Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Men Who Teach in Elementary Special Education Programs: A Path Less Taken

By Josiah Willey

B.A. 2002, The University of Maine
M.A. 2004, The George Washington University

A Dissertation submitted to

The Faculty of
The Graduate School of Education and Human Development
of the George Washington University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education

August 31, 2011

Dissertation directed by

Carol Kochhar-Bryant
Professor of Special Education and Disability Studies

The Graduate School of Education and Human Development of The George Washington University certifies that Josiah Willey has passed the Final Examination for the degree of Doctor of Education as of June 8, 2011. This is the final and approved form of the dissertation.

Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Men Who Teach in Elementary Special Education Programs: A Path Less Taken

Josiah Willey

Dissertation Research Committee:

Carol Kochhar-Bryant, Professor of Special Education and Disability Studies, Dissertation Director

Colin Green, Associate Professor of Elementary Education Committee Member

Lynda West, Professor of Special Education and Disability Studies Committee Member

“The most difficult thing in life is to know yourself.”

Thales

Dedication

For Bob

Acknowledgements

I would like to express a heartfelt thanks to the three male elementary special education teachers of this study. “Steve”, “Matt”, and “Carl”, each generously shared their personal time to participate in the research. Additionally, each demonstrated an authentic interest in the nature of the study and all shared their experiences as educators genuinely and honesty. I am tremendously appreciative to each of them for their contributions to this study.

I would like to thank the dissertation committee that served as leaders of my study. Dr. Colin Green and Dr. Lynda West helped me develop the concept and design of the study and offered support and guidance during each stage of the process. Additionally, I would like to recognize my dissertation director, Dr. Carol Kochhar-Bryant, for the countless hours she spent helping me develop, edit, and revise my study. She was always readily available to answer questions or provide feedback upon my many requests. All three challenged and inspired me to view issues in a critical and unique fashion and were instrumental in helping me see my study come to fruition.

I would like to thank Dr. Marian Jarrett and Dr. Christine Ritter, who served as external examiners to my dissertation defense. Both vigorously encouraged, supported, and challenged me during the final phases of the study.

I would like to express a great appreciation to my friends and family for their support as I traversed the dissertation process. I give particular thanks to my parents, Lorna and Larry, and siblings, Ezra and Monica, for their immense encouragement and support over the past several years as I underwent this endeavor. Their enthusiasm afforded me with the motivation and drive to successfully complete this venture.

I would like to pay particular thanks to my late father-in-law, Bob Nabozny. I had the good fortune of meeting Bob early in my life at the age of 16. I grew up with him as a major part of my early adulthood and over the years, he taught me to live a life that reached beyond my own needs by giving back to this world through love and compassion for others. Nearly 16 years later, Bob's lessons resonate with how I live my life and will continue to until my final days.

And finally, I would like to thank my wife, Emily, for her unwavering love, support, and encouragement while I completed my dissertation. Without her, I would never have had the strength or inspiration to see this study to the end. She spurred me on when I needed encouragement and showed me patience when I had none. And most importantly, she has helped close this chapter of my life by opening another with the birth of our first child, Elijah. You both are the light of my life. I will love you always.

Abstract of Dissertation

Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Men Who Teach in Elementary Special Education Programs: A Path Less Taken

Research on male participation in education conducted by the National Education Association (NEA, 2003) states that the percentage of male teachers in primary and secondary-level education ranks at a 40-year low. In 2003, the NEA identified that 24.9% of the nation's three million teachers in K-12 are men; by 2008, this number had dropped to 24.5% (NEA, 2008). Furthermore, the percentage of male teachers in elementary schools has decreased steadily from 18% in 1981 to 9% at present. In addition, the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (PCESE, 2002) stated that there is a shortage of adequately qualified personnel to provide special education services to children with disabilities. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore how men experience their identity as elementary school special education teachers. This exploration will be done through investigating how men describe: (1) the factors that influenced them to become elementary special education teachers, (2) how they view their role as special education teachers and their professional experiences in elementary schools, (3) what it means to be "male" in the context of elementary education, and (4) the influences that enable them to persist in their role as elementary special education teachers. Although a number of unique dynamics and distinctions influenced the participants' decisions to become elementary level special education teachers, four themes surfaced as a result of the research process: (1) a desire to improve the lives of children with special needs, (2) a desire to improve the social milieu of elementary schools for special education, (3) the importance of entering the field with a strong sense

of self-confidence in one's maleness to be an effective elementary special education teacher, and (4) the importance of growth and advancement in one's career.

Table of Contents

Dedication……...iv

Acknowledgements v

Abstract of Dissertation vii

Table of Contents ix

List of Figures……...xv

List of Tables……xvi

CHAPTER ONE 1

Introduction 1

Statement of the Problem 2

Purpose of the Study 3

Research Questions 4

Significance of the Study 5

Theoretical Framework 6

Methodology Overview 8

Data Analysis 11

Delimitations and Limitations 12

Ethical Considerations 13

Definitions 14

Summary 16

CHAPTER TWO 18

Literature Review 18

Systematic Literature Search 19
Theoretical Framework 21
Historical Context 21
Theoretical Framework ..... 22_Toc296320464
Gender Roles in American Public Education 27
Review of Research on Men in Education 33
Constructing Masculinity and Femininity 33
Foundations of Masculinity 38
Gendered Assumptions 41
Gender Differences in Teaching 44
Sex Differences 44
Gender Dynamics 46
Identity Formation 48
Influences and Experiences of Men in Elementary Education 50
Summary and Implications for this Study 59
CHAPTER THREE 61
Methodology 61
Epistemology 61
Design 63
Method 64
Participants 67
Selection Criteria 68
The School District 69

Setting 70
Instrument 70
The Interviews 71
Data Collection 72
Three-Interview Series 73
Procedures 78
Trustworthiness of Data 79
Data Organization and Management 81
Data Analysis 82
Subjectivity Statement 83
Steps of Data Analysis 89
Researcher as Instrument: Addressing Researcher Bias……..……88
Human Subjects and Ethical Considerations 91
Summary 93
CHAPTER FOUR 94
Results 94
The Participants 95
Steve 95
Matt 97
Carl 98
What Influences a Man's Choice to Become an Elementary Special Education Teacher? 99
Familial Influences 99

Educational Influences 100
Professional Influences 102
A Desire to Work with Children 105
How Do Men Describe Their Role as Special Education Teachers and Their Professional Experiences within the Elementary School Setting? 110
Finding One's Purpose 110
Teaching Preferences 112
The Power of Supportive Relationships 115
Family 116
Friends 116
Students 117
Colleagues 118
School Administration 121
Parents 123
Spouse 124
Challenging Experiences in the Teaching Career 126
Special Education versus Regular Education 128
Salary 130
How Do Men Represent What it Means to Be "Male" in the Context of Elementary Education? 134
Preserving One's Masculinity 135
Qualities of an Effective Elementary School Special Education Teacher 137

What Influences Enable Men to Persist in Their Roles as Special Education Teachers within the Elementary School Setting? 140
Dealing with Stress 141
Working with Other Men 142
A Look Towards the Future 144
CHAPTER FIVE 149
Discussion 149
Direct Conclusions 151
What Influences a Man's Choice to Become an Elementary Special Education Teacher? 151
How do Men Describe Their Role as Special Education Teachers and Their Professional Experiences within the Elementary School Setting? 154
How do Men Represent what it Means to be "Male" in the Context of Elementary Education? 156
What Influences Enable Men to Persist in Their Roles as Special Education Teachers within the Elementary School Setting? 159
Speculative Conclusions 163
Recommendations for Further Research 165
Practice 166
Policy 168
Methodological Process and Recommendations 170
What Worked Well 170
Limitations and Recommendations 172

