study was based on the general principles of the Meyer (2008) theoretical model. This theoretical model described four elements: external influences, internal influences, perceptions and responses that illustrate a relationship between how teachers perceive and respond to students based on

gender identity (Meyer, 2008). External influences are described as outside factors that provide an influence over teachers' perceptions within a school. School culture, an external influence, has a significant impact on the perceptions held by teachers associated with a school. Institutional and social influences contribute factors that assist in creating the school culture (Meyer, 2008). Administrative structures and responses are institutional influences that can affect the teachers' perception of the school culture. According to this theoretical model, teachers are not feeling supported by their administrative staff when discipline issues occur in reference to sexual or homophobic harassment. Additionally, teacher workloads and demands contributed to a lack of or inconsistencies in speaking against harassment related to gender identity. Furthermore, a lack of education and training contributed to teachers' feelings of not being able to sufficiently address harassment and bullying related to gender identity. Lastly, a lack of knowledge and awareness concerning the school or school board's policies on how to address harassment based on gender identity prevented intervention from teachers. (Meyer, 2008). Social influences are an additional external influence utilized in the Meyer (2008) theoretical model, and the most powerful over teachers' behaviors. The teachers' perceptions of the school administrators' leadership style, personal values, professional priorities, and policy implementation shaped their actions in addressing harassment related to gender identity. School leaders who were inconsistent in addressing harassment related to gender identity left teachers' feeling unsupported when addressing gender identity harassment. Additionally, having a positive relationship with students influenced the willingness of teachers to intervene in the harassment of students based on gender identity. Lastly, teachers' perceptions and responses were formed due to

interactions with parents. Positive or negative interactions shaped the climate and the priorities of which behaviors were being addressed in schools (Meyer, 2008).

Internal influences were discussed in this theoretical model as being the individualized experiences teachers bring into their school setting. Personal identities and experiences can have a significant impact on how teachers perceive and act upon their school culture. These experiences either served as motivators for teachers to speak out against acts of discrimination or as barriers. These inconsistent responses cause incongruous intervention due to feelings of vulnerability in teachers' minority status (Meyer, 2008).

Definition of Terms

In this section, a description of the terms, *gender identity, gender expression, gender non-conforming, LGBTQ, sexual orientation, and transgender* were delineated. These definitions were provided to increase the reader's understanding of the terminology used in the reading. All of these definitions were taken from the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) media reference guide (2016), as this source is a reliable reference for accurate terminology.

Gender identity. "A person's internal, deeply held sense of their gender, and often not visible to others."

Gender expression. "External manifestations of gender, expressed through a person's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, and/or body characteristics."

Gender non-conforming. "A term used to describe persons whose gender expression is different from the conventional expectations of masculinity and femininity."

LGBTQ. "Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer."

Sexual orientation. "The scientifically accurate term for an individual's enduring physical, romantic and/ or emotional attraction to members of the opposite sex, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual orientations."

Transgender. "An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth."

Delimitations

Delimitations are described as those characteristics that limit the scope and define boundaries in your study (Simon & Goes, 2011). The results of this study might be most relevant to secondary school teachers who work in school districts in South Central Texas. Delimitations in this study include primary school teachers' experiences and the experiences of teachers in school districts located in other geographic regions.

Limitations

Limitations in a research study are those occurrences that the researcher cannot control (Simon, 2011). I am using a phenomenological qualitative approach which relies on the essence of lived experiences. To capture these lived experiences, I am relying on interviews as the instruments for data collection. I cannot control or manipulate the responses given by the participants or the willingness of those participants to respond honestly in interviews. Additionally, the sensitivity of this topic may lead to socially acceptable responses or a lack of participation.

Assumptions

There are assumptions being made in my research study. I am assuming that participants will understand that their identities will remain confidential and all data will be analyzed holistically. Because participation in this study is voluntary, I assume that all participants in this study will provide truthful responses to interview questions. Additionally, I assume that data collected would be an accurate representation of the participants' understanding of the phenomenon.

Organization of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore secondary teachers' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender. Chapter I included the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of this study, significance of this study, research questions, conceptual framework, and definition of terms, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions of the study. Chapter II focused on a review of literature of the following themes: (a) importance of LGBT inclusivity in pre-service teacher education programs, (b) school leaders' attitudes towards creating an LGBT inclusive school climate; and (c) teachers' willingness to become allies of LGBT students. Chapter III described the methodology used in this study, including research questions, research design, role of researcher, selection of participants, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and a summary. Chapter IV presented the findings derived from the individual interviews, based on analysis and interpretation through coding and triangulation of data. Chapter V included implications of the findings and suggestions for further research and practice.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this study was to examine secondary school teachers' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender. This literature review was organized into three sections. The first section, Pre-service Teacher Education Programs and LGBT Inclusivity is an examination of the roles pre-service teacher education programs play in educating teachers to be aware of LGBT social issues, become teacher allies for LGBT students, and provide a LGBT inclusive curriculum in their future classroom setting. The second section, School Leaders Attitudes toward LGBT Inclusivity describes school leaders (i.e., Principals, Assistant Principals and Counselors) attitudes towards creating an LGBT inclusive school climate, in addition to their knowledge with regard to creating LGBT inclusive school climates. The third section, Teachers Attitudes Toward Working with LGBT Students is an examination of teachers' willingness to become allies for students identifying as LGBT, in addition to their perception of their knowledge in working with this group of students.

Pre-service Teacher Education Programs and LGBT Inclusivity

Pre-service teacher education programs are designed to provide future teachers with the necessary skill set to become successful educators. Educational scholars suggest that future educators should be taught how to effectively work with diverse populations, in addition to addressing social and educational inequalities (Wyatt, Oswalt, White & Peterson, 2008). Despite this calling, issues of gender identity and sexual diversity often are not included K-12 pre-service teacher coursework (Goodrich, Kingsley, Lopez Leiva & Daugherty, 2016).

Brant (2014) conducted a qualitative research study to investigate pre-service teachers' understandings of various terms associated with (LGBT) issues in education. Additionally, Brant examined if pre-service teachers adequately felt prepared to work with LGBT students and their families. Specifically, Brant explored pre-service teachers' preparedness to (a) advocate for LGBT students' social challenges, including bullying; (b) teach a LGBT curriculum, and (c) address bias against these students were examined. Additionally, the researcher polled pre-service teachers' willingness to add LGBT curriculum and address biases against these students in the school environment. The research site for this study was a large university in the Midwest.

Several teacher preparation programs were utilized to recruit participants for the Brant (2014) study. The researcher collected 69 surveys, and 11 of the respondents were students who volunteered to be interviewed for this research study. Two pre-service teachers also were selected from each of the represented teacher preparation programs; thus, four participants were interviewed. University faculty and staff in the teacher preparation program were contacted to request what, if any, multicultural or diversity issues were discussed in their teacher preparation programs. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and checked for accuracy. The researchers concluded that pre-service teachers did understand sexual orientation; however, they were not as aware of the needs of students who did not conform to traditional gender roles. The pre-service teachers expressed an interest in wanting to learn more about how to address and cope with issues related to LGBT students and their families.

Similar to Brant (2014), Larrabee and Morehead (2008) guided a research study on the self-reflections of pre-service teachers after a lecture on LGBT people and schools.

The researchers conducted this study at a public Midwestern university. The participants were 67 pre-service teachers who volunteered to participate in the study. The students were given presentations by two males who self-identify as gay on LGBT issues in three classes. Students were asked to submit a written self-reflection upon completion of each presentation. The data collection first consisted of the researchers reading the students reflections, and agreeing upon emergent themes. One important finding of this study consisted of the observation that most prospective teachers wanted to be capable of discussing issues of sexual orientation and gender identity and their impact on education. Prospective teachers were open to discovering the ways in which the LGBT community and schools interconnect. The authors concluded that prospective teachers were ready to discuss the intersection of the schools and LGBT people, in addition to examining the challenges LGBT students may face, as well as creating a LGBT-inclusive learning environment.

A mixed methods approach was used by Kukner, Kearns & Tompkis (2015) to determine the effectiveness of a program geared towards pre-service teachers' knowledge and ability to provide a safe place for LGBT students. This program included mandatory core education courses for all pre-service teachers. The program encouraged their pre-service teachers to be familiar with various topics in social justice education. These workshops were required and participants were asked to become allies for LGBT students. Quantitative and qualitative data were used to assess the quality of this training on pre-service teachers. Pre-service teachers were given a pre- and post-survey. As part of the data collection process, feedback on the training workshops was assessed and a focus group was conducted, in addition to individual interviews.   Interview transcripts

were analyzed to identify common themes. As demonstrated in the findings, participants credited the Positive Space I and II training as a vital component to raising understanding about the challenges LGBT youth can encounter. Positive Space trainings are a two-part mandatory training for all elementary and high school pre-service teachers. The focus of these courses was on "issues of power and privilege, interlocking forms of oppression, and inclusive education" (Kukner et al., 2014, p. 20).   Furthermore, Positive Space was viewed as an essential part of the teacher education program that should remain mandatory for all pre-service teachers to acquire the necessary skills to be allies for LGBT students and families.

Additionally, Clark (2010) assessed the attitudes towards diversity and sexuality of pre-service teachers.   Students' knowledge of their cultural competence, abilities to use experiences to teach LGBT students; their preparedness in teaching and becoming an ally for LGBT students were addressed in this research study. English Language Arts pre-service teachers at the end of all required coursework and student teaching provided the data. Additionally, seven students volunteered to participate in group and individual interviews. Clark, in addition to his research assistants, used two surveys to gain insight into the pre-service teachers' nature of diversity and their cultural competence regarding their peers. The Multicultural Awareness-Knowledge-Skills Survey (MAKSS) is a series of Likert- response formulated questions and was chosen because it has been adapted and validated with both prospective and practicing teachers. The MAKSS focuses on various diversity issues, and requires the participant to explore their self-perceptions of competence and the degrees in which they are aware. The Modern Homophobia Scale (MHS) was also used in this study due to its validation by populations reflecting the

sexual demographics of the group being targeted, in addition to the inclusion of its use of education-specific items (Clark, 2010, p.705). Participants wrote Knapsack papers based on the book *White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack* by Peggy McIntosh as a reflection of their perceived invisible privileges. The author concluded that K-12, U.S. teachers are not prepared to teach LGBT youth or to work against homophobia and heterosexism in schools. The author observed a lack of ally-models in most of what these pre-service teachers observed in schools, or in their preparation programs, thus providing a limited outlook and language for incorporating ally-work in their teaching.

Furthermore, Wyatt et al., (2008) examined pre-service teachers' attitudes toward gay men and women. The participants were solicited at the beginning of a child and adolescent development course during their teacher preparation program. The 334 teacher candidates completed a 147-item questionnaire to examine their present knowledge, attitude, and beliefs concerning sexuality education concepts, the appropriate age of discussing sexuality education topics, and their level of confidence in addressing sexuality education topics (Wyatt et al., 2008). Additionally, the Attitudes Toward Lesbian and Gay Men Scale (ATLG-S) was used along with demographic questions to examine the attitudes towards gay men and lesbians by teacher candidates. The ATLG-S scale uses a Likert, 10-item scale to measure responses by participants of their attitude toward lesbian and gay men. The survey consisted of two subscales of 5 items each; one evaluating attitudes towards lesbians, and one evaluating attitudes towards gay men (Wyatt et al., 2009). The participants of this study considered themselves as being moderately informed concerning issues of sexuality education, and sexuality issues. Additionally, Wyatt et al., 2009 discovered these participant's attitudes were more

negative towards gay males than lesbians. Furthermore, there was not a significant difference by participants across ethnic groups in their attitudes towards lesbians and gay males.

School Leaders Attitudes Toward LGBT students

Parrie (2006) conducted a research study to determine high school administrators' knowledge and attitudes toward LGBT issues in their school, as well as in the general population. Additionally, the researcher identified practices that were put in place by schools in response to LGBT issues on their campuses. Parrie also identified policies that schools have modified or updated to incorporate LGBT concerns. A random sample of Illinois public high school principals participated in this study (Parrie, 2006). Parrie chose to exclude private and parochial school principals to reduce the effect of religion on the results.

The State Board of Education in Illinois reported that 730 high schools and 115 middle schools were randomly selected to participate in this study. The principals received a letter explaining the purpose of the study as well as defining key terms, and they were given a new golden dollar coin in each of their envelopes as an incentive and appreciation for their participation in the survey. Principals who were unresponsive to the survey after four weeks received a follow up letter. Principals who still did not respond received follow-up phone calls. These follow-up phone calls assessed why the principal did not respond and complete the mailed survey. The researchers also used the follow-up phone call to ask two important questions on the survey. The researcher received 23 completed or partially completed mail in surveys, and conducted 74 telephone contacts. Parrie concluded that participants reported higher percentages of

LGBTQ students on their campus than the national average reported in previous literature. Additionally, the participants believed LGBTQ students' family reactions would be more positive than reported in previous studies.