Conclusion 173

References 176

APPENDIX A 183

Logic Model 183

APPENDIX B 185

Sample Interview Protocol Forms 185

APPENDIX C 188

Template for Coding a Phenomenological Study 188

List of Figures

Figure 1: Context for the Study…….27

List of Tables

Table 3.1: Organizing Summary of the Data Collection Plan……...……73

Table 3.2: Organizing Summary of the Three-Series Interview……77

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (PCESE, 2002) stated that there is a shortage of adequately qualified personnel to provide special education services to children with disabilities. PCESE noted that the U.S. Department of Education-funded Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE) found that the nation's excess of 12,000 openings for special education teachers were either unfilled or filled by substitute teachers in 1999-2000. Furthermore, 98% of school districts reported special education teacher shortages. Moreover, PCESE added that the scarcity of qualified special education teachers will be met by the U.S. Department of Education estimates that the nation will need more than 200,000 new special educators during the five years following its study. However, at the present time colleges and universities have the capability to train only about half that number. PCESE also commented that despite the growing diversity of children, they project that teachers will continue to be predominantly white, middle class, female, and monolingual.

The U.S. Department of Education's 29th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2007, examined the number of children ages six through 21 served under IDEA Part B. It found that in 2005, a total of 6,109,569 students, ages 6 through 21, received special education and related services. The report noted that this number represented 9.1 percent of the U.S. general population ages 6 through 21. The report further described that from 1996 to 2004, both the number of students ages 6 through 21 served under Part B of the *IDEA* and those of

the general population ages 6 through 21 have experienced an overall increase in population. This was an increase of almost 900,000 students, from 5.2 million students in 1996 to 6.1 million in 2004. Yet there was a slight decrease in 2005. Furthermore, the report described that children in elementary schools, typically ages six through 11, served under Part B of the *IDEA*, found that speech and language impairments was the most common disability category, while specific learning disabilities was slightly less prevalent. Additionally, the report found that at the time of this study, there were 417,891 special education teachers serving these 6.1 million school-age students. Of these teachers, 376,478 were fully certified to be providing such services.

Research on male participation in education conducted by the National Education Association (NEA, 2003) states that the percentage of male teachers in primary and secondary-level education ranks at a 40-year low. In 2003, the NEA found that 24.9% of the nation's three million teachers in K-12 are men. This trend has remained steady since that year; in 2008, the NEA affirmed that 24.5% of the United States' three million teachers continue to be men (NEA, 2008). Furthermore, the percentage of male teachers in elementary schools has decreased steadily from 18% in 1981 to 9% at present.

Statement of the Problem

Male teachers have become a scarce commodity within America's elementary schools. As previously noted, research conducted by the NEA found that the percentage of male teachers in primary and secondary-level education ranks at a 40-year low. The unique role of schools in structuring a child's identity makes them an appropriate subject

for examining broader questions of social relations. Boys spend much of their lives in school. As Tolson (1977) noted, their time within these social milieus play a significant role regarding identity formation. While there is public acknowledgement about the lack of male elementary school teachers, little is known about why so few men enter this role and few studies exist that document their voice and personal experiences. Consequently, there is little literature that addresses why some men freely elect to pursue a career in elementary education, and even less related to the smaller subset of men who opt to teach special education within the elementary milieu.

Researchers are examining aspects that influence the presence of male teachers, including representations of what it means to be 'male' in the context of education. Yet there is limited empirical research regarding male educators and factors that influence their choice to teach. Such research may serve to advance the discussion of how to include more male teachers in special education at the elementary school level. Thus, there is a need for more research on the manner in which men experience their identity as the male minority in a female dominated profession, and in particular, in the context of elementary special education. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how men experience their identity as elementary school special education teachers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how men experience their identity as elementary school special education teachers. This exploration included an investigation of how men describe: (1) the factors that influenced them to become elementary special

education teachers, (2) how they view their role as special education teachers and their professional experiences in elementary schools, (3) what it means to be “male” in the context of elementary education, and (4) the influences that enable them to persist in their role as elementary special education teachers. It is hoped that by examining and giving voice to the experiences of men who teach elementary special education, there will be a meaningful contribution to understanding why there is a lack of participation among men in teaching at public elementary schools.

It is anticipated that this research will result in several themes that portray the essence of the lived experiences of men who teach elementary special education. It is hoped that the data attained in this study will be viewed as a positive contribution to the currently limited research base on men who teach special education.

Research Questions

The essential question that this study explores asks: how do men experience their identity as elementary school special education teachers? Sub-questions will be asked to support the exploration of the aforementioned essential question. The sub-questions are as follows:

- *Question 1:* What influences a man’s choice to become an elementary special education teacher?
- *Question 2:* How do men describe their role as special education teachers and their professional experiences within the elementary school setting?

- *Question 3:* How do men represent what it means to be ‘male’ in the context of elementary education?
- *Question 4:* What influences enable men to persist in their roles as special education teachers within the elementary school setting?

Significance of the Study

This study explored the particular factors that have influenced males in their choice of a career in elementary special education and the manner in which they experience their identity within this career. A systematic exploratory inquiry into the experiences and choices of practicing male teachers can inform efforts to increase the participation of males in elementary special education. If men who are currently engaged in the profession are willing to share their invaluable experiences, then perhaps characteristics and qualities of active male elementary special education teachers may be represented, as well as environmental and other factors that influence their participation. By so doing, there is an opportunity to support suggestions that more men teach by better understanding why some do. Consequently, this qualitative study examines male special education teachers’ perceptions of their experiences teaching at the elementary school level while exploring their perceptions of their identity within such settings.

Common trends were identified in these accounts and have resulted in suggestions for future actions that may aptly address men’s role in elementary special education. Additionally, this study has the potential to inform colleges and universities as they develop recruitment processes. Teacher preparation curricula could also be updated to

address the unique conditions for men as well as women. This study may also inform school administrators who wish to hire and retain more male teachers within their schools. Furthermore, male elementary teachers who read this study may identify with the participants' experiences, and find a sense of unity within their small numbers as this study attempts to reflect their voice.

Theoretical Framework

The nature of this study is grounded in theory related to the social forces that shape an individual's identity. Therefore, this study was framed through the conceptual lens of the social relations perspective which was formed out of the feminist movement. Andrew Tolson (1977), a profeminist authority in the social relations perspective, and whose theory serves as the genesis of this study, describes the roots of this point of view:

> My starting point is perhaps the most basic of all feminist propositions: the distinction between biology and culture. When we talk about 'masculinity,' or when we respond to the masculine 'social presence,' we draw upon certain specific forms of social knowledge. This is to say, although certain aspects of sexual behavior are obviously functions of biological sex (including genetic aptitude and physical development), by far the major part of sexuality is cultural (encompassing personality, social behavior; and involving symbolic meanings transmitted in linguistic communication) (pp. 11-12).

Tolson describes how the foundation of male identity development begins during childhood. The family serves as the initial cultural and emotional influence on male children. However, other major social structures in a child's life play a significant part in the formation of male identity. One such social structure is school, where the conception of masculinity takes root.

Masculinity, Tolson (1977) argues, cannot be simply thought of as the opposite of femininity. Rather, he argues that there are a variety of types of gender identity and that masculinity is expressed differently among various cultures. For example, Tolson describes how Western, industrialized societies define masculinity based on one's career or occupation. These societies, such as the United States, are bound to a hierarchical ladder of achievement and men are doomed to pursue personal rewards in the image of having 'made it.' Thus, men's pursuit of climbing the hierarchical ladder for professional advancement may result in personal, unintended consequences. Tolson stated, "At home, with their insistence on status, they are prevented from enjoying certain kinds of domestic labour ('housework') and childcare. Social prestige becomes a psychological barrier, limiting their potentiality for personal relationships" (p. 13).

Connell (2008) argued that examining institutions is a fundamental step in the general understanding of men and hegemonic masculinities as well as women and femininities. Connell (2008, p. 77) defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women." This position aligns with Tolson's assertion that male identity formation begins in childhood and is perpetuated in major social structures such as the school (1997). Thus, the influence of the traditional social relations forces are still primarily at work within public schools. The unique role of schools in structuring a child's identity makes them an appropriate subject for examining broader questions of social relations. Boys spend much of their

lives in school. As Tolson (1977) noted, their time within these social milieus play a significant role regarding identity formation.

Gorski (1998) described a social relations perspective on male identity. He stated that it is grounded in the suggestion that identity forms from the positioning of men within a variety of social institutions. He stated that the social relations perspective was influenced by the feminist movement to address how cultural institutions (such as family, school, work, peer groups) and cultural identifiers (such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation) shape the growth of individuals' identities. Gorski argues that if men are aggressive, oppressive, unemotional, and competitive, it is because of their learned behavior within social structures.

Since this study explored the phenomenon of male special education teachers' perceptions of their experiences of teaching at the elementary school level, this lens was found to be an excellent match. This perspective allowed the study to focus on male identity, and because it suggests that identity forms in relation to how men are positioned within various social structures, it will also provide an ideal perspective on the social structure of U.S. elementary schools.

Methodology Overview

This study explored how men experience their identity as elementary school special education teachers. Specifically, the study investigated how men describe: (1) the factors that influenced them to become elementary special education teachers, (2) how they view their role as special education teachers and their professional experiences in

elementary schools, (3) what it means to be "male" in the context of elementary education, and (4) the influences that enable them to persist in their role as elementary special education teachers. The theoretical perspective that shaped this study is the social relations perspective (Tolson, 1977). As Gorski (1998) described, the social relations perspective on male identity is grounded in the notion that identity forms in relation to the positioning of men within a variety of social institutions. Thus, to aptly relate this perspective to the purpose of this study, qualitative methodology was employed, with phenomenology as the research paradigm. The study took the form of case studies, which included a combination of two individual interviews for each participant and one focus group interview.

Qualitative methods were employed in this study. Creswell (2007) defines qualitative research as research that:

> Begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes (p. 37).

A phenomenological paradigm was chosen to meet the goals of the study and research questions. The phenomenological approach was most appropriate for addressing the study's purpose and questions because it is grounded in using participant-generated texts, or interview transcripts, to gain a deeper understanding of the essence of their personal experiences. In an effort to collect the richest possible data, Dolbeare and Schulman's in-

depth phenomenological three-interview series was selected as the primary research tool for the study (Seidman, 2006).

A case study design was deemed most appropriate for this study because it allowed for a holistic portrayal of the participants' experiences. Furthermore, case studies supported the organization of an array of information about the participants and then allowed an in-depth analysis of the cases by seeking patterns and themes in the data. The case studies were selected from within a single school district in the mid-Atlantic U.S. states.

In an effort to concentrate the research within a single school district, the study took place in a large urban school district in the mid-Atlantic states. The district was selected to participate in the study due to its size. Currently, it is the largest school district in its state and is one of the largest districts in the United States. Furthermore, of its 197 schools, 137 are elementary (preschool through grade six) with an additional nine special education centers and 48 alternative programs and learning centers. The remaining schools consist of middle, secondary, high, and alternative high schools, which will not be considered for this study.

Participants were selected based on their ability to contribute a better understanding of the phenomenon under study. Thus, a total of three elementary-level male special education teachers, working across a large urban school district in the mid-Atlantic states were identified as potential participants. These men were selected to participate in the study based on how well they met the selection criteria, listed below. Additional men would have been invited to join in the event that a participant dropped

out of the study. However, the three original participants were willing and able to engage in the research in its entirety and replacements were not needed. Additionally, it was determined that instead of interviewing a larger number of participants, in-depth interviews with three subjects would yield a deeper and richer level of data. Interviews with a larger number of participants may produce greater breadth of information but it is likely that those interviews would lack the level of depth desired for this study. By drawing on a smaller number of participants, it was anticipated that the researcher could take a more concentrated approach towards the interview process. This resulted in a more thorough and accurate representation of each of the participant's experiences.

The selected method that supported the data collection for the phenomenological case studies was a modified version of Dolbeare and Schuman's in-depth three-interview series (Seidman, 2006). While the study followed Dolbeare and Schuman's structure and procedures for conducting each interview, the third and final interview occurred in focus group form (Seidman, 2006). The focus group was chosen as the final interview because it provided a forum in which issues were uncovered that would not otherwise come up in individual interviews. The focus group also helped to identify common themes across all of the cases. The interviews and focus group are discussed in detail in chapter three. A visual representation of the study's logic model may be found under Appendix A.

Data Analysis

Sargent (2001) notes that in his own research, "analyzing the interview was an ongoing process" (p. 173). Thus, in an effort to address the overarching research question

of how men experience their identity as elementary school special education teachers, it was decided that thick, rich descriptions of their experiences would yield optimal data. Thus, participants' descriptions were recorded and transcribed to present actual, first-person accounts of male teachers' perceptions of their experiences of teaching elementary level special education. Transcripts were used for interpreting the data.

Creswell (2007) recommended that data analysis begin with the process of researcher introspection. This practice allows the researcher to describe his or her experiences in the phenomenon under study. The purpose of this act is for the researcher to make an effort to put their personal experiences aside, to the extent possible, in order to direct the focus to the participants in the study. Having spent a number of years as an elementary school special education teacher himself, the researcher needed to be diligent about minimizing the amount of bias that he introduced to the study. Thus, it was necessary that the researcher must make any potential biases that he may introduce to the study as transparent as possible. This is done through the use of a subjectivity statement which is presented in its entirety in Chapter Three.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study was delimited by restricting the variables of location and population. In an effort to concentrate the research within a single school district, the study took place in a large urban school district in the mid-Atlantic states. This district was selected to participate in the study due to its size. Currently, this district is the largest in its state and is one of the largest districts in the United States. Furthermore, of its 197 schools, 137 are

elementary (preschool through grade six) with an additional nine special education centers and 48 alternative programs and learning centers. The remaining schools consist of middle, secondary, high, and alternative high schools, and will not be considered for this study. Additionally, the subjects of this study consisted entirely of males who teach special education at the elementary school level. They also had a minimum of five years' teaching experience. There were no delimitations placed on the age, race, or certification of the participants.

Although an in-depth study of three participants was conducted, a number of limitations must be noted. First, state-to-state and county-to-county comparisons would not be valid due to the nature of the study. Second, this research is intended to represent the lived experiences of a group of three men in a particular county and state. Their experiences are particular to them and cannot be generalized to other men in other geographical areas. Third, the participants consist only of men, thus their experiences cannot be generalized to women performing the same work. Fourth, the study is focused on special education teachers at the elementary level. Great caution would be needed in making generalizations to both teachers of regular education and teachers outside the grades of elementary school.