Bishop and McClellan (2016) examined how school principals in rural areas supported LGBT students in the schools. In addition, researchers were interested in examining the effect the rural community might have had on the principal's cultivation of socially inclusive environments for all students. The data, for the purpose of this research study, were collected from communities' known to be resistant to providing support for LGBT students (Bishop & McClellan, 2016). Researchers committed to identifying regions with high poverty rates, a high number of residents with strong religious and conservative beliefs, and few college-educated residents (Bishop & McClellan, 2016). Researchers identified 68 principals who acknowledged having LGBT students in their student populations and who were willing to participate. These principals were sent screening surveys and semi-structured interviews were conducted with those principals meeting both criteria. The researchers were given surveys from 18 principals, and five of the respondents agreed to be interviewed. The principals were given semi-structured interviews allowing the principals to provide information on their lived experiences in establishing a socially just school climate. Bishop and McClellan (2016) presented emergent themes from their interviews with the participants. All participants discussed their thoughts on supporting all students, the perception of their community, their beliefs on LGBT students, and being an advocate for LGBT students in their schools. Emerging themes from the interviews were as follows: (a) knowing each student, (b) valuing longevity and stability, (c) reflecting on the community and self, and (d) advocating for

LGBT students. Initially, the authors found these principals to be socially aware and providing an inclusive environment for all students however, through further study of the interviews, conclusions were reported these principals are in need of a more reflective consciousness.

Likewise, Porreca (2010) utilized a qualitative research study to observe how high school principals provide a supportive campus environment for students identifying as LGBT, in addition to what directed them to these actions. The sample for this study originally consisted of eight current and former high school principals who advocated for LGBT students on their respective campuses during their duration as a principal. One of the participants was unable to complete the study due to health issues; however, a partial profile was included in the study because of her unique perspective. The principals were selected for this study based on criteria from a state-wide initiative in a mid-western state known as the Safe Schools Alliance. Safe Schools Alliance is a LGBT education and advocacy organization for youth in this mid-west state. Members of this organization were asked to nominate principals who have shown support for their LGBT students on campus. The data were collected through three face-to-face interviews with each individual participant. The selected principals in this study provided support for LGBT students in various ways. These principals were able to use their school authority and amend or endorse school policies to provide a supportive environment for their LGBT students. All participants were supportive of allowing Gay Straight Alliances on their respective campuses. These principals were also supportive through their treatment of specific situations and concerns (Porreca, 2010). The second research question addressed in this study concerning what led these principals to be advocates of LGBT students

resulted in several factors. The participants expressed an overall desire to show a commitment to social justice in their leadership. These principals all relied on the law to use as a leader when experiencing parents or community leaders objecting to their stance on LGBT issues. One recommendation provided by Porreca is that school districts provide professional development for principals, teachers, and school board members. Providing these trainings led to positive results for the participants in this study.

Steck (2010) interviewed seven high school principals and assistant principals who were currently in the position of leading school communities. The administrators, with the exception of one, had three years of experience or less in their current position. Administrators were from urban, suburban, and rural school districts. The participants located in the Northeastern United States were selected through a letter disseminated to the district, and were chosen based on the length of time they served as a school administrator in their district or current building. Additionally, the administrators were chosen because they expressed a willingness to participate in the interview process by sharing their experiences in creating an inclusive environment for LGBT students. Upon the completion of the interviews with the participants, the researcher observed the administrators in their daily routine. Findings of this study resulted from interviews with high school administrators, observations of the school environment, and an interview with the Advisor of the Gay Straight Alliance Club in the schools (Steck, 2010). The researcher took notes of the observations using a journal to record the experiences. Steck (2010) concluded there were 15 internal and three external factors that played a role in school leaders being able to create an inclusive and safe environment for LGBT students.

The necessity of the school administrator to employ school and community relationships to collaborate in providing an inclusive education to all students was an important finding from this study.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA), the professional organization that supports school counselors', states that all students have a right to be treated with respect regardless of sexual orientation, and gender identity/expression (ASCA, 2016). School counselors should be social justice advocates and change agents to students of all backgrounds to ensure an accepting learning climate (Shi & Doud, 2017). Shi and Doud (2017) conducted a study to determine the perceived competency of school counselors' in working with students identifying as LGBT, as well as identifying specific variables associated with the school counselors' competency level perception. Two states from each geographical region were randomly selected by the researchers (Shi & Doud, 2017). Random selection was also used to select 10 school districts from each represented state. Researchers emailed invitations to the directors of school counseling in each selected school district. The directors were asked to forward the email to the school counselors in their district. The ASCA website was used to conduct the second phase of collecting data. Researchers posted a link on the discussion board accessible by all ASCA members to gain additional participants for their survey. The total sample used for analysis consisted of 125 school counselors ranging from the age of 20-69. These participants were employed in various school grade levels. The Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale (SOCCS) was the instrumentation used in this study for data collection purposes. Shi and Doud (2017) stated the SOCCS is "self-reported assessment of attitudinal awareness, skills, and knowledge competency of mental health

professionals working with LGB populations" (p. 8). The scale used in this study consisted of all 29 items extracted from the SOCCS, however the SOCCS does not include measures specific to transgender populations. The researcher included the addition of one item concerning the participants experience in counseling transgender students. Additionally, the researchers used a questionnaire to gather demographic information from the participants. The results from the first research question targeting school counselors' perception of their competency level in working with LGBT students revealed the participants had a low competency level. The researchers concluded for the second research question the counselors' sexual orientation, training after their master's degree, and their geographical location were significant in relation to their competency level in working with LGBT students (Shi & Doud, 2017). School counselors should attend trainings and professional development opportunities focused on this population as one recommendation from this study.

Hall, McDougald, & Kresica (2013) examined high school counselors' education and training, competency skills in counseling and supportive behavior in regard to students identifying as gay, lesbian, and bisexual. School counselors in the southeastern United States were sent an email message through a mailing list used to distribute information, updates, and workshops to school counselors, resulting in 86 high school counselors participating. Participants were given a background questionnaire to obtain demographical information. Additionally, the School Counselor Sexual Orientation Education and Training Scale (SCSOETS) were provided to participants to assess their educational and training experiences concerning LGBT students (Hall et al., 2013). The scale consisted of eight statements on a four-point Likert scale. The researchers also

distributed the Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale (SOCCS) to participants

to examine their competency in counseling LGBT students. The SOCCS scale developed

by Bidell uses 29 items, three subscale skills in addition to knowledge and attitude

questions. This scale measures the truth of the statements listed on the scale on a Likert

scale. The scale was slightly altered by these researchers to have a better assessment of

the counseling of LGBT students in the school sector. Lastly, the researchers used the

Gay Affirming Behaviors Scale (GABS) to determine the behaviors exhibited by the

participants to ensure their school setting provided a supportive environment for LGBT

students. This scale comprised of 8 items in a Likert scale format. The authors

concluded the majority of the participants in this study had counseled students identifying

as LGBT, however they did not feel adequately prepared to address issues of sexual

orientation. Additionally, certain participants did reflect having negative attitudes

towards LGBT students.

 Similarly, Gonzalez (2014) assessed high school counselors' experiences as

advocates for students identifying as LGBT with a focus on race and class. The

researcher used criterion sampling to obtain participants. The high school counselors

acquired for this study were predetermined as being advocates for students identifying as

LGBT. Additionally, the researcher regarded school setting as a means of comparing

high school counselors who worked in a suburban and urban school setting. School

counselors in the Southeastern region of the United States were sent an email with the

description of the study and the researchers contact information by district personnel.

Two counselors were obtained for the study from this district utilizing this distinct

method. Additionally, 10 participants were acquired through emailing notices on

educational list serves in the southeastern United States. Likewise, the researcher

obtained participants on ASCA Scene, a site for school counseling professionals.

Thereafter, a notice of this study was sent to non-profit organization staff. Lastly, an

extensive search through the internet of high schools with Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs)

or clubs that were LGBT inclusive and were co-sponsored by a school counselor was

conducted. The researcher contacted more than 80 counselors in identified rural districts

that met the study criteria; however, only two counselors responded and participated in

this study. The high school counselors submitted a demographic questionnaire to obtain

information on their race, age, sexual orientation, and gender identity (Gonzalez, 2014).

This was essential in gaining a diverse population of participants. The researcher also

conveyed their purposefulness in trying to obtain school counselors of color; however,

only one participant identified as a counselor of color. The racial and socioeconomic

demographics of the schools ranged from 82% White students to 94% students of color,

and 5% and 86% free and reduced lunch (Gonzalez, 2014). The researcher used semi-

structured interviews and document review to obtain data. The document review

consisted of examining each school's demographic information, each school's policies

specific to LGBT students, and the school's climate as an aide or inhibitor of creating an

inclusive environment for LGBT students by the school counselor. Six themes emerged

from the data collection process: (a) student advocacy, (b) education as advocacy, (c)

systems advocacy, (d) social/political advocacy, (e) a purpose-driven advocacy, and (f)

support (Gonzalez, 2014, p. 159). The author concluded that most participants reported

their GSA clubs and groups were reflective of the student bodies racial and

socioeconomic configuration, however additional participants reported a small number or

no students of color involved in the GSA meetings. Similarly, the researcher concluded students identifying as LGBT who are also representing marginalized identities are susceptible to facing additional challenges (Gonzalez, 2014). The researcher suggested additional studies be conducted to obtain greater knowledge on the school counselor being an advocate for students identifying as LGBT across various identity groups.

Teacher Attitudes Toward LGBT Students

A positive relationship with teachers has been identified as one of the best predictors of the continued success of LGBT students in schools (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016). Teachers have the greatest impact on self-esteem, achievement and school attendance. Swanson & Gettinger (2016) conducted a research study focusing on classroom teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards students identifying as LGBT, the rate in which they support LGBT students, and their beliefs on intervening in support of LGBT students. The intentions of the researchers were also focused on if the outcomes were related to having an existing anti-bullying policy, a campus Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), and professional development geared toward LGBT issues. The participation sample consisted of 98 public school teachers representing Grades 6-12. These general and special education teachers were representatives from the states of California, Iowa, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee. The researchers used a purposeful recruitment design to gain a sample of representation from states with and without legislation in place. Researchers were able to recruit participants through the Department of Education's directories located on their website. This recruitment happened during a four-month period, with a random selection of 200 principals. These principals were emailed a message requesting the survey to be dispersed to teachers, selected randomly, on their

respective campuses. Participants were given a demographic survey to gain information on their gender, years of experience teaching, sexual orientation, grade level taught, school environment, and if they know of someone who identifies as LGBT (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016). The participants designed the online survey, Providing Services and Supports for LGBT Youth: Teacher Assessment Survey (TAS) for the purpose of this study. This scale was designed to gain the total of four additional scales that were intended to measure the teachers, "(a) knowledge of risk factors and legal rights of LGBT youth; (b) frequency of engaging in diverse roles and activities to support LGBT youth and the importance of each role; (c) perceptions of barriers to providing support to LGBT students; (d) general attitudes toward LGBT youth" (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016, p. 334). The authors concluded having an established GSA, an anti-bullying policy, and LGBT professional development for teachers were all factors that coincided with teacher support of students identifying as LGBT. There were important differences in teachers who work in schools with an active GSA in comparison to teachers who did not have an active GSA on campus in relation to the amount of times that teacher engaged in support of LGBT students. Likewise, teachers who expressed receiving professional development relating to LGBT issues had a higher occurrence and importance in providing supportive behaviors for these students. Additionally, teachers working in a school with an established anti-bullying policy were associated with taking on a supportive role for LGBT students.

Comparably, Shelton (2015) over the course of two years analyzed a first-year teacher's determination to be an advocate for students identifying as LGBT, despite sociocultural factors providing resistance to and influencing her students, classroom, and

teaching practices. The beginning of this longitudinal qualitative study began with 24 members of an undergraduate English education cohort in the Southern region of the United States. Once the participants graduated only four remained in the Southeast as full-time teachers, and could continue their participation. The focus of this study and analysis were based on the individual interviews and focus group transcripts of one individual from the cohort program. This participant, a white, heterosexual female was a good representation of the teaching force in the South (Shelton, 2015). Participation consisted of a 60-80-minute interview at the end of each 9 weeks, and participants viewed the transcripts of their interviews. This research study was presented through narrative inquiry to gain an understanding of the limitations the participant encountered when providing support for LGBT students. The interview questions were generated to gain a narrative response. These narratives allowed an examination of how the uses of language were tied to the ability of the participant to influence change on behalf of these marginalized students. Interviews were read and analyzed by the researcher, and themes were constructed based on the issues, terms, and people mentioned frequently or discussed in detail in the focus groups and individual interviews (Shelton, 2013). The participant, as a student teacher reported being a strong advocate of students identifying as LGBT, and having the ability to provide LGBT inclusive content into the lessons presented to her students. This was done without fear of being fired, or being given consequences a teacher of record could receive in the same situation. However, the participant reported once she became a full-time teacher, there was a fear of providing LGBT inclusive content due to the fear of being fired or reprimanded in her conservative teaching position in the South. The author concluded from this research the need to

provide more research on the teachers' experiences in their struggle to maintain their advocacy for LGBT students, and particularly in the South. Additionally, the author concluded a school's sociocultural foundations strongly influenced what was accomplished by the participant.

Perez, et al., (2013) sought to compare the areas of general bullying and bullying relative to sexual orientation and gender expression and investigate the educators' perception gap as it relates to a specific group. Additionally, the researchers specifically chose to investigate the educators' perceptions of the seriousness, empathy, and likeliness to intervene in bullying based on a students' sexual orientation or gender expression (Perez et al., 2013). The Bullying Attitude Questionnaire-Modified (BAQ-M) was used in this investigation as an assessment of verbal, physical, and relational bullying. Vignettes, a close depiction of real-life situations (Perez et al., 2013) were used as a means to gain a more authentic admission due to the sensitive nature of this topic. Additionally, the BAQ-M assessed three variables, perceived seriousness, empathy toward the victim, and likelihood to intervene (Perez et al., 2013) by using a Likert scale with a 5-point response scale. The modified version of the BAQ reflected changes to Vignette 2 to reflect expert feedback in reference to the weakness in Vignette 2 (Perez et al., 2013). This change to Vignette 2 included the victim reaction, in addition to, bullying size and social status. Participants for this research were experienced teachers and additional school personnel (administrators, school psychologists, teacher aides, and bus drivers) who were thought to be essential to the school environment. The researchers recruited the participants through electronic invitations through social networking sites and email. This research study consisted of 186 participants from 24 states located in the

U.S., and the majority dwelling from the Southern state of Texas. The work experience of the participants ranged from early childhood to high school, with1-39 years of educational experience. The participants were randomly assigned to the group listed as lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender, questioning/ gender non-confirming (LGBT/GN) BAQ-M or the non-LGBT BAQ-M. Completion of the non-LGBT version consisted of 89 participants, and the 97 participants completed the LGBT/GN version. The authors concluded that educators only viewed physical bullying as the most severe form of bullying only when in relation to non-LGBT/GN instances. Contrary to previous research, educators in this research study valued bullying of those students identifying as LGBT/GN as less serious than verbal and relational bullying. Likewise, these educators also reported less empathy toward LGBT/GN students identifying as victims of physical bullying, and conveyed a less likelihood of intervening in physical bullying of LGBT/GN students (Perez et al., 2013).

Similarly, to Perez, et al., (2013), Kolbert et al., (2015) researched teachers' perception of bullying against LGBT students in addition to teachers' knowledge of anti-bullying policies. A total of 3,652 secondary school teachers in various districts residing in Pennsylvania were contacted through email to participate in the study by completing a survey. These teachers were given an invitation to participate as well as one reminder via email over a two-month span resulting in 217 teachers completing some portion of the survey. Overall, 200 teachers qualified as participants of this study. The researchers of this study developed a 35-question, five-point Likert scale survey. The purpose of this survey was to evaluate the participants' perceptions in reference to bullying of LGBT students. Additionally, participants answered demographic question and multiple-choice

questions concerning their students' grades, who do they feel comfortable reporting bullying behavior to, where does bullying most often happen, and their knowledge of the number of students and staff members who identify as being LGBT. An Overall Bullying scale was created using responses from the participants' perceptions of experiences of verbal, physical, relational, and cyberbullying against LGBT students. The participants consisted of 61% females with the majority reporting White as their race/ethnicity. The authors concluded that teachers' perceptions of their positive support regardless of sexual orientation played a substantial relationship in the frequency in which LGBT students report bullying or harassment. Additionally, strong staff and student support were related to students reporting at a higher rate the use of negative language when referring to LGBT students. Moreover, teachers identifying as LGBT rated the school staff and students as being less supportive in relation to their heterosexual peers. Lastly, higher rates of bullying of LGBT students were reported by teachers who were not aware of the anti-bullying policies on their campus in relation to teachers who were aware of their campus anti-bullying policies.

Schools with staff members who rarely intervene or stop harassment due to gender identity are accepting this as part of their school culture (Meyer, 2008). A research study guided by Meyer (2008) analyzed the perceptions of teachers and their response to harassment based on gender identity. Participants in this study were six Canadian teachers in an urban, secondary school enlisted by using snowball and maximum variation methods. Teachers were given three open-ended interviews to determine their perception and response to gendered harassment in their respective schools based on their specific experiences. The first session of interviews obtained

information on the participants on the teacher's career goals, philosophy of teaching, their role in the classroom, and their thoughts on bullying. The next set of interviews focused on sexual harassment, homophobic harassment, and harassment based on gender identity. Lastly, participants were able to reflect on their previous two interviews in order to conclude their reasoning for action or inaction when dealing with harassment based on gender identity. This author concluded the participants dealt with external and internal influences that are the guiding force of the perceptions and responses of secondary school teachers in intervening with harassment based on gender identity. These external and internal forces can act as barriers or motivators to teachers intervening in gendered harassment.

An inclusive school climate for gender diverse students will allow them to feel a greater connection to the school environment (Ullman, 2017). Ullman (2017) surveyed same sex attracted and gender diverse Australian teenagers and the impact teacher positivity regarding gender expression has on the school gender climate. Researchers utilized advertising on the social media networking site, Facebook to recruit participants. Recruitment posts were targeted to Australian teens (14-18 years old) that were interested in same sex relationships or had shown interest in LGBT topics as verified by their "likes" through their Facebook page. The survey yielded a 3.4% or 1,292 student participation rate. Overall, 704 students were able to be utilized in this study. Students with a range of gender identities were identified through their response to an item questioning their gender. The findings of this study echoed previous research with gender diverse students reporting frequent use of transphobic language. Likewise, 70% of students reported their teachers were never, or hardly ever positive about gender

diversity. Additionally, teachers are in need of training and further support to provide intervention during homophobic and transphobic harassment.

Students who identify as transgender often experience negative comments related to their gender identity from their peers, teachers and staff members (Silveira & Goff, 2016). It is important for these students to have a supportive staff member on campus. The investigation by Silveira and Goff (2016) measured music teachers' attitudes toward students who identify as transgender in addition to their attitudes toward supportive school practices for transgender students. The participants identified as certified music teachers were recruited using an online recruiting process to obtain K-12 music teachers. The questionnaire was correctly filled out by 612 participants representing 28 different states. A web based questionnaire with a screening question, demographic question, and 40 attitudinal statements was used to assess music teachers' attitudes towards students who identify as transgender. A five-point Likert scale was used to rate each statement. The authors concluded those music teachers' attitudes towards students who identify as transgender and supportive practices for these students were fairly positive. However, there were some differences by gender and political affiliation.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a review of the literature related to pre-service teachers, educational leaders, and teachers' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender. The first section Pre-Service Teacher Preparation Programs and LGBT Inclusivity focused on pre-service teacher preparation programs including LGBT curriculum. This section focused on qualitative and quantitative research geared towards

pre-service teachers' prior knowledge of LGBT terminology, preparedness to work and their ability to provide a safe place for this group of students.

The second section, School Leaders Attitudes Toward LGBT Students, focused on Principals knowledge and attitudes towards LGBT students in addition to their ability to provide a supportive school environment. Additionally, this section provided a review of the literature pertaining to the need of school counselor's being a social justice advocate for LGBT students, as well as their training and competency in working with these students.

Lastly, the section, Teacher Attitude Toward LGBT Students focused on the need for LGBT students to have a positive relationship with students, teachers' willingness to stop bullying and harassment based on sexuality and gender expression, and teachers being an advocate for LGBT students. In Chapter III, I described the procedures that were used to conduct this qualitative research study on secondary teachers' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender.

CHAPTER III

Method

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of secondary teacher's in working with students who identify as transgender. In Chapter III, I discuss the methods used to collect data, and how these data were interpreted to answer the research questions. Specifically, Chapter III is divided into twelve sections: (a) research questions, (b) research design, (c) role of the researcher, (d) selection of site, (e) selection of participants, (f) instrumentation, (g) data collection, and (h) data analysis (i) trustworthiness, (j) researcher credibility, (k) transferability, and (l) ethical considerations.

Upon approval of my proposal, I submitted a research request form to the Sam Houston State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) asking permission to conduct my study of human subjects in an individual interview format. Once the request was accepted and I received formal approval from the IRB, I recruited participants for my study on secondary teachers' perceptions of students who identify as transgender in urban districts in a South-Central region of Texas.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided my study:

 (a) What are select secondary teachers' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender? (b) What kinds of school-wide supports do teachers describe as necessary to support the success of students who identify as transgender?; (c) What professional development needs do select secondary school teachers report might assist them in supporting the success of students who identify as transgender?

Research Design

Qualitative research studies are conducted when the researcher desires to explore and understand a social or human problem through the participants own perception or context (Porreca, 2010). This research was based in social constructist theories (Porreca, 2010) and involved emerging questions that were addressed through informal interviews with select participants to gauge their experiences with the phenomenon of study (Creswell, 2013). In qualitative inquiry, the intention is for qualitative researchers to rely on participants' perceptions of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). Ideally, a qualitative researcher aims to interpret the perceptions others have of the world, and develop a theory of meaning (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research approaches originated from the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, the humanities, and evaluation methods and became more prevalent methods of research in the 1990s and the 21st century (Creswell, 2013).

A German mathematician and philosopher, Edmund Husserl initiated a new movement in research in the 1900s that was given the name of phenomenology. Phenomenology originates in philosophy and has philosophical goals (Giorgi, 2010). Husserl's phenomenology can be categorized as Transcendental Phenomenology, or emphasizing the essence of an experience (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological studies are focused on a topic, will create a question that to guide the research study and obtain findings that will aide in future research (Moustakas, 1994). Reflections occur in the phenomenological study to provide a resource for completing an analysis to create fundamental descriptions of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Upon completing the

reflection process, the researcher constructs a description of the experience that includes thoughts, feelings, and examples of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, the focus of a phenomenological study is on the appearance of things just as they are given removed from any biases, concerned with wholeness, and committed to describing the experience (Moustakas, 1994). In the phenomenological study the researcher has a personal interest in the phenomenon and the approach is rooted in questions that provide a focus to the phenomenon, while producing themes based on the research findings (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological approach was best for this study because I was investigating the shared experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, this study was geared at gaining an understanding of secondary teachers' shared perceptions of students who identify as transgender.

According to Lin, 2013, conducting a phenomenological analysis calls for the completion of conceptual tasks, *epoche*, reduction, and imaginative variation. The researcher must be aware of any personal biases, assumptions or preconceptions related to the phenomenon, and should be reflexive to more objectively interpret the data, in order to get a pure visualization of what the phenomenon is. The process of reduction is utilized to reach the core or essence of the phenomenon and the researcher must go beyond normal patterns to allow exposure of the core structure (Lin, 2013). Imaginative variation reveals potential meanings through "utilizing imagination and approaching the phenomenon from different perspectives, roles, and positions" and the goal is to uncover the underlying factors that account the experiences (Lin, 2013, p 472).

Perception, in a phenomenology, is considered the principal source of knowledge, and every perception adds an important experience to the research

(Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological approach was appropriate for this qualitative study because the research will be focused on the perceptions of secondary teachers.

By participating in individual interviews, select secondary teachers shared their perceptions about students who identify as transgender, identified challenges in responding respectfully and appropriately to students around issues of gender identity, and highlighted the importance of professional development and school and district support in preparing teachers and protecting students.

Role of Researcher

Qualitative research studies allow the researcher to play a central role in generating and interpreting data (Xu & Storr, 2012). Essentially, the researcher is considered the instrument of data collection (Simon & Goes, 2011). Qualitative researchers need to describe relevant aspects of self, including any biases, assumptions, expectations, and experiences to qualify his or her ability to conduct the research (Simon & Goes, 2011). An emic perspective follows the tradition of understanding the culture from the participant's point of view (Morris, Leung, Ames & Lickel, 1999). As the researcher of this study, my role was that of an insider, or full participant of the activity, program or phenomenon (Simon & Goes, 2011). After reflecting upon my level of theoretical sensitivity, or the ability to give meaning to the data and the capacity to understand (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), I believe my personal and professional experiences prepared me for the research conducted. My professional background as a school counselor for 7 years allowed me to experience working with students who identify as transgender. It permitted me to be a witness to the perceptions of some teachers when dealing with transgender students. Additionally, I drew upon my personal experiences

with a family member and teacher who identifies as being transgender. This family member began their transition from female to male while in the position of teacher in a similar school district that was used in this study. This personal relationship allowed me to witness the treatment and support from his principal, colleagues, students, and school parents. Additionally, it allowed me to witness the mental and physical struggles that a person identifying as transgender may face allowing me to empathize with students who may be facing these same challenges.