Ethical Considerations

Studies involving the inclusion of human subjects require numerous ethical considerations. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) of the World Health Organization (WHO) provides a series of ethical guidelines for research involving human

subjects. Therefore, the following guidelines were employed to ensure the protection of the human subjects involved in the study. These guidelines include: provide the subject adequate knowledge of the appropriate facts and the consequences of participating in the study; the anticipated duration of the subject's participation; the anticipated benefits that may result as an outcome of the research; all potential risks or discomforts to the participant; all records will be kept confidential; all research will occur at no cost to the subject; the participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time; obtain a signed form as proof of individual informed consent. There was no risk or potential harm involved in this study. Nonetheless, extreme care was put into ensuring that each participant in this study be treated with the utmost consideration regarding these ethical guidelines.

Definitions

The following list provides definitions for frequently used terms throughout this study. These terms include:

- *Femininity:* Western culture has labeled feminine traits that are stereotypical of women as passive, helpful, and expressive (Terman and Miles, 1936).
- *Identity:* Cultural institutions, such as family, school, work, peer groups, and cultural identifiers, such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, shape the growth of individuals' identities (Gorski, 1998).

- *Hegemonic masculinity:* The configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 2008, p. 77).
- *Institution*: When used in the social sciences, institution means much the same as "organization" (Connell, 2008).
- *Masculinity:* Western culture has labeled masculine traits that are stereotypical of men as aggressive, competitive, and instrumentally oriented (Terman and Miles, 1936).
- *Phenomenology:* "Phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld—the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflexively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9).
- *Special education:* "Special education teachers work with children and youths who have a variety of disabilities…Most special education teachers instruct students at the elementary, middle, and secondary school level, although some work with infants and toddlers" (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009).
- *Qualitative research:* "Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive

to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes" (Creswell, 2007, p. 37).

The above list is not an exhaustive inventory of terminology used in this study. It is intended to familiarize the reader with frequently used terms and to clarify others that might have multiple meanings.

Summary

Chapter One presented the relevant background of this study as well as its problem and purpose. The purpose of this study is to explore how men experience their identity as elementary school special education teachers. This exploration was conducted by investigating how men describe: (1) the factors that influenced them to become elementary special education teachers, (2) how they view their role as special education teachers and their professional experiences in elementary schools, (3) what it means to be "male" in the context of elementary education, and (4) the influences that enable them to persist in their role as elementary special education teachers. Research questions were posed, the significance of the study described, and the conceptual framework that guides the study and the methodology introduced. Delimitations and limitations were presented with a brief statement of the researcher's subjectivity, followed by a description of ethical considerations and definitions for frequently used terms.

Chapter Two documents the literature that relates to male teachers at the elementary school level. Due to the broad nature of the topic of men in education,

attempts were made to discover literature and research grounded in elementary school. Further attempts were made to find literature on male teachers of elementary special education in particular. This chapter makes an effort to account for the literature that is most relevant to this study.

Chapter Three presents the design of this qualitative phenomenological research. It provides details as they pertain to the participants, setting, and tools used. The discussion then moves to the data collection process, organization and management of data, and data analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the trustworthiness of the study and the researcher's subjectivity. Chapter Four presents the results of the study. The results are analyzed in relation to the research questions. This chapter presents the lived experiences of men who teach elementary special education. Chapter Five focuses on the conclusions, discussion of the study, limitations, and implications for practice and future research on the topic of male elementary special education teachers.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Research on male participation in education conducted by the National Education Association (NEA, 2003) states that the percentage of male teachers in primary and secondary-level education ranks at a 40-year low. In 2003, the NEA identified that 24.9 % of the nation's three million teachers in K-12 are men. This trend has remained steady since that year and in 2008, the NEA affirmed that 24.5% of the United States' three million teachers are men (NEA, 2008). Furthermore, the percentage of male teachers in elementary schools has decreased steadily from 18% in 1981 to 9% at present. Research related to school climate and teacher quality emphasizes the critical role that men play as educators in creating effective and positive learning environments. Thus, this literature review will explore the current state of knowledge related to the factors that account for this change.

According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE, 2007), numerous countries display patterns in which most teachers at the primary school level are female while men often hold administrative positions. UNECE considers that structural equality within the teaching profession is both an issue of equal opportunities and sex-based occupational segregation within the labor market. The 1998 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Education Report indicated that teachers' salaries would be higher if teaching were a male profession.

The Education Commission of the States (ECS, 2007) asserts that regardless of gender, special education teachers are in high demand and short supply. ECS found that in 2000, the American Association for Employment in Education reported on nine fields of special education teaching. Eight of these fields were listed with "considerable" shortages. The ECS also states that while many states have passed legislation addressing the issue of teacher shortages, some states have addressed the need for special education teachers specifically through policies that focus on recruiting and retaining teachers for all understaffed subject areas. Several strategies that have been implemented by states include salary bonuses, re-employing retired teachers, relaxing specific certification requirements, loan forgiveness, tuition assistance programs, and incentives for paraeducators to pursue teacher certification.

The unique role of schools in structuring a child's identity makes them an appropriate subject for an examination into broader questions of social relations. Boys spend much of their lives in school. As Tolson (1977) noted, their time within these social milieus play a significant role in whom they become later in life and the manner in which their identity is formed.

Systematic Literature Search

This literature review on the topic of male experiences in teaching special education in elementary schools has proven a challenging endeavor. There is a dearth of research on the topic of male special education teachers. However, research on the broader context of male teachers is more readily available. It is apparent that other

regions of the world, such as England, Australia, and New Zealand, have taken progressive steps towards exploring the general subject matter of men in education.

The majority of available data are qualitative in nature. Furthermore, there is little research on the topic of men who teach special education in an elementary school setting. The broader topic of men in education offers a greater wealth of literature, much of which offers valuable and insightful data. There is a broader and deeper scope of research relating to this topic in Europe, Australia and New Zealand, than in the United States.

In order to ensure that only the most appropriate literature was included in this review, the selection criteria included appropriateness, authority, and a publication date of 2000 or later, though salient literature prior to 2000 was included. It is worth noting that much of the reviewed research is current and was conducted in 2005 or later. The literature in this review takes the form of research reports, articles, books, internet resources, and other sources of relevant information.

The literature searches were conducted from education, psychology, and sociology databases. The search engines within the databases included *Academic Search Premier*, *Dissertations & Theses Online*, *ProQuest*; *Gender Studies, JSTOR*, and *Project Muse*. The author selected literature related to the themes of men, education, special education, elementary school, teaching, masculinity, and identity.

The search engines within the education database yielded the greatest results. Example keywords used in each search engine included: “male teacher,” “men,” “male,” “lack of male teachers,” “teacher,” “identity,” “elementary,” “masculinity,” “gender,” and “special education.” These keywords and phrases were entered into the search engine

both singularly and through a variety of combinations. The searches which sought specific information on men and special education did not yield relevant research studies. Based on the outcome of the search for applicable literature, it is evident that there is a very limited amount of literature on the specific topic of men teaching special education. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter will address the context for the study and a review of the research of men in education. However, to properly address these areas, it is imperative to first describe the profeminist social relations perspective that serves as the theoretical framework for this study.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in theories regarding the social forces that shape an individual's identity; in particular, through the theoretical lens of the social relations perspectives of Tolson (1977) which were formed out of the feminist movement. The social relations perspective places into context what it means to be male in the context of elementary special education.