I disclosed these personal and professional experiences in conducting this research by bracketing my biases. Bracketing has been described as the task of sorting out the qualities that belong to the researcher's experience of the phenomenon (Tufford & Newman, 2010). A researcher should be honest about their pre-existing thoughts and beliefs, as well as setting aside their prior knowledge and assumptions, with the goal of attending to the participant's accounts with an open mind (Tufford & Newman, 2010). There are various methods of bracketing that a researcher can employ. A researcher can write memos throughout the data collection process to examine and reflect the researcher's work with the data (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Researchers can also engage with outside sources to bring awareness to any preconception and biases. Conducting bracketing interviews with an outside resource will allow the researcher to uncover any biases that may inhibit the reliability of the study (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Selection of Participants

The initial stages of a study require a researcher to identify, select and begin talking to the most information rich people to obtain an understanding of their

experiences with a phenomenon of interest (Palinkas, et al., 2015). Additionally, participants should be available, interested in understanding the nature of the study, willing to participate, and have the abilities to express opinions (Palinkas et al., 2015; Moustakas, 1994). Purposeful sampling is based on the ideas that the researcher selects individuals and sites for the study to purposefully inform an understanding of the central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2013). The purposeful sampling in this research study was based on criteria selected by the researcher to allow the researcher to select participants who gave the best insights into the study (Porecca, 2010). The criteria for participation in this research study included: secondary school teachers with one or more years of full time teaching experience in a large urban school districts in the south-central Texas. Criteria sampling is considered an acceptable approach in conducting qualitative research with teachers (Kyei-Blankson, Blankson, Ntuli & Agyeman, 2016; Petty, Good & Putman, 2016). Most researchers recommend having three to ten participants in phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013). The final sample for this research study included six participants, which allowed me to explore the perceptions and experiences of three novice teachers and three veteran teachers.

Instrumentation

According to Simon and Goes (2011), Moustakas suggested that research should focus on the wholeness of experience and a search for the essences of experiences (p 1). The most common means of data collection in a phenomenological study is through in-depth interviews (Moustaka, 1994; Simon & Goes, 2011). This form of data collection allows the researcher to gather and obtain the participants' experiences through detailed descriptions. Kvale (2006) stated that an interview has been defined as a meeting where

a reporter obtains information from a person, to achieve a specific goal, and more generally as a conversation with a purpose (p 483). I chose to use Kvale's power dynamics to formulate my research questions and interviewing techniques. Kvale's techniques are as follows: (a) the interviewer rules the interview, (b) the interview is a one-way dialogue, (c) the interview is an instrumental dialogue, (d) the interview may be a manipulative dialogue, and (e) membership research (Kvale, 2006). I developed my interview questions to provide rich information and data to answer my research questions. A pretest of the interview questions was conducted with a participant who is similar to the criterion listed previously for my research sample. This pretest allowed me to make necessary changes to any of my interview questions. My interview questions are:

1. Why did you choose to become a secondary teacher?

2. Tell me about some of the greatest challenges you have faced as a secondary school educator?

3. How knowledgeable do you feel you are concerning students who identify as transgender?

4. How have you been trained on transgender issues? How important do you think it is for educators to be trained on transgender issues?

5. How do you feel internal factors (teaching philosophy, life experiences, beliefs, identity) influence how you work with students who identify as transgender?

6. How do you think you would respond to having a student who identifies as transgender in your classroom? What are some of your concerns in meeting the needs of students who identify as transgender?

7.   Tell me about how you, as a teacher, would respond to students using language such as: "You're gay," or "You're acting like a girl."

8.   Tell me about how you, as a teacher, would respond to bullying incidents based on gender identity.

9.   How do you feel your administrators perceive working with students who identify as transgender?

10.   Tell me about how you, as a teacher, think you can best support students who identify as transgender.

Data Collection

Data collection in a qualitative research study involves interviews, focus groups, observations, key informants and case studies leading to the interpretation of emerging themes by the researcher (Yates & Leggett, 2016). My data collection process began by providing my participants with an informed consent document. This document provided the participant with an overview of the research I was conducting, a notice that participation in this research was voluntary, and assurance that their participation, as well as the district they represented would remain anonymous. Simon and Goes (2011) suggested using pseudonyms for participants to ensure responses are in their own words all while maintaining confidentiality. Phenomenological research can utilize a variety of methods to obtain data. For this research study, I focused on semi-structured interviews, because I was looking for interpersonal contact, and the ability for follow up contact on interesting comments (Yates & Leggett, 2016). All participants were given the same semi-structured interview questions. The interviews with the participants were recorded digitally; with participant permission (Yates & Leggett, 2016) then transcribed verbatim.

Transcribing the interviews was important for the participants to allow member checking, a process that provides the participants with a copy of the transcribed interview in order to correct any inaccuracies (Simon & Goes, 2011).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis specifies steps in analyzing and making sense of the essential meanings of the participants views through taking apart the data and putting it back together to search for general themes (Creswell, 2013; Kleiman, 2004; Vosloo, 2014). The focus on text and identifying key themes, or concepts are an important part of qualitative analysis (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). The data for qualitative studies are often notes written down during an interview, or text transcribed from interviews (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). For the purpose of this study, individual interview data were transcribed and analyzed using the first-round descriptive coding method. Creswell's (2013) data analysis protocol for qualitative research was used to achieve optimum results. I used Creswell's six-step process; including (a) Step 1 - organizing and preparing data for analysis, (b) Step 2 – read or look at all the data, (c) Step 3 – coding of the data, (d) Step 4 – utilizing the coding process to generate themes for analysis, (e) Step 5 – advance themes for representation, and (f) Step 6 – interpretation of findings, to identify the essence of my research question.

Descriptive coding is the ground work for second cycle coding and further analysis and interpretation (Saldana, 2013 p. 89). In Vivo coding, which refers to using short phrases from the actual data will also be used because of its focus on honoring the participants voice (Saldana, 2013). I believed it was important in this study to understand the teachers' voices in examining their perceptions of students who identify as

transgender. Next, second cycle coding was used as a way of reorganizing and reanalyzing data coded through the first cycle method (Saldana, 2013). During the second cycle coding process the goal was to develop a sense of categories as well as narrowing down the codes formulated in the first cycle coding process. Focused coding followed the In Vivo coding process, in which I searched for the most frequent codes (Saldana, 2013). Focused coding allowed me to compare the second cycle codes across other participants to assess comparability and transferability (Saldana, 2015).

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research should depict the results of the study in an accurate manner (Yates & Leggett, 2016). Trustworthiness in a research study refers to the degree in which a researcher has confidence in the data and methods used to produce a quality study (Connelly, 2016). Protocols and procedures should be established by the researcher to ensure the study is worthy by its readers (Connelly, 2016). A trustworthy research study involves the establishment of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Additionally, it is important for the researcher to document their trustworthiness plan by developing a trustworthiness protocol (Amankwaa, 2016). Bracketing is a standard practice in qualitative research, in which the researcher is aware of personal biases and presumptions and intentionally sets them aside to prevent a disproportionate influence on the research. Moreover, emotional involvement in the researchers' topic of interest could interfere with the fair collection of data (Morrow, 2005). Self-awareness or reflexivity can assist the researcher in dealing with biases and assumptions that are emotionally driven. Additionally, a self-reflective journal can be kept by the researcher from the beginning to the end of the research in order to keep a

record of the experiences, reactions, and developing awareness of assumptions and biases

(Morrow, 2005). The emerging assumptions and biases can be examined and placed to

the site or incorporated in the analysis. Moreover, qualitative researchers should strive to

fairly represent the participants' realities of the research or phenomenon. Participant

checks are conducted to ensure the researchers' interpretations of the interviews are

reflective of the interviewee's meanings (Morrow, 2005).

Researcher Credibility

One of the key criteria that should be addressed by the qualitative researcher in

ensuring trustworthiness is that of credibility, or certifying that their research study

measures what it intends to measure (Shenton, 2004). This research study focused on

member checking to ensure credibility. Member checking, the most important provision

of establishing credibility (Shenton, 2004), ensured the accuracy of the findings from the

research because the participants were able to review the transcript of their interview and

verify its accuracy. (Creswell, 2013).

Transferability

Qualitative research studies utilize a small population, and it is often difficult to

validate how the findings are applicable to other populations or situations (Shenton,

2004). Transferability describes the process of the reader being able to apply the findings

of the research study to their own context (Barnes et al., 2012; Morrow, 2005). The

findings of a qualitative study are not intended to be generalizable, as the descriptions

and themes are intended to be developed in a specific site (Creswell, 2013). However,

there have been discussions concerning generalizability in qualitative studies. Thick

description can be utilized to facilitate transferability (Amankwaa, 2016). Thick

description can be employed to achieve external validity through describing the phenomenon in detail and assessing the extent to which conclusions can be transferred to other times, or situations (Amankwaa, 2016). Generalization can occur when the researcher studies additional cases and will generalize the results to a new case (Creswell, 2013). The qualitative researcher must have good documentation procedures to repeat the findings found in the case study in a new case (Creswell, 2013); thus, the researcher should provide detailed information on the research study (Amaknwaa, 2016). The researcher is conveying a story and should present details including location, participants present, reactions, and attitudes of the participants (Amaknwaa, 2016).

Ethical Considerations

Qualitative researchers should strive to conduct their research with high ethical standards (Banister, 2007) when working with human participants by following the guidelines of ethical principles (Moustakas, 1994). The American Educational Research Association (AERA) has articulated a code of ethics in which educational researchers should base their professional values (AERA, 2011). I used the following principles: professional competence, integrity, professional responsibility, respect for people's rights, and social responsibility (AERA, 2011) to ensure that I exemplified the highest ethical standards.

Prior to conducting this research study, I consulted the code of ethics as listed by the AERA, and submitted IRB approval to Sam Houston State University. The beginning of the study entailed contacting participants to notify them in regard to the nature of the study, ensured participation was optional and confidential, and obtained appropriate informed consent. While conducting the study, I identified the purpose of the study,

looked to establish trust, informed the participants they may end participation at any time during the study, and stayed in line with the interview protocol as much as possible. Upon the completion of the research, I analyzed the data reporting participant perspectives, reported unclear or contrary findings, and assigned pseudonyms for participants to protect participant identity (Simon & Goes, 2011). Lastly, I accounted, distributed, and stored the data that was collected using American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines, unbiased language, and distributed copies of the report to participants for consideration.

Summary

In Chapter III, I described the method I employed in conducting this phenomenological study which was based on Moustakas's (1994), phenomenological approach and was designed to describe the perceptions of novice and veteran secondary educators on students who identify as transgender. The research study included six secondary teachers in a large urban district in south central Texas. The participants for this study included secondary teachers who might be classified as *novice* (1-3 years of teaching experiences) and veteran teachers (with 3 plus years of experience). I used Creswell's (2013) six-step qualitative process for optimal results, and In Vivo coding, to focus on honoring the participants' voice as I coded the interview transcripts (Saldana, 2013). To ensure trustworthiness, I established researcher credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Amankwaa, 2016). Finally, I developed themes through an iterative process of collapsing and categorizing codes.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine secondary school teachers' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender. The overall objective of this research was to understand the influences that determine how teachers perceive and consequently respond to students based on their gender identity (Meyer, 2008). In Chapter IV, I detailed the procedures I followed during the data collection process and analysis of the findings that emerged from six secondary teachers' semi-structured interviews.

In summary, an eleven-question interview protocol conducted through semi-structured interviews was developed for examining secondary school teachers' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender. Participants' contact information was given (with their consent) through network sampling from work and school colleagues. Initial contact was made through email, in which I introduced myself and attached a Sam Houston State University Instructional Review Board (IRB) approved recruitment document detailing the research study. I received responses from 11 potential participants, and second contact was made to schedule the face to face interviews. Six female secondary teachers who were employed in different school districts throughout southeast Texas consented to participate in the study. Participants included three middle school and three high school teachers, ranging in experience from 3-22 years. Pseudonyms were used in place of each participant's real name to protect their identities and maintain confidentiality.

Prior to the interview dates, participants were asked brief demographic questions (i.e., school level, years of experience). The face-to-face, open-ended interviews each

lasted approximately 60 minutes and were audiotaped on a recorder so they could be

transcribed for coding. Creswell's (2013) data analysis protocol for qualitative research

was used to achieve optimum results. To identify the essence of my research questions, I

used Creswell's six-step process; including (a) Step 1 - organizing and preparing data for

analysis, (b) Step 2 – read or look at all the data, (c) Step 3 – coding of the data, (d) Step

4 – utilizing the coding process to generate themes for analysis, (e) Step 5 – advance

themes for representation, and (f) Step 6 – interpretation of findings. In conducting my

qualitative data analysis, I used these specific steps to analyze and make sense of the data

and then interpret essential meaning in the participants' points of view. As I searched for

general themes, I deconstructed the data and attempted to put them back together

(Creswell, 2013; Kleiman, 2004; Vosloo, 2014).

After analyzing the data, the following themes emerged from this research study:

(a) school-wide support, (b) teacher preparation and training, (c) new normal, and (d)

teacher behavior. Additionally, to support the emergent themes, the following subthemes

emerged: **school-wide support:** (a) counselor support, (b) administrator support, and (c)

culturally respectful environment; **teacher preparation and training:** (a) teacher

preparation programs, and (b) professional development; **teacher behavior:** (a)

acceptance of all students, and (b) response to bullying.

Emergent Themes

Emergent themes were derived from repetitions in the data to a point of saturation

through the process of coding (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). A variety of themes emerged

through coding and analysis, and codes were collapsed and grouped into four overarching

themes. Table 1 provides a visual display of the emergent themes, subthemes and their

definitions, and significant statements from the participants.

Table 1

Description of Emergent Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Description	Example of Significant Statement
School-wide support	(a) Counselor support (b) Administrator support (c) Culturally respectful environment	Support provided at the school, rather than classroom, level.	"It is important to allow students to see the counselor when necessary."
Teacher preparation and training		Professional development and training focused on bullying and students' gender identity.	"I think it is important for educators to be trained on transgender issues."
Teacher Behavior	(a) Acceptance of all students (b) Response to bullying	Teacher actual responses to students and gender-identity related incidents of bullying.	"No kid wants to be different." "I will not tolerate anyone being disrespectful."
New normal		Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about gender identity and diversity in today's schools.	"Our normal is not normal anymore."

School-wide Support

According to Dessel et al. (2017), students who identify as heterosexual are more likely able to identify supportive school staff members than their transgender peers. School-wide support was cited by all participants as an important aspect of the success of students who identify as transgender. Students spend the vast majority of their day in the school environment; thus, it is important that schools provide strong social support systems (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016). Having a supportive adult in the school setting has been cited as having the strongest positive effect on a student's well-being and can greatly improve the educational outcomes of students who identify as transgender (Kosciw et al., 2013; Singh & Kosciw, 2016 & Swanson & Gettinger, 2016). In this study, the emergent theme of *school-wide support* was applied to describe teachers' references to programs, interventions, policies, and occurrences in the general school environment outside of the classroom setting. The theme also included any references made to the actions or roles of principals, counselors, or district level administrators. Three subthemes emerged under the theme of school-wide support including: (a) counselor support, (b) administrator support, and (c) culturally respectful environments.

Counselor support. A national survey conducted by GLSEN of students who identify as LGBT reported 51.7% of these students would feel comfortable speaking with a school counselor, thus these school professionals play an important role in the lives of these students in the school setting (Singh & Kosciw (2016). The subtheme of counselor support referred to teachers' perceptions of the importance of the school counselor's role in advocating for students identifying as transgender, as well as the importance of communication between the school counselor and the teacher. Regarding the theme of

counselor support, participant Jennifer Griggs (pseudonym) stated: "I think that it's important that one of the counselors, whoever is assigned to that student, pulls aside all of the teachers, and we have some sort of discussion." Jamie Wright discussed her appreciation of her counselors' communication in relation to students, who identify as transgender by stating,

> Our counselor is doing a good job of communicating to us when we do have one [transgender student]. They tell us about that student's preferences and how they want to be addressed. I think that goes a long way with helping build a relationship with the student. Teaching is about building those relationships.

School counselors are in the position to provide the needed support for students identifying as transgender in an environment where most staff can be perceived as unsupportive (Shi & Doud, 2017 & Abreu, Black, Mosley & Fedewa, 2016). Barbara Hines stated, "It is important to allow students to see the counselor whenever they feel it is necessary," and Pam Ivan noted her counselor "will definitely be [the] number one supporter" of students who identify as transgender.

Administrator support. The subtheme of administrator support was ascertained by participants' frequent references to the importance of having supportive administrators for students who identify as transgender and their teachers. School leaders should provide this marginalized population of students with acceptance, support, and fair protection (Boyland, Swensson, Ellis, Colemean & Boyland, 2016). Barbara stated, "I think my campus administrators want every student to feel safe and accepted. My assistant principal (over English) has a rainbow flag outside of her office, indicating that

it is a safe space for LGBT students." Likewise, Jennifer discussed the administrators on her campus by expressing:

> I think that we have a great team of administrators right now. I don't see them having any problems [with transgender students]. They would all be supportive. If a teacher needed anything or guidance, they would all help you with whatever you needed. So I don't think we have any issues with that.

Principals are an essential aspect of promoting acceptance, shaping expectations of the school culture, and supporting diversity in schools (Boyland et al., 2016; Beck, 2016). Pam expressed some hesitation when stating:

> I think our principal is a little disconnected, sometimes, to the campus. I think he's a little disconnected to the kids, and I am not sure if he would care. I don't think he would know how to do it [support] or if he would even know that there's anybody on our campus that does identify [transgender], because I'm sure that's something that would probably be private unless they say it openly. I don't think he would just know that there's kids that…he's just…does principal things.

Principals should use their position of influence to set the standards for their school's climate in supporting students based on gender identity. Because educational leaders must consider students who identify as transgender when creating the school's policies and procedures, the principal should be aware of current laws and best practices in addressing these students (Ludeke, 2009). All participants were vocal in their belief of the importance of having a supportive administrator. Overall, most participants

expressed their administrators were supportive when dealing with students who identify as transgender. As the leaders in establishing the school culture, principals must show they care and are willing to provide a supportive environment for these students and the advocating teachers.

   Culturally Respectful Environment. It is important to provide a culturally respective environment for students who identify as transgender, as improving the school climate may result in better academic success, as well as providing a voice to these students who are often ignored (Goodrich et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2013). Utilizing gender-inclusive language with students and including transgender topics in lessons can aid in developing supportive relationships with these students (De Pedro, Jackson, Campbell, Gilley & Ciarelli, 2016). Additionally, teachers should ensure they are using the chosen name of the student, as not to cause undue stress or "outing" of the student to their classmates (Zalaznick, 2015). A culturally respective environment is characterized as a setting where students, teachers, and administrators consistently demonstrate respectful and mindful behaviors toward others who might be different from themselves (Lynch, 2012). Inevitably, students will come in contact with a diverse array of people once they leave the school setting for college or work life. Many scholars suggest that it is incumbent on schools to prepare students to interact positively with those who are different from them (Lynch, 2012). Jennifer voiced a need for students to be educated on various issues by stating:

   Students need to be educated, and that would help with them being sensitive to

   the fact that there are different kids…and learn how to adapt to that. It is

important that we all respect each other. My goal at the end of the day is that they

have something positive that they can say when leaving my classroom.

Additionally, teachers should ensure they are providing a culturally respectful

environment through their actions. Barbara demonstrated the importance of providing a

respectful environment noting, "I don't make a big deal about it [having transgender

students], and I refer to the student by their chosen pronoun and name." Likewise, Jamie

ensures her students that "We're all learners in this room, and there's no difference

between you and everyone else." Additionally, she states, "I also don't believe a student

should be sitting in a classroom where they've been asked to be called by male pronouns

but the teacher refuses to follow that."

Pam's goal is to make all of her students comfortable. She ensures that "everyone

in the classroom understands that we're all different and that is okay." Furthermore,

Jamie conveyed to the importance of being accepting of differences and not being told to

live life a certain way. She believes "anyone who has been slightly different themselves

will easily accept differences in others." Every Participant conveyed the importance of

providing all students with a culturally respectful environment. A positive and

supportive school environment can make a difference on the school outcome of students

based on gender identity (Jones, 2017).

Teacher Preparation and Training

Pre-service teacher programs are designed to give future teachers the necessary

tools to be prepared for today's classrooms. However, few teacher preparation programs

explicitly discuss topics related to sexual minorities; resulting in future educators feeling

inadequately prepared to address these concerns (Riggs, Rosenthal & Smith-Bonahue,

2011; Wyatt et al., 2008). Educational training textbooks contain less than one percent of material pertaining to students who identify as transgender (De Pedro et al., 2016). This lack of training and preparation for issues related to gender identity could explain the high percentage of these students reporting a lack of teacher intervention in gender identity harassment, victim blaming, and homophobic remarks (Fisher & Kennedy, 2012). Although teacher professional development is the most common strategy used to increase teachers' awareness of transgender student issues, in-service training is very limited, if provided at all (Abreu, Black, Mosley & Fedewa, 2016 & Greytak et al., 2013). This emergent theme was based on teachers' perceptions of their levels of knowledge and training to effectively support the academic and social success of students who identify as transgender. When asked how knowledgeable they felt they were in teaching students who identify as transgender, Jennifer stated, "I don't think that I'm clueless, but I think that there would be some areas where I would need to learn a little bit more." When prodded for further detail on those areas, Jennifer noted:

> Maybe just how to… I wouldn't say handle, because at the end of the day,
> all students should be treated equally. Maybe how to handle certain
> situations when other students who are not knowledgeable come across the
> question or how to guide discussions on being sensitive to the fact that
> these students are also a part of us a group, as a whole. How do you
> handle those situations or guide those discussions properly so that no
> one's feelings are getting hurt?

Additionally, Jennifer expressed she has not been trained on transgender student issues but has done her own research in anticipation of the possibility of having a student who

identifies as transgender because of the diversity of students she currently teaches. "I cannot speak for the district itself, but as of right now, I don't know of any [transgender students] that we have in our building." Furthermore, Jennifer was asked if she felt her district was taking a reactive stance instead of a proactive stance when it came to students who identify as transgender. Jennifer stated:

> Absolutely. We don't talk about it because as of right now, we don't have anyone. That's not a situation that we even talk about because I guess they're just waiting until when it is time. Sometimes that can be too late. So again, maybe when we're doing all of these staff developments in the beginning of the year, we could squeeze in transgender concerns. It could be a course that teachers now should take to get them prepared and ready for if it does happen. What if the student comes in the middle of the year? What would we do? Call a meeting?

Jennifer's description of a lack of professional development offered by schools and districts to support students who identify as transgender was consistent with all participants. According to Lacey (2016), 24% of teachers are receiving training on gender identity, in comparison to 85% receiving training on issues related to bullying, thus leaving these students susceptible to victimization. Districts are not providing teachers with the necessary training to offer support for these students, based on the assumption that schools have a minimal number of students who identify as transgender. This assumption was evident in Jennifer's assumption of not having students who identify as transgender currently on campus. These students are present in schools but may not feel comfortable expressing their gender identity (Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). Although the

importance of supporting students who identify as transgender is important to teachers; the most consistently mentioned barrier in applying this desire into practice is their lack of knowledge and training (Coulter & Miller, 2018).

Barbara conveyed being moderately knowledgeable concerning students who identify as transgender due to her prior and present experience in working with these students. However, she indicated a lack of formal training on transgender issues. She stated, "I think it is important for educators to be trained on transgender issues, especially in a red state like Texas with 'bathroom bill' laws being debated in our government."

Nancy noted her district takes an "out of sight, out of mind" approach when addressing students who identify as transgender. She explained when a gender non-conforming student was on campus, the staff attended a brief meeting on what to do, "but when the student left, [they] did not hear any more rules about it." Based on these comments, Nancy seemed to recognize the importance of awareness training for students who may not be out as transgender in school.

The importance of professional development should be stressed to all stakeholders, since educators receiving professional development are more likely to provide an inclusive environment to students who identify as transgender (Abreu et al., 2016; Greytak et al., 2013). Moreover, professional development is essential to gaining buy-in from school personnel and can facilitate the development of a caring culture and establish common ground for how to respond to students identifying as transgender in the school community. When speaking with Pam concerning her training on transgender student issues, Pam responded:

My district… wouldn't dare offer anything like that because they have this

reputation to uphold and so they wouldn't ever. There hasn't been any

training offered, and there definitely needs to be something because we

need to be able to know how to protect and kind of settle anything that

starts and not offend. We need to be able to have those types of

conversations. So it definitely needs to happen, but it's not in my district.

Like Jennifer, Pam described how reactive, rather than proactive, her district is in dealing

with any issues that arise concerning students who identify as transgender. She noted,

"It's our reality, and we need to be prepared for it."

Jamie discussed receiving training in some faculty meetings about being

respectful to others but had not received any formal training on transgender issues. She

went on to explain that she encountered very few students who openly identified as

transgender over the span of her 22-year career. She did say that she encountered a

student who identified as transgender that school year but did not see the need for whole

faculty training due their low numbers. She explained, "I think that it is probably more

practical to get the information quickest to the people who need to know."

Hailey specified a need to have training on transgender issues, and initially

thought it could be something relatively simple and even geared to providing teachers

with training on pronoun use and how to respond to what pronoun and name students

would like to use.

I feel that the bathroom issue might come up as I want to respect students

who truly identify as the opposite sex but high school students can be

immature and try to take advantage of a more respectful policy, so I am

not sure the best way for that to be handled. I guess this would also apply

to locker rooms. Okay, maybe it is not that simple of training.

All participants expressed a need for more knowledge and training to assist in addressing

students who identify as transgender. At the time of this study, there was little to no

training being offered in any of the participants' respective campuses or districts.

Undoubtedly, the teachers in this study believed that professional development

specifically aimed at helping teachers understand their roles in addressing transgender

issues in schools should be more commonly available. Professional development

consistently is identified as essential to the development of teacher awareness and

potential behavioral changes (Greytak et al., 2013).

Teacher Behavior

Having supportive school teachers and staff members plays an important role in

creating a safe school and is a strong predictor of success for students who identify as

transgender (Seelman, Forge, Walls, Bridges, 2015; Swanson & Gettinger, 2016).