Historical Context

Hooks (2000) defines the women's movement, otherwise known as feminism, as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (p. 1). Women of the nineteenth century began to express the feminist view that they are intrinsically equal to men and merit equal rights and opportunities (Hooks, 2000). The feminist movement became rooted in the United States in the late 1960s and eventually

stretched worldwide. During the civil rights period of the 1960s, the National Organization for Women (NOW) was formed and in 1966, Betty Friedman described NOW's purpose to the American public:

> We, men and women who hereby constitute ourselves as the National Organization for Women, believe that the time has come for a new movement toward true equality for all women in America, and toward a fully equal partnership of the sexes, as part of the world-wide revolution of human rights now taking place within and beyond our national borders.

Although the above excerpt is only a small portion of NOW's original statement of purpose, it set the stage for developing profeminist theories. One such theory is Andrew Tolson's (1977) social relations perspective which serves as the seminal influence of this study.

Theoretical Framework

Men who became sympathetic to the feminist movement took the brand of profeminist. Profeminist men, such as Tolson, chose this title over feminist because they recognized that women held unique personal experiences which made them feminists. Tolson rejected the assertions that traditional masculinities are grounded in biology and that they are essential for social stability. Rather, profeminists argued that masculinities are created and perpetuated through the male social advantage which correspondingly oppresses women (Clatterbaugh, 1990). Claterbaugh (1990) refers to Sawyer, who stated: "Neither men nor women need be limited by sex-role stereotypes

that define ‘appropriate’ behavior. The present models for men and women fail to furnish adequate opportunities for human development” (p. 41). This statement reflects the profeminist perspective which is evident in Tolson’s social relations perspective.

Andrew Tolson (1977, pp. 11-12), an authority in the social relations perspective and whose theory serves as the genesis of this study, describes the roots of this point of view:

> My starting point is perhaps the most basic of all feminist propositions: the distinction between biology and culture. When we talk about ‘masculinity,’ or when we respond to the masculine ‘social presence,’ we draw upon certain specific forms of social knowledge. This is to say, although certain aspects of sexual behavior are obviously functions of biological sex (including genetic aptitude and physical development), by far the major part of sexuality is cultural (encompassing personality, social behavior; and involving symbolic meanings transmitted in linguistic communication).

Tolson describes how the foundation of male identity development begins during childhood. The family serves as the initial cultural and emotional influence on male children. However, other major social structures in a child’s life play a significant part in the formation of male identity. One such social structure is school. Upon reviewing the social relations perspective, it was determined to be the most appropriate and applicable lens for this study.

Masculinity, Tolson (1977) argues, cannot be simply thought of as the opposite of femininity. Rather, he argues that there are a variety of types of gender identity and masculinity is expressed differently among various cultures. For example, Tolson describes how Western, industrialized societies define masculinity based on one’s career or occupation. These societies, such as the United States, are bound to a

hierarchical ladder of achievement and men are doomed to pursue personal rewards in the image of having 'made it.' Thus, men's pursuance of climbing the hierarchical ladder for professional advancement may result in personal, unintended consequences. Tolson states, "At home, with their insistence on status, they are prevented from enjoying certain kinds of domestic labour ('housework') and childcare. Social prestige becomes a psychological barrier, limiting their potentiality for personal relationships" (p. 13). Sheila Rowbotham describes such barriers that limit men's potentiality:

> "Men…are ashamed of their own sensitivity to suffering and love because they have been taught to regard these as feminine. They are afraid of becoming feminine because this means that other men will despise them, we will despise them and they will despise themselves. Men are as afraid of being rejected and despised as we are. They have only a defensive solidarity…We are moving towards a new world together but development is an uneven and painful process. We must be honest and help one another until they find a new way to express and organize themselves towards us. The generalization of our consciousness of our own subordination enables them to discover a new manner of being a man" (p. 43). (Tolson, 1977, p. 19).

The new manner of being a man is in essence a discovery of possibilities for the future. Yet to discover such possibilities, profeminists would argue that it is necessary for men to overturn their reliance on dominant masculinities, masculinities that Clatterbaugh (1990) describes as hegemonic masculinities. He further states that hegemonic masculinities vary among cultures, but all share the commonality that those who appear to demonstrate them are most apt to be positioned in a status of power and prestige. Clatterbaugh (1900) emphasized that typical traits include being articulate, loyal, heterosexual, white, and wealthy. If such dominant masculine traits are linked to one's status of power and prestige, then examining the institutions which perpetuate them is

necessary. Connell (2008) argued that examining institutions is a fundamental step in the general understanding of men and hegemonic masculinities as well as women and femininities. This position aligns with Tolson's assertion that male identity formation begins in childhood and is perpetuated in major social structures such as school (1997). Thus, the influence of the traditional social relations forces are still primarily at work within public schools. The unique role of schools in structuring a child's identity makes them an appropriate subject for an examination into broader questions of social relations.

Gorski (1998) provides a social relations perspective on male identity. He states that this identity forms from a man's positioning within a variety of social institutions. He notes that the social relations perspective was influenced by the feminist movement to address how cultural institutions, such as family, school, work, peer groups, and cultural identifiers, such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, shape the growth of individuals' identities. Gorski argued, if men are aggressive, oppressive, unemotional, and competitive, it is because of their learned behavior within social structures. Therefore, the absence of male teachers is thought to contribute to the manner in which boys experience identity formation in their early years.

Although it has been over 30 years since Tolson developed his social relations perspective, little has changed in regards to the social structure of the American public school. Teachers are predominantly female and male teachers are scarcely found. Furthermore, men who enter the field of education are typically found teaching at the high school level or working in administrative positions (NEA, 2003). Thus, this

literature review intends to explore how social forces interact with and shape men's identities as they negotiate teaching in elementary school.

The social relations perspective was determined to be the most appropriate and applicable lens for this study. Brademas (1987) writes: "In a country more and more apprehensive about the future, it is not surprising to find attention more and more focused on the institutions that, through our young people, help shape it: schools, colleges, and universities" (p. 62). Since this study will explore the phenomenon of male special education teachers' perceptions of their experiences of teaching at the elementary school level, this lens was found to be an excellent match. This perspective will allow the study to focus on male identity and because it suggests that identity forms from how men are positioned within various social structures, it will also provide an ideal perspective on the social structure of U.S. elementary schools. A visual representation of the study's theoretical framework is found below.

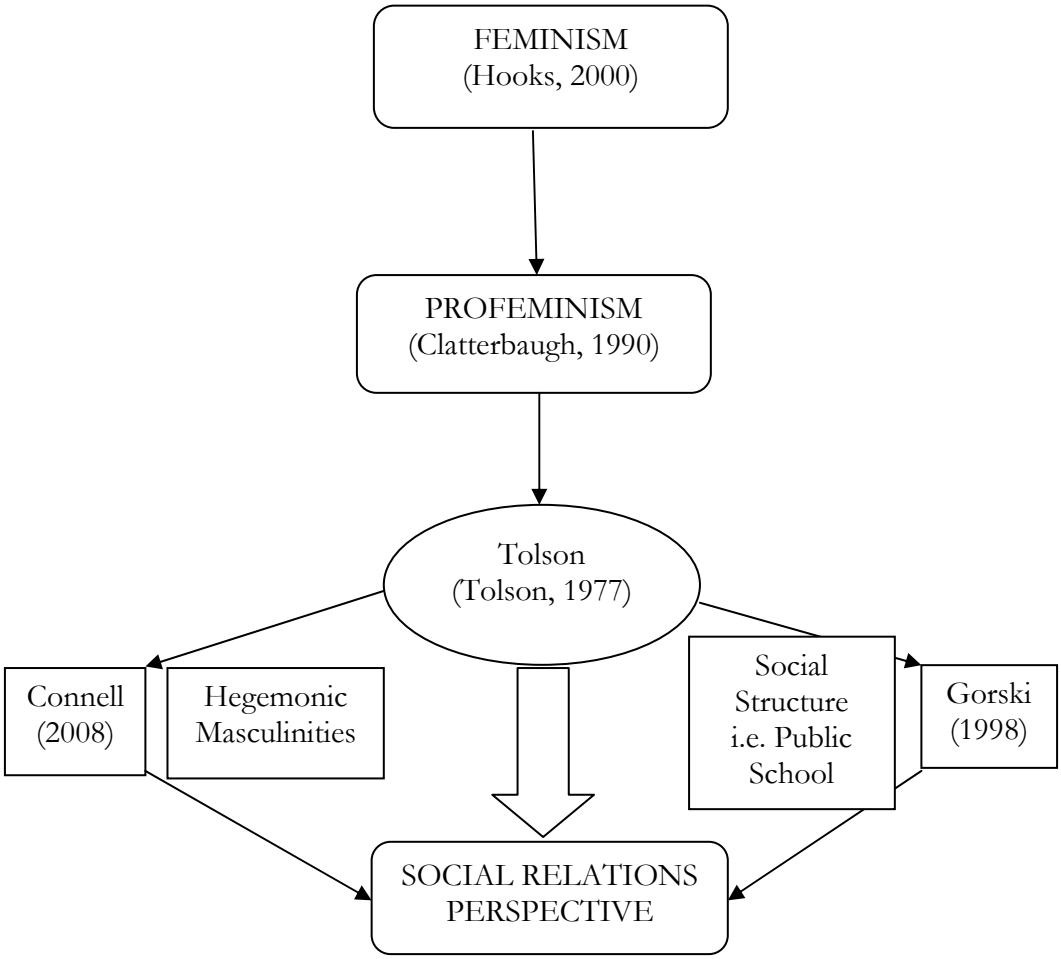


Figure 1: Context for the Study

Gender Roles in American Public Education

Tyack (2001) states that "schools are the most familiar of all civic institutions" (p. 1). U.S. public schools are spread across America and are found in the cities, suburbs, and towns that form this country. American public education is rich with history and the countless individuals, both male and female, had much to contribute to its current form.

Mantino (2008) explains that gender politics around elementary teaching as women's work and its emasculating associations for male teachers and boys has a long history. Tyack and Hansot (1982) described American public schools as grounded in a past which was presided over by a group of men who led education in a hierarchical, elitist, undemocratic, class-biased, racist, and sexist manner. The years following the American Revolution, educational leaders expressed a common conviction that education was essential to civil peace, prosperity, and individual morality. Such beliefs led to the Protestant-based common school philosophy which emerged in the northeast United States.

In the early nineteenth century, agriculture dominated America's economy and education was a predominantly religious venture. From the War of 1812 through the Civil War is frequently referred to as the "age of the common man." The age of the common man promoted education as a basic right and opportunity for all citizens (Kaestle, 2001). The common school ideal, led by Horace Mann, held the belief in equality which was rooted in the conviction that schools could provide the ladder that citizens may use to climb socially and economically (Pulliam and Van Patten, 2007).

In the 1830s, the American economy moved from its grounding in agriculture to industry and a demand for educated boys soon followed. The call to improve public schools was closely related to the need for a growing workforce of the industrialized society. Following the expansion of American public schools was a new found belief in equal educational opportunity. Kaestle (2001) noted that school reformers of this time disparaged charity schools, which were created to serve the poor, because they isolated

them in the process of educating them. Some groups, such as the New York Working Men's Advocate, suggested that public schools should provide boarding to all students in an effort to reduce feelings of inferiority among children of poor families. The belief in equal educational opportunity emphasized class-based equality with less emphasis on gender-based equality between boys and girls (Pulliam et al., 2007).

Men of this period comprised the majority of school instructors. However, the tenure of most men who taught was short lived, since many intended to return to their farms, or become lawyers and businessmen. Those who did remain in the field of education tended to create administrative positions for themselves to maintain their position within the school hierarchy. While the United States expanded in population and territory, so too did the need for schools and teachers. Horace Mann deemed that hiring women teachers would present the most practical resolution to the teacher shortage (Blount, 1998).

The early national period was a time in which leaders such as Horace Mann encouraged women to teach in elementary schools (Pulliam et al., 2007). During this time Catharine Beecher advocated for female teachers and viewed teaching as a woman's moral calling. She stated that "God designed women to be the chief educators of our race…It is woman who is fitted by disposition and habits and circumstances for such duties" (Kaestle, 2001, p. 53). Martino (2008) described that the early nineteenth century found teaching as an extension of the domestic duties that were deemed appropriate for women (Altenbaugh, 1992; Biklen, 1995; Heap & Prentice, 1991; Sugg, 1978). It was not only viewed as culturally and socially appropriate to hire women teachers, it was also

economically sensible to employ them as they were often paid significantly less than male teachers (Lortie, 1975).

Horace Mann and Henry Barnard believed that public schools had the power to create a more united American society. Education was to be the chief instrument to assimilate citizens of all cultures and backgrounds into American life. As Horace Mann once stated: “I believe in the existence of a great, immutable principle of natural law, or natural ethics—which provides the absolute right of every human being that comes into the world to an education; and which, of course, proves the correlative duty of every government to see that the means of that education are provided for all” (Pulliam et al., 2007, p. 131).

Horace Mann continued his efforts to achieve the right to an education for all. In the period between the Civil War and World War I the modern American school system expanded considerably. This growth was largely due to the increase in immigration, which led to population rising from 30 million in 1860 to over 100 million in 1920 (Pulliam et al., 2007).

The common elementary school was established prior to the Civil War; however, it only became a reality for most Americans between 1865 and 1900. Prior to World War I, the belief in the common school was extended to include secondary education. Thus, the standard American high school became a major institution within the nation’s educational system (Pulliam et al., 2007). As the American public school was expanding, so too was the need for a larger teaching force.

Since World War II, many changes have occurred in the American public school system. The civil rights movement, a growing Hispanic population, and educational problems among children from a variety of economic, social, racial, and ethnic backgrounds have received increased attention (Pulliam et al., 2007). During World War II, women were called upon to enter the workforce. "Rosie the Riveter" helped the military build tanks, ships, and aircraft for the war. The wartime contributions of women proved that they were dependable, efficient, and capable. As a result of their participation in the war, women significantly increased their role in the workforce and represent approximately 48% of it today (Pulliam et al., 2007).

Martino describes Oram's view of the post-WW2 era as a "deeply familial ideology" which was replicated in the public school system with "the man as the head of the family, supported by women teachers, who were supposed to be particularly suited to the education of younger children" (Martino, 2008, p. 199). As a consequence, Martino affirms that the patriarchal ideology enforced in schools tends to reflect the structure of sex-differentiated roles that are related to the nuclear family.