Teachers can provide a positive school environment for these students, hence benefiting

their overall academic and social success. The manner in which teachers treat students

who identify as transgender can have a lasting impact on these students' success (Dessel

et al., 2017). Additionally, because students who identify as transgender are particularly

susceptible to bullying (Meyer, 2008), teachers are responsible for intervening when they

witness bullying. In this section, these two main characteristics of teacher behavior are

discussed in greater detail.

Acceptance of all students. Supportive adults in a school environment can

provide students who identify as transgender an atmosphere that cultivates these students'

connection to education and a stronger sense of belonging (Seelman et al., 2015). Jamie conveyed the importance of being accepting and non-judgmental of all students. She noted this can be as simple as using the pronouns and names they are requesting to be called. Additionally, Jamie stated:

> No one wants to be treated differently. No kid wants to be different. [Transgender] students need acceptance and support. There are a million things that teachers can do that are helpful, but there are probably a billion things that you can do that are not helpful. It is important to build that relationship with a student so you understand their needs better.

Jamie recognized the importance of treating all students with equity, knowing and understanding that everyone is different, and adapting to students' gender identity preferences. Moreover, she provides all students with a listening ear, and open door policy to show that she is a supportive adult on campus. It is important for schools to assess their school climate in providing support for individuals based on gender identity (Slesaransky-Poe. 2013). Hailey expressed the importance of ensuring she had a clear understanding as to how students would like to be addressed. She conveyed she "would need to keep [her] self in check as [she is] still learning about the idea of a person being transgender" and would not want her lack of knowledge to have an effect on how the student would feel in her classroom. Similarly, Pam's goal was to ensure that all students are comfortable in her classroom and understands that everyone is different, which is fine by her.

When questioned how internal factors like teaching philosophy, life experiences, or personal beliefs would influence working with students who identify as transgender, participants disclosed similar responses. For instance, Jamie stated:

I think when you decide to become an educator, some of those things honestly go out the window. You're not going to agree with everything, but it is a part of your job. My personal or religious beliefs will not transfer into my classroom. That is where it has to stop. So for me it wouldn't be a problem. Again, I'm into this we all should be treated equally. What you decide to do or who you decide to be with, that's not my business. I'm here to just teach you the curriculum and hopefully you'll enjoy it.

Likewise, Barbara spoke on being raised in a tolerant family and educated in a tolerant K-12 school district in another state. She also expressed she attended a liberal university in Texas and felt this background "helped [her] become more empathetic towards others and has helped [her] as an adult to work with those who are different from [her]." Pam also expanded on her upbringing by explaining her family "loved and accepted everyone for who they were, so that's just part of who I am now. I give them the love and attention I would, as a teacher, to all of my students."

When faced with this question, Nancy's response varied from the previous participants. Nancy expressed her only concern was whether or not the student could pass the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness exam. She continued by stating that as long as their behavior was under control, and the student was following procedures in the classroom, she does not have any concerns. She explained that, "If

them being transgender does not cause them to act up in my class, we're good." A school's culture and environment are strong determining factors of a healthy learning environment for students who identify as transgender, thus a negative school climate can impact the education and social outcomes for these students (Weiler, 2003; Dessel et al., 2017).

  Response to bullying. Bullying in schools across the country has made national headlines, and districts have been making intentional efforts to combat this growing issue. Unfortunately, despite these efforts, students who identify as transgender often feel unsafe and unsupported in school due to peer victimization (Abreu et al., 2016). Barbara worries about her transgender students being bullied. She has "never witnessed it [bullying], but if any of her students seemed upset, she would allow them to see their support counselor." Pam also expressed fears for her students who identify as transgender because some people are not as tolerant as she is, and "you never know how people will accept it." She went on to state that while her students are in her care, they all belong to her, and she will not tolerate anyone being disrespectful towards them.

  Students frequently hear the word "gay" used as a derogatory term, and many report feeling troubled due to the use of this terminology (Abreu et al., 2016). Participants were asked how, as teachers, they would respond to students using language such as: "You're gay" or "You're acting like a girl." Barbara stated she would "shut it down right away and say that terminology is inappropriate." She specified this intervention has always worked for her but if the harassment continued, those students would need to go see their assistant principal and obtain a discipline referral for bullying.

Conversely, Jennifer responded by asserting how intervening would be a problem in her room because her "students like to play a lot." She explained she would need to have a class discussion with her students about the inappropriate use of "certain terms, and talk about what is respectful and what can be considered as disrespectful." Students are taught using slurs against religion, race, or ethnicity is inappropriate; however, homophobic statements are often used and tolerated in most schools (Weiler, 2003). Students who identify as transgender want their teachers to intervene for them when derogatory language is being used based on gender identity. The use of disparaging language may happen daily; however, teachers are intervening and correcting this behavior less than once a month (Hansen, 2007). Similarly, Pam explained she tries to observe how other students respond to those students who consistently use those terms:

> If the student who is the one that's being called those terms is playing
>
> around then I kind of let it go. However, when you see it is someone who
>
> is "acting like a girl" or you kind of look like a dude, then I do feel the
>
> need to stop this behavior. I nip it in the bud.

Nancy also conveyed the need to look at the context of the conversation. "I would have to look at the perspective of each of the students involved because you have friends just talking to friends." Nancy went on to mention that you can tell when someone is trying to be mean, and in those cases, she will step in. Many students who identify as transgender are experiencing and witnessing homophobic language in schools, and this behavior is often going unchallenged by adults (Poteat & Vecho, 2016). In contrast to the previous literature, overall, each participant in this current study indicated when responding to incidents of bullying, they intervene to stop the mistreatment and quickly

inform a counselor or administrator. Nancy responded by stating, "I don't ever want to be in a situation where I should have done something and I didn't do it. I never want them to say I asked for help and she didn't help me."

The New Normal

The Williams Institute reported in the United States, 0.7% (150,000) and, specifically in the state of Texas, 0.73% (13,800) of youth ages 13-17 identify as being transgender (Herman, Flores, Brown, Wilson & Conron, 2017). The term *transgender* was not used in the United States until 1971 (Whittle, 2010). The theme *new normal* was ascertained by the participants indicating the diversity and views of their present-day students has changed over time. The expression *new normal* was coined as a previous concept that was unfamiliar or nonconforming with typical standards but now has become the standard or norm (Oxford dictionary, 2018). In describing her new normal, Jennifer expressed that her students have different views, which are "not traditional like back in the day" and that these differences are "becoming more normal. Our traditional sense of normal is not normal anymore." Pam discussed having a lack of experience with students actually affirming they identify as transgender, however she developed her personal opinions:

 Oh, I know this student is different, but they never actually stated their

 gender identity. She wondered these students stayed closeted because the

 terminology is new, the student didn't know that was what was happening.

Additionally, she specified situations when she noticed, in her opinion, certain students who did not portray "girly-like symptoms" or were "not all male." Furthermore, she indicated that "[she] was not an expert, but [she has] seen some things that kind of like

was oh, maybe this one would definitely say they identify as transgender now." Pam expressed these conversations are crucial for school personnel to engage in, since "this is our new normal." Teachers must be prepared to address the changing population and diversity occurring in schools. Overall, each participant was aware of the changing populations in their classrooms, and was supportive of all students.

Summary

In Chapter IV, I described the findings of this phenomenological study. This study was conducted to understand secondary school teachers' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender. By applying Creswell's (2013) six-step qualitative process for optimal results and In Vivo coding to focus on honoring the participants' voice (Saldana, 2013), I was able to identify and interpret several themes provided from the participants' rich descriptions in their individual interviews. Four total themes emerged from this analysis: (a) school wide support, (b) educator preparation and training, (c) new normal, and (d) teacher behavior. Additionally, to support the emergent themes the following sub-themes emerged: (a) school-wide support (a) counselor support, (b) administrator support, and (c) culturally respectful environment, educator preparation and training (a) teacher preparation programs and (b) professional development; teacher behavior (a) acceptance of all students and (b) response to bullying. These emergent themes were essential to understanding these select secondary school teachers' experiences and perceptions.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview of Study

In this qualitative study, secondary school teachers shared their perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender. Participants provided rich descriptions of their experiences in working with these students. The overarching research question for this study was: "What are secondary school teachers' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender?" and was formulated to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of secondary school teachers in working with students based on gender identity. This central research question was further divided into the following sub questions: (a) What kinds of school-wide supports do teachers describe as necessary to support the success of students who identify as transgender? and (b) What professional development needs do select secondary school teachers report might assist them in supporting the success of students who identify as transgender?

These research questions were formulated to elicit participants' lived experiences and afford them the opportunity to share their descriptions as secondary school teachers. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were the chosen data collection method. The verbatim transcribed interviews were then categorized according to reoccurring themes using Creswell's (2013) six-step qualitative process.

Based on the results of the data analysis and interpretation of interview data, I identified four emergent themes: (a) school-wide supports, (b) teacher preparation and training, (c) new normal, and (d) teacher behavior. The first major theme, participants' perceptions of school wide support when working with students who identify as transgender, produced three subthemes: (a) counselor support, (b) administrator support,

and (c) culturally respectful environment. The second major theme, participants'

perceptions of teacher preparation and training when working with students who identify

as transgender, constructed two additional subthemes: (a) teacher preparation program

and (b) professional development. From the third major theme that emerged, secondary

teachers' perceptions of teacher behavior when working with students who identify as

transgender, two additional subthemes were developed: (a) acceptance of all students,

and (b) response to bullying.

In this chapter, implications of findings and recommendations for practice are

provided. Additionally, I discuss recommendations for future research. Specifically,

Chapter V is divided into four sections: (a) a brief overview of study; (b) implications of

findings, (c) relationship to the conceptual framework, (d) recommendations for practice

and future studies, and (e) a conclusion.

Implications of Findings

This small, exploratory qualitative study focused on the under-explored topic of

teachers' perceptions of students who identify as transgender and how to best support

them. The results of this study have implications for practice that are described below as

organized by the research questions guiding my research.

What are secondary school teachers' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender?

This overarching central research question was devised to explore teacher

participants' lived experiences in working with students who identify as transgender.

Students identifying as transgender benefit greatly from having at least one supportive

adult in the school environment. Schools must create a safe and supportive environment

for these students and their advocates. Having a supportive presence and a sense of belonging can have a positive impact on these students (Dessel et al., 2017; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). Supportive groups in schools, such as gay-straight alliances (GSAs) are often teacher sponsored and are associated with improved educational and social performance by students who identify as transgender (Dessel et al., 2017; Quasha, McCabe & Ortiz, 2014). Gay-straight alliances are student- organized and student-led clubs, predominately in middle and high schools and are intended to provide a safe space to communicate about issues related to sexual orientation or gender identity. Schools with active GSAs experience less harassment and fewer instances of victimization of students based on gender identity (American Civil Liberties Union, 2018). According to a study conducted by Quasha et al., (2014), two middle schools in neighboring districts were examined to determine if having an active GSA on campus had an impact on providing a welcoming environment for students who identify as transgender. The results of this study indicated the middle school with an active GSA reported a more positive climate for these students in comparison to the second middle school without an active GSA. Participants in this current study conveyed the importance of being supportive and non-judgmental of all students. Statements such as "no one wants to be treated differently," and "no student wants to be different," served as collective statements from participants in reference to their perceptions of acceptance of all students. Several of the participants expressed the importance of showing their students support by providing a "listening ear," having an open-door policy and assuring they address the student who identifies as transgender by the requested name and pronoun. Likewise, teachers' responses to bullying incidents were an emergent subtheme under the theme of teacher behavior. Gender-based

harassment is defined as any physical, verbal, or psychological harassment that exists

based on stereotypes of heteronormative gender roles (American Civil Liberties Union,

2011; Meyer, 2008). Victimization in the school setting can contribute to higher

instances of mental disorders, substance abuse, and disciplinary actions among these

students. Recently, research studies have documented the disproportionate amount of

gender non-conforming students obtaining school discipline and juvenile crime offenses.

These students make up 5-7% of the population; however, they comprise 15% of the

overall juvenile justice system (Palmer & Greytak, 2017). Palmer and Greytak (2017)

explored the relationship between school disciplinary and juvenile justice offenses and

victimization in schools. Based on the findings of this study, those students who

experienced victimization in schools were more likely to obtain school disciplinary

referrals and juvenile justice system involvement. Additionally, school staff members

who were reported as having a lack of support or response to the victimization of these

students attributed to higher discipline infractions in comparison to staff members who

provided these students with support. To illustrate the representation of the pathways of

victimization of students who identify as transgender and school discipline and juvenile

justice involvement, please see the following author adapted figure (Figure 1).
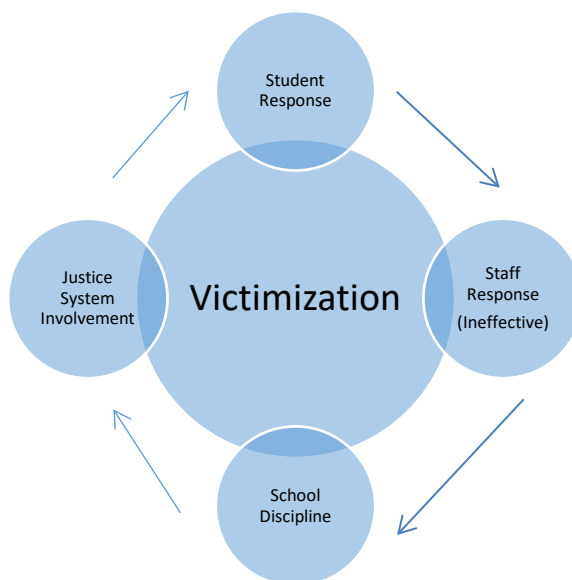
Figure 1. Pathways of victimization, school discipline and juvenile justice system based on Palmer and Greytak's (2017) operational model. Author created.

Bullying based on gender identity is an area most teachers are not equipped to address, thus these students often feel unsafe in schools. Teachers' perceptions of gender-based harassment are important to understand in order to comprehend the reasoning behind their choice to intervene. Furthermore, the theoretical framework utilized in this current study, instituted by Meyer (2008), indicated teachers' willingness to intervene in situations of harassment based on gender-identity was determined by external and internal barriers and motivators. Understanding these barriers and motivators are imperative to providing effective resolutions to deter gendered harassment in schools. Most participants were concerned with their students who identify as transgender being bullied by their peers. Participants expressed their responses to hearing language such as, "You're gay" or "You're acting like a girl." All participants stated they would not allow this type of language and indicated they would "shut it down right away" and explain why "using those terms is inappropriate." Some participants

mentioned needing to check on the context of these phrases and the response of the students to determine the intent of these statements.

Additionally, the subtheme of ***new normal*** emerged under the theme of teacher behavior. This subtheme was important as it referenced the diverse population of students in today's schools and the participants' perceptions in working with these students. Participants expressed perceptions of students having different, non-traditional views. Each of the participants expressed similar sentiments about the new normal in schools, explaining the traditional "normal is not normal anymore," as students identifying as transgender in classrooms "is becoming more normal."

All participants in this study indicated a willingness to be a supportive adult for students who identify as transgender. A supportive and positive relationship with a teacher can be predictor of success in school for these students. A review of the literature noted teachers with support systems, as established anti-bullying policy, professional development, and active gay-straight alliance clubs, were able to take on a more supportive role for their students who identify as transgender. However, a review of the literature and the results of this study varied in specific areas. Previously, researchers noted teachers' unwillingness to intervene in bullying incidents of students based on gender identity. However, participants in this present study expressed a readiness to intervene in bullying incidents and involve an administrator or school counselor.

"What kinds of school-wide supports do teachers describe as necessary to support the success of students who identify as transgender?" This first sub-question to the central research question was designed to explore the participants' perceptions of what school-wide supports were needed to assist with the academic and social success

and safety of students who identify as transgender. A whole-school approach is needed

to effectively create an encouraging school environment to ensure the positive

development of gender non-conforming students (DePaul, Walsh & Dam, 2009).

Participants shared the importance of the school counselor's role in supporting gender

non-conforming students in addition to the importance of communication between the

school counselor and the teacher. The ASCA national model places an emphasis on the

school counselors' role in providing support and advocacy for all students. School

counselors are encouraged to implement school-wide programs to promote a positive

school culture and assist teachers in advocating for these students (Singh & Kosciw,

2016). School counselors as social justice advocates should address any educational

inequities based on sexual orientation or gender identity by being visible advocates, using

inclusive language, and intervening when reports of harassment occur (Bidell, 2011;

Simons, Hutchison, & Bahr, 2016). Simons et al., (2016) examined the experiences and

roles of school counselors as advocates for these students. The researchers identified a

correlation between school counselors' attitudes towards LGBT students and their

willingness to be an advocate. School counselors must step into their role of change

agents and advocates of gender non-conforming students to ensure change within the

entire school environment is occurring (Shi & Doud, 2017). The participants in this

study emphasized the importance of "counselors pull[ing] the teachers to have a

discussion", and of transgender "students [being allowed] to see the counselor when

necessary." Participants shared these types of statements in reference to their perception

of the school-wide supports that were needed to support students who identify as

transgender.

Additionally, the subtheme of administrator support also played a role in identifying school wide supports. The principal is the leader in providing social change in the school environment, particularly for marginalized students, and has a responsibility to provide preventive measures to combat harassment based on gender identity (Boyland et al., 2016; Ludeke, 2009). All participants shared the importance of having a supportive administrator for teachers and students who identify as transgender. One participant shared how an assistant principal has a rainbow flag outside of her office, representing a safe place for LGBT students. The participants articulated having supportive administrators and not foreseeing any problems in having students who identify as transgender on campus. Additionally, almost all of the participants stated their administrator would provide support and guidance for the teachers when needed. Although the majority of the participants communicated having supportive administrators, one participant conveyed concern with her respective administrator. This participant shared the concern of her principal being disconnected from the campus and would not know how to support these students and teachers.

Lastly, the subtheme of culturally respectful environments played a role in participants recognizing school-wide supports for students identifying as transgender. It was important for these participants to provide a respectful environment for all students. The participants indicated their willingness to provide a respectful, safe, and comfortable environment for all students through phrases such as: "we're all learners in this room, and there are no differences between you and everyone else", "everyone should understand we are all different and that is okay", and "I refer to the student with their chosen pronoun and name." One participant also shared the need to educate her students as this

could aide in helping them to become sensitive to the different types of students around them.

As indicated in the results of this study and a thorough review of literature, principals and counselors should be properly prepared for their position as advocates and change agents for students identifying as transgender in order to provide a safe, and comfortable learning environment (Beck, 2016; Shi & Doud, 2017). The American School Counselor Association, states that all students have a right to be treated with respect regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression (ASCA, 2016). School counselors revealed in the literature they wanted to be advocates for students identifying as transgender; however they also reported a lack of being properly trained, in addition to having a lack of confidence in counseling students based on gender identity (Shi & Doud, 2017). A national survey conducted by GLSEN of students who identify as LGBT reported 51.7% of these students would feel comfortable speaking with a school counselor, thus these school professionals play an important role in the lives of these students in the school setting (Singh & Kosciw, 2016). Furthermore, the principal must collaborate with the school and community to allow for an inclusive education for all students. Additionally, in congruence with results of this study, principals were found to be supportive of these students through their school treatment and concerns.

"What do select teachers describe as their professional development needs in working with students who identify as transgender?"

This second sub question was designed to elicit information from participants regarding their perception of their knowledge and training in regard to gender non-conforming students. Each participant shared a lack of knowledge and training to effectively support students based on gender identity. Teachers are affirming the need to support and protect these students but are not sure of the correct way to implement that support (Smith, 2015). Phrases like "I don't think I'm clueless, but I would like more information", and "needing knowledge to learn how to handle situations" are a few examples of the significant statements that arose from the participants' statements concerning their knowledge of addressing gender identity. Additionally, teacher preparation programs plays a critical role in ensuring future educators are gaining the necessary knowledge to provide a supportive environment for these students. These pre-service education programs provide future educators with the tools needed to teach the diverse population of students found in today's schools. Unfortunately, as found in a review of the literature, most K-12 pre-service teacher coursework does not include training on gender identity, yet these teachers are not aware of how to address the needs and challenges of students who do not conform to traditional gender roles. Additionally, pre-service teachers are willing to understand and learn about students who identify as transgender; so pre-service programs are responsible for providing the necessary training. Programs that are offering some form of training have found it to be beneficial to future teachers to understand the challenges and needs of these students. In addition to a lack of knowledge, participants also expressed a lack of continuing education from their campus

or district in respect to these students. One participant expressed she has done her own

research due to the lack of training provided in her district. Additionally, her district

takes an "out of sight, out of mind" approach to these students and does not provide any

training unless these students are present on campus. Most participants expressed their

districts have a reactionary stance instead of a proactive stance in providing education

and training to staff members in reference to gender identity. Districts are not providing

professional development unless they are aware of a currently enrolled gender non-

conforming student. One participant conveyed feelings that her district would not offer

these trainings as "they have a reputation to uphold." The participant expressed the need

for these types of trainings, even though "they are not happening." Only one teacher

discussed being briefly trained on campus; however, she felt this training was only due to

the presence of students identifying as transgender on campus.

School districts must provide their teachers with professional development to help

provide a safe and supportive school environment for these students. Extensive trainings

based on gender identity have yielded positive effects in teachers addressing anti-

transgender behaviors resulting in a positive school environment for these students

(Greytak et al., 2013). Similar to the results of this study, previous literature specified

teachers moderate knowledge in issues concerning students identifying as transgender

thus, they are in need of additional trainings.

Connection to the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that grounded this study was based on the Meyer

(2008) theoretical model. This model is grounded on the premise that teachers'

perspectives in supporting students based on gender identity are determined by external

and internal barriers and motivators. These barriers and motivators are important to understand from the teacher perspective to gain an understanding of how to provide support to teachers in creating safe spaces for students who identify as transgender. Although different terms were used in describing the findings in this study, this framework served as a foundation and interpretive lens. The Meyer (2008) framework has four main elements: external influences, internal influences, perceptions, and responses that interact to shape how teachers perceive working with students based on gender identity. Some of the elements proposed in the Meyer (2008) model were reflected in this study, while others were not apparent. To illustrate the representation of the external and internal barriers and motivators teachers face when choosing to intervene in gendered based harassment, please see the following author adapted figure (Figure 2).
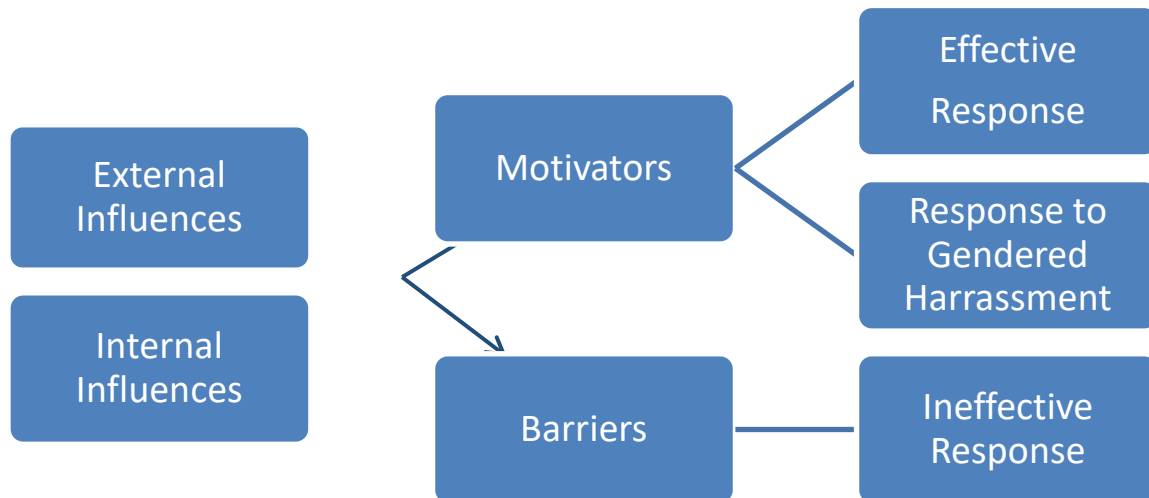

Figure 2. Relationship between external and internal barriers and motivators based on Meyer's (2008) model of teachers (non) intervention. Author Created.

In this study on secondary teachers' perceptions in working with students who identify as transgender, external influences were described as outside factors that provided an influence over teachers' perceptions in working with these students. These influences included school culture and administrative staff. Overall, the participants of this study did perceive their administrative staff (i.e., principals and school counselors) as important factors in dealing with issues or concerns with students who identify as transgender. As an emergent theme, support from principals and school counselors was noted as being important to teachers in their quest to provide a supportive and comfortable school environment for these students. Additionally, according to this framework, a lack of education and training attributed to teachers' perceptions in working with students based on gender identity. A lack of education and training was accredited to teachers' unwillingness to step in during incidents of bullying or gender identity harassment (Meyer, 2008). All participants reported a lack of education and training provided by their respective campus or school district to effectively work with these students.

Furthermore, according to this framework, internal influences were discussed as the individualized experience the teacher brought into their classroom and school setting in relation to their perception of working with students who identify as transgender. Most participants in this study noted being raised in a tolerant household, and being taught to be accepting of all people. This upbringing or internal influence attributed to their willingness to provide a supportive environment for students who identify as transgender.

Recommendations

In conducting this study and considering implications of the findings, I recognized several areas where improvements could be made to increase the support and safety of secondary students who identify as transgender. Specifically, I outline recommendations for both practice and future research. Recommendations for practice are made for teacher preparation programs, professional development, and school leaders as discussed below.