The first half of the twentieth century saw great expansions of American public schools. In 1958, for the first time, massive amounts of federal money, totaling over $100 million annually, were provided to support public education. These funds were made available through President Eisenhower's National Defense Act. At the beginning of the century, virtually all children attended elementary school and by the middle of the century, 80% of teens were enrolled in high school (Kaestle, 2001). Within a few more

years, the 1960s became a time dominated by concerns over equal opportunity. Schools were reorganized to create integrated settings during this time (Pulliam et al., 2007).

Despite efforts to reorganize American public schools, women and girls continued to experience discrimination in their education. In 1970, less than 1% of all law and medical degrees were awarded to women (Cuban, 2001). Leslie Wolfe stated: "The worldview that girls and boys learned from those early textbooks was one in which girls and boys didn't do the same kinds of activities…Boys were strong, boys were masters, boys were active. Girls were sweet, girls were passive, girls watched, girls helped" (Cuban, 2001, p. 161). By this time women increased their representation in the teacher workforce to comprise the majority of educators in the United States. The role of the American teacher had shifted from an institution once dominated by men to one dominated by women (Cuban, 2001).

The majority of elementary teachers are now female (Acker, 1994). Men comprise only a small fraction of the elementary teaching force (NEA, 2008). Yet the need for more teachers is growing rapidly. According to Pulliam et al (2007), the United States Department of Education predicts that two million teachers will be needed within the next decade. The attraction of men into the field is uncertain. Tolson (1977) argued that in many cases, work is palatable for men only through the various types of masculine compensations it can provide, ranging from physical effort, comradeship, and the rewards of promotion. It is frequently only a man's identification of masculinity that keeps him at work each day. History has demonstrated that men typically work in careers that are based in some level of hierarchal order. The goal of such work has been to climb the

hierarchal ladder where one may exert masculine dominance over others. If this is the case for men in the workplace, can the milieu of an elementary school offer men such masculine compensation? Or, can it act as an alternative hierarchical or egalitarian order for men?

Review of Research on Men in Education

Due to the paucity of the literature related to men who teach elementary special education, the following review is organized by the subsequent themes: constructing masculinity and femininity; gendered assumptions; gender differences in teaching; experiences of men in elementary education; and teachers in elementary school. The literature review will then be followed by a brief summary.

Constructing Masculinity and Femininity

All children have to come to terms with society's image of what is masculine and what is feminine. Learning the social standards of masculinity and femininity and attempting to live up to them is part of every child's development. This progression is evident in the United States. Western culture has stereotypically labeled men as aggressive, competitive, and instrumentally oriented. Conversely, women have been labeled as passive, helpful, and expressive. Such stereotypes assume that gender differences are based on innate distinctions in traits, personalities, and temperaments of men and women (Connell, 1995; Sabbe and Aelterman, 2007; Terman and Miles, 1936).

Masculinity and femininity are now viewed not as innate distinctions, but rather based upon social conditions. Margaret Mead (1935) addressed temperament differences in males and females. Her study concluded that the observed differences in temperament among men and women were not based in biological differences. Instead, the differences were a result of distinctions in socialization and the cultural expectations of each sex. Connell (1995) described the cultural expectation for men and masculinity. He explained, "Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (p. 77). Therefore, Connell's definition asserted that masculinity is practiced in an effort for men to construct relationships of dominance over women. This, as Tolson (1977) described, is learned in childhood.

Knudsen (2004) conducted a series of interviews grounded in gender paradoxes of boy-girl gender differences. These contradictions should not be thought of as an either-or antithesis, but rather as "both-and." Knudsen (2004) illustrated the gender paradox in the following excerpt of an interview elementary age children:

> "Are there differences between the behavior of girls and boys in the class?" [Female interviewer, gender researcher.]
> "Boys make a bit more noise, and they also talk a bit more, and they don't do as much work." [Response from female pupil.]
> "Girls aren't as interested in sport, and they don't dare as much as the boys. And they don't get told off as much as the boys." [Response from male pupil.] (p. 102)

Knudsen argued that gender dualism determines the positions that individuals take up and is placed in the hetero-normative model as either man or woman. This brief extract

demonstrates how children view gender differences between boys and girls in the hetero-normative model.

Paechter's (2006) research of literature pertaining to how masculinities and femininities are constructed in school further investigated how children learn to create and perform both masculinity and femininity. Her investigation focused on the development of gender in the social systems to which children belong. Paechter (2006) stated that a child's body is particularly prominent in school because a great number of their thoughts about gender are related to external bodily expressions such as clothing, hairstyles, and physical style. In her study, Paechter (2006) referred to Walker (1998), Francis (1998), Reay (2001), Renold (2001), and Paechter (2003b), all of whom argue that "while a variety of masculinities and femininities is possible, both within school and out, children who wish to construct themselves publicly as feminine boys or masculine girls will be marginalized in peer communities of masculinity and femininity practice" (p. 131). This phenomenon indicates that social expectations shape what children construct as masculine or feminine.

Smith's (2007) research on ethnographic data of interviews with teachers and students from a large co-ed secondary school demonstrated how school outcomes are negatively affected by boys' dealings in peer-controlled hegemonic masculinity. He argued that there is an invasive homophobia in school culture, in which some teachers ironically act as cultural accomplices, who adopt compulsory heterosexuality in appealing to alienated and troublesome young men.

Smith (2007) argued that prevailing forms of hegemonic masculinity influence boys' attitudes towards schoolwork. Smith posited that there is a resolute attachment to the normative principles of an era in which masculine subjectivity is defined in conflict "with the 'real' world of industrial manual labor, and its primary 'symbol of machismo,' and the wage packet" (p. 192). Schoolwork, Smith contended, is an intellectual pursuit situated as feminine as opposed to manual labor and is something that girls do. Anyone who expresses interest in study becomes an object of stigmatizing homophobic maliciousness in adolescent culture.

Feeney and Freeman (1999) concluded that a teacher's individual personality, temperament and life experiences influence what he or she thinks, acts, and feels towards children and their families. Thus, male teachers who practice normative displays of masculinity will impact those around them. Additionally, male teachers frequently serve as commanding forms of the very same dominant masculinity that boys struggle to achieve (Smith, 2007). Connell (2000) added that schools construct institutional definitions of masculinity and students adopt these masculinities merely by entering the school and living in its walls. Concurrently, Smith (2007) argued that calling for more male teachers to serve as role models for boys remains fruitless as long as teachers continue to invest in normative masculinity and heterosexuality. He concludes, "If schools are to genuinely embrace the notion of inclusive gender relations, then educators at the local level have a central role to play in progressively moving towards critical reflection on the ramifications of their own institutional practices" (p. 193). However,

Paechter (2006) argued that bodies—or in other words, gender—cannot be perceived or conceived except through cultural norms and discernment.

Paechter (2006) further asserted that although children's bodies are initially neutral, school practices teach children that they are not only embodied, but embodied as sexed individuals. For example, schools teach that boys and girls are expected to dress differently. Consequently, Paechter suggested that children need to be treated as embodied persons whose bodies are deeply connected not only to their identity, but also their behavior and understanding of gender, race, and class. She argued that if embodiment is understood as a fundamental part of identity, then the dualisms of male/female, sex/gender, and mind/body may be undermined and will lead to "a more effective conceptualization of what it is to be sexed, or gendered, and how this affects how we construct and enact our identities" (p. 133). In other words, such dualisms reinforce current gender stereotypes which in turn, reinforce the manner in which children engage in and demonstrate their gendered identity. Paechter suggested that children ought to connect to their identity not through the influence of socially construed gender stereotypes, but rather by freely expressing their own uninfluenced persona. Perhaps if there were more male teachers in elementary schools who would critically reflect on the institutional practices of gender relations, there might be a broader range of gender norms within schools and consequently society at large.