Recommendations for teacher preparation programs

Teacher preparation programs are designed to provide future educators with the necessary tools to properly educate today's students. Many teacher preparation programs are including racial and ethnic issues in their pedagogy; however, limited programs provide knowledge in sexual minority issues (Wyatt et al., 2008). By pre-service teacher preparation programs including gender-identity training into their curriculum, future educators will be equipped to properly support and advocate for these students. Teacher preparation programs must make changes to their curriculum to provide pre-service teachers the knowledge and training to sufficiently support these students. It is essential that we are preparing future educators to become culturally responsive teachers. Pre-service teachers must be adequately prepared for a diverse school environment. Additionally, real world support could aid in the training of pre-service teachers. Providing these future teachers an opportunity to partner with teachers involved with supporting students who identify as transgender through GSA clubs or inclusivity in curriculum can allow for these pre-service teachers to be better prepared in supporting these students. The results of this study were consistent with previous studies, in that all participants (secondary teachers) expressed a need for professional development or

training. These teachers want to provide support for students who identify as
transgender, however many teachers are unsure of how to effectively provide this needed
support.

Teacher Professional Development

Offering professional development for teachers is a strong element in helping to
create a safe and inclusive environment for students who identify as transgender.
Participants in this research study all reported a lack of training provided from their
campus or school districts. School districts should provide professional development for
teachers to effectively understand and support students who identify as transgender.
Students who identify as transgender make up 13,800 of youth ages 13-17 in Texas
schools; however, there is limited education and training to properly support these
students (Herman et al., 2017). School districts must also recognize the lack of
professional development being offered to teachers and implement a plan to provide this
needed support. School districts should provide this training for their teachers in order to
ensure students who identify as transgender are being provided a safe and supportive
environment. Additionally, school districts also are charged with ensuring their school
leaders are properly trained and equipped to handle the diverse students in today's
schools. Effective professional development sessions can assist in helping teachers to
understand the challenges faced by students trying to express their gender identity
(Zalaznick, 2015). School districts should partner with their local LGBT youth
organizations to provide the school experiences of students who identify as transgender in
these staff trainings. Previous researchers indicated viewing and sharing these

experiences increased empathy from teachers, thus increasing their willingness to support these students (Greytak et al., 2013).

School Leaders

Teachers are in need of support from administrators and school counselors, therefore these school personnel must be trained to provide support for these teachers and students. An effective counselor-principal relationship can aid in the important role of building a positive academic and social school career for these students (Beck, 2016). The administrator plays an important role in leading the school wide example of a positive and safe environment for students who identify as transgender. Likewise, as change agents and social justice advocates, school counselors are crucial to ensuring they are supporting all students. Similar to teacher preparation programs, educational leadership and school counselor preparation programs must prepare future school leaders for culturally diverse students. These preparation programs must include gender identity training in their pedagogy and opportunities to work with students who identify as transgender. School counselors reported a lack of confidence in counseling students related to gender identity, along with principals reporting a lack of knowledge and skills in handling concerns related to these students (Beck, 2016). These preparation programs must build a curriculum to assist pre-service school counselors and principals in working together to construct a curriculum that effectively allows for collaboration to create a safe space and advocacy for students who identify as transgender. Furthermore, these pre-service programs for administrators and counselors should design assignments to assist in pre-service students reflecting on their own biases in working with gender identity and help to develop skills to become an advocate of students who identify as transgender

(Bidell, 2011; Simons et al., 2016).   Additional in-service education should be implemented by school districts to address the lack of continuing education affording administrators and school counselors the opportunity to keep current with the growing body of literature to effectively provide needed support for students based on gender identity (Shi & Doud, 2017).

School districts Researchers have noted the importance of ensuring that students have safe and respectful school environments in which learning and social development can be maximized **(**Dessel et al., 2017; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013**).**   The school community must strive to provide inclusivity for all students. Additionally, the responsibility falls on school districts to ensure they are providing support and resources for teachers and school leaders who are advocating for these students. School districts can develop community partnerships within the school environment to enhance the positive school experience of students who identify as transgender. These partnerships can aid in helping the school to respond to the diversity found in our schools. Partnering with local LGBT organizations with a focus on gender-identity can inform school districts of their knowledge in providing care for these students. Moreover, these organizations can assist districts in providing professional development concerning inclusive language, conducting respectful conversations about gender diversity, and having conversations with the community (DePaul et al., 2009). Previous research indicated viewing and sharing these experiences through community partnerships increased empathy from teachers, thus increasing their willingness to support these students (Greytak et al., 2013). The need to increase the awareness, training, and support of students who identify as transgender is critical.

Recommendations for Future Research

The goal of this study was to provide insight into the lived experiences of secondary school teachers in the state of Texas. An additional recommendation is for the expansion of this study to extend to secondary school students who identify as transgender. This qualitative, phenomenological study touched on the perceptions and lived experiences of secondary school teachers; however, a study is needed to obtain the perceptions of students who identify as transgender to fully understand the similarities and differences in their respective perceptions. It is important to understand the perspective of the student to ensure effective policies are in place.

A second area of research that can be explored related to this study is by expanding this study to include elementary school teachers' perspective. This study should be expanded to elementary school teachers to determine if these teachers' perceptions are similar to secondary school teachers. This understanding is important to determine the needs of teachers in all grade levels. Due to the different needs, maturity level, and ages of elementary students, these teachers may provide a different perception.

An additional recommendation is to expand this study to include the perception of administrators and school counselors. As determined by the findings of this study, administrators and school counselors play an important role to teachers of students who identify as transgender. It is important to understand the knowledge level, perception of working with these students, and approach to bullying incidents of students who identify as transgender. Principals and school counselors must work together to improve the school environment for students who identify as transgender.

Lastly, the current study presented the findings from six secondary teachers whom all identified as female. Future research should include the perspective from male teachers to determine if the findings will be consistent with the current study.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to gain a broader understanding of the perceptions of secondary school teachers' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender. According to the extant literature, pre-service teacher education programs, school leaders, and teachers play an important role in providing students who identify as transgender a safe and supportive school environment. The findings implicated in this research study indicated a need to increase teachers' exposure to school wide supports, provide education and training, ensure teachers are accepting of all students, responding to bullying incidents based on gender identity, and are aware of the "new normal" happening in today's schools.

Previous studies focused on students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual but are lacking a focus in studies related to gender identity (Wernick et al., 2014). Additionally, a majority of these studies that are geared towards gender identity are in an institution of higher learning or lack the perspective of the teacher. There remains a deficiency in understanding the experiences of K-12 teachers and their perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender. The present study contributed to the literature by providing a focus on students who identify as transgender and the perception of the secondary school teacher in working and providing support to these students. The results of this study provided important implications for secondary school teachers, teacher and school leader preparation programs, school leaders and school districts.

Further research is needed to continue providing literature to school practitioners on this growing population of students.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

1. Why did you choose to become a secondary teacher?

2. Tell me about some of the greatest challenges you have faced as a secondary school educator?

3. How knowledgeable do you feel you are concerning students who identify as transgender?

4. How have you been trained on transgender issues? How important do you think it is for educators to be trained on transgender issues?

5. How do you feel internal factors (teaching philosophy, life experiences, beliefs, identity) influence how you work with students who identify as transgender?

6. How do you think you would respond to having a transgender student in your classroom? What are some of your concerns in meeting the needs of students who identify as transgender?

7. Tell me about how you, as a teacher, would respond to students using language such as: "You're gay," or "You're acting like a girl."

8. Tell me about how you, as a teacher, would respond to bullying incidents based on gender identity?

9. How do you feel your administrators perceive working with students who identify as transgender?

10. Tell me about how you, as a teacher, think you can best support students who identify as transgender.

APPENDIX B

Research Study Information

Hello fellow educator,

My name is Jessica Wiltz and I am a current Doctoral student under the supervision of Dr. Rebecca Bustamante with Sam Houston State University. I am looking to gain participants for my dissertation research study. This is to give you information on my study in hopes you will participate in this study. Please note the information gained in this research will be anonymous, and any identifiers related to your identity will be anonymous and destroyed once the dissertation has been completed and accepted.

Title of Research Study: Texas Secondary School Teachers' Perceptions of Working with Students Who Identify as Transgender

Principal Investigator(s): Jessica Wiltz

Purpose of this study: The purpose of this study is to examine secondary school teachers' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender. Ideally, a better understanding of secondary teachers' perceptions of transgender students will uncover potential support and intervention strategies to provide a safer environment and a greater sense of belonging for transgender students (Meyer, 2008).

What will you be asked to do if you take part in this research study?

• Interview with researcher: If you accept participation in this study, Jessica Wiltz will meet with you via Zoom Conference system to conduct an audio/video-recorded interview. At the time of the interview, a set of questions pertaining to your perception of working with students who identify as transgender will be asked. These questions are designed to aid the researchers in understanding the perceptions of teachers on this topic.

Time: The approximate length: • Interview with researcher (60 minutes)

What are the possible benefits to you or to others? The outcome of this study will enable the researchers to collect knowledge pertaining to teachers' perception of working with transgender students. Such knowledge base will increase understanding of the necessary steps needed to put in place in order to make sure all teachers are adequately prepared to address the needs of this growing population. Succinctly put, your involvement in this study may/may not increase your awareness of students identifying as transgender. (No compensation will be given for this study.)

Thank you for considering being a part of my study. If you have any questions, please email me or contact me at the following:

jhwiltz@aldineisd.org or 832-353-9572.   Thank you,

Jessica Wiltz

IRB Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The person handing you this form will also describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to take part in the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate.

Title of Research Study: Texas Secondary School Teachers' Perceptions of Working with Students Who Identify as Transgender

Principal Investigator(s): Jessica Wiltz, a graduate student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Administration, who is completing a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Rebecca Bustamante, Sam Houston State University Department of Educational Leadership and Administration.

Purpose of this study: The purpose of this study is to examine secondary school teachers' perceptions of working with students who identify as transgender. Ideally, a better understanding of secondary teachers' perceptions of transgender students will uncover potential support and intervention strategies to provide a

safer environment and a greater sense of belonging for transgender students (Meyer, 2008).

What will you be asked to do if you take part in this research study?

• Interview with researcher: If you accept participation in this study, one of the research investigators will meet with you to conduct a video/audio-taped interview. At the time of the interview, a set of questions pertaining to your perception of working with students who identify as transgender will be asked. These questions are designed to aid the researchers in understanding the perceptions of teachers on this topic.

Time: The approximate length: • Interview with researcher (60-90 minutes)

What are the possible benefits to you or to others? The outcome of this study will enable the researchers to collect knowledge pertaining to teachers' perception of working with transgender students. Such knowledge base will increase understanding of the

necessary steps needed to put in place in order to make sure all teachers are adequately prepared to address the needs of this

growing population.   Succinctly put, your involvement in this study may/may not increase your awareness of students identifying as transgender. (No compensation will be given for this study.)

If you do not want to take part in this study, what other options are available to you? Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to refuse participation and your refusal will not influence current or future relationships with Sam Houston State University. You are free to withdraw your consent and stop participation in this research study at any time. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Sharla Miles, Research Compliance Administrator, Sam Houston State University, (936)294-4875.

How will your privacy and the confidentiality of your research records be protected? Pertinent information about you will be stored safely in the researchers' password protected computer files. All information gathered from this study will be analyzed holistically. Participant names will not be used. Video/audio recording will be heard only for research purposes by the investigator and her associates. If the results of this research are published or presented at scientific meetings, your identity will not be disclosed. Please note the information gained in this research

will be anonymous, and any identifiers related to your identity will be anonymous and destroyed once the dissertation has been completed and accepted.

Name and signature of person who explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

_____
Signature and printed name of person obtained consent Date

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. Your signature on this page indicates that you understand what you are being asked to do, and you voluntarily agree to participate in this study. If you have any additional questions please contact, Jessica Wiltz-Principal Investigator (832-353-9572) or Dr. Rebecca Bustamante-Principal Investigator's faculty supervisor (936- 294-4946).

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____
Signature of Principal Investigator   Date

VITA

Jessica C. Wiltz

School Counselor, Aldine Middle School

Aldine Independent School District

Academic Degrees

Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership (In progress), Sam Houston State University, (tentative 2018)

Dissertation Title: *Secondary School Teachers Perceptions of Working with Students Who Identify as Transgender.*

Master of Arts, Counseling, Prairie View A&M University, 2007

Bachelor of Science, Psychology, Minor in Child Development, Prairie View A&M University, 2004

Professional Experience

2015-Present School Counselor, *Aldine Middle School*, Aldine Independent School District

2011-2015 School Counselor, *Marcella Intermediate*, Aldine Independent School District

2007-2011 5th Grade Science Teacher, *Marcella Intermediate*, Aldine Independent School District

Career Highlights Recent Recognitions

Extra Miler Recipient, Marcella Intermediate, Aldine Independent School District, 2015

Professional Certificates

EC-12, School Counselor

4-8, Generalist Teaching Certification

Texas Pedagogy and Professional Responsibilities (PPR) - EC-12

Presentations

(2016) Student Research Symposium, Sam Houston State University- The Woodlands

(2016) Round table discussion presented at the Annual TCPEA Graduate Research Exchange, Houston, TX.

Peer-Reviewed Journal Article Publications

Wiltz, J., & Slate, J. R. (2016). Differences in drop- out rates by ethnicity/race of middle

school students: A multi-year analysis. *Global Journal of Human Social Science,*

16(8).