Foundations of Masculinity

American society is comprised of a multitude of social institutions. Connell (2008) explained that the term "institution" when used in the social sciences is roughly identical to "organization." He argued that elementary schools serve as institutions that influence gender in organizational life. Sargent (2001) elaborated that institutions create and reproduce differences between men and women which can result in one group receiving unwarranted advantage over others. He added that jobs are often designed based on sex stereotypes which lead to a division of labor that reinforces orthodox thinking of which jobs are suitable for women and men.

Public schools set a clear example of the social rules of gendered expectations, all of which begin in the elementary years. As Tolson (1977) noted, the foundations of masculinity are formed in boyhood, as boys experience family, school, and peers. He further noted the boy's family provides basic emotional predisposition that they bear throughout life. This emotional predisposition is then extended in the education system and informally in the cultures of peer groups.

Nearly all American citizens spend the majority of their early years in school. As a result, boys and girls shape their identities within this milieu. Connell (2000) stated that discipline problems in schools most often involve boys, and school violence is primarily performed by boys. Furthermore, it is boys who are slower to read, more apt to drop out of school, and more apt to be in programs for children with special needs. Perhaps these "traits" are biological characteristics of boys, or perhaps they represent the expectations

placed upon them by society. Alan Sandison (1967, p. 15) describes the 'ten commandments' of the public schoolboy as noted by Tolson:

> There is only one God; and the Captain of School is His Prophet.
> My School is the best in the world.
> Without big muscles, strong will, and proper collars there is no salvation.
> I must wash much and in accordance with tradition.
> I must speak the truth even to a master, if he believes everything I tell him.
> I must play games with all my heart, with all my soul and with all my strength.
> To work outside class hours is indecent.
> Enthusiasm, except for games, is in bad taste.
> I must look up to the older fellows and pour contempt on newcomers.
> I must show no emotion and not kiss my mother in public (1977, p. 35).

These 'ten commandments' illustrate the boys' approval of the institutional system of school and its support of masculine character. Furthermore, it delineates the manner in which masculinity was the paradigm for boys four decades ago. Some of the boys, who learned such masculine ideals 40 years ago, have likely become fathers. What sort of model do they serve for their own children?

For the most part, parents and educators would likely suggest that boys need more male role models in school. However, Roulston and Mills (2000) stated that boys should not be construed as victims in an effort to move towards more gender equality in schools, rather the effort should be to explore the manner in which dominant masculinity creates gender order for already advantaged boys and men. They affirmed that "we regard suggestions that boys are now in crisis as representing crude overstatements of the gains made in girls' schooling over the last 20 years or so" (p. 221). Yet other studies oppose this notion and argue that more male teachers would be positive for elementary schools.

Carter's (2008) qualitative study involved individual interviews with 10 male elementary school teachers and supports the hypothesis that more men in elementary education would provide positive contributions to schools. His research captured the experiences and opinions of male elementary school teachers from across several school districts. In a semi-structured format, Carter asked his study's participants the following questions (p. 40-41):

> 1. Why did you decide to become an elementary school teacher?
> 2. When did you first know you wanted to teach? When did you decide to opt for the elementary level? Do you remember a specific incident that made you consider this as a feasible possibility?
> 3. What life experiences influenced your choice for this career?
> 4. Did you come straight from school or try other career options first?
> 5. What family influences have affected your choice to be an elementary teacher?
> 6. Describe the male that has had the greatest impact in your life.
> 7. What experiences have you had working with children prior to your professional training and employment?
> 8. Did you have any male teachers when you were in elementary school? What are some memorable experiences from those years?
> 9. Were you successful in school? Did you have a positive attitude toward school?
> 10. What activities did you like best in school? How would you say you learn best?
> 11. As people learned of your decision to teach at this level, how was the news received? How were you treated at the time? What is your perception of how you are treated currently?
> 12. Who supported you the most in this decision? Who did not support you? What has been your experience with male peers and their attitudes towards your career choice?
> 13. How supportive did you find your university training to be? Were you able to establish a supportive network? Any male peer support?
> 14. What part of your personality does the elementary classroom bring out the most?
> Is this a part of your personality you have developed/refined over time or has this always come naturally to you?
> 15. What did you anticipate about the job that has proven to be true? What did you not anticipate?
> 16. Why not teach at the secondary level?

17. What do you think could attract more men to the profession? In your opinion, is there a need for more aggressive recruitment by universities and public school administrations?
18. Do you think the status of teaching is an issue for male teachers?

The results of these interviews described and analyzed the various factors that influenced these men to become elementary school teachers. The participants in his study agreed that men made essential contributions as behavioral and cultural counter-weights to a distinctly female school environment. They also shared the desire to improve the lives of children.

These studies exemplify some of the pressures and expectations that boys face in social milieus such as school. However, there was little discussion of boys' ability to exercise free will and their opportunity to follow their own individual needs and desires. According to Connell (2000): "Masculinities and femininities are actively constructed, not simply received. Society, school and peer milieu make boys an offer of a place in the gender order; but boys determine how they take it up" (p. 162).

Gendered Assumptions

Sargent (2001) asserted that the United States continues to maintain gender order through the sexual division of labor, which is evident in the way a hierarchy of gendered jobs has been established and reproduced. Furthermore, Coleman and Hong (2008) observed that women have faced discrimination for centuries. Moreover, women have faced lower social status and experienced restrictions in the roles that are offered to them due to the stereotypes of being female. Coleman and Hong further suggested that an individual's self-perception may be influenced by their awareness of their own identity.

Foster and Newman (2005) investigated the relationship between gender and identity by interviewing male primary teachers. They used the term “identity bruising” to describe the unexpected “knock backs” that male trainees and teachers receive during their initial experiences of the ‘female’ culture of the primary school. Their study drew from stories of a small sample of beginner and practicing male teachers in the UK. They explored how men become aware of, understand, and cope with the nature of gendered assumptions in regards to male teachers. The emerging themes from the men’s stories reflected society’s orthodox views of male primary teachers. These male teachers described how the public views them as a “handyman, sportsman, sexual predator, precocious careerist, potential child abuser, staff room sex symbol, discipline man, father figure, or simply a comment-worthy rare commodity” (Foster and Newman, 2005, p. 345). Male teachers are in a unique position to cope with the gendered assumptions that they face in school. Carter (2008) found that men who teach ought to have a strong sense of their ability and identity to successfully enter this profession.

Gosse, Parr, and Allison (2008) postulated that the school environment has a hidden and sometimes overt atmosphere of violence. Specifically, they identified this as “symbolic violence” which is described as “opposed to physical violence, may be seen as acts that dehumanize, alienate, demoralize and threaten; these acts may even be inactions, subconscious, and implicit” (2008, p. 65). Gosse et al. also found that the participants felt that they were constantly being policed when having physical contact with children, such as hugging or holding hands, while it was a near non-issue for their female colleagues. They found that the policing of male affection and sensitivity towards children took the

guise of the male teacher candidates' sense of unease around children when circumstances arose in which they may need to comfort children in a sensitive manner. Furthermore, these men were given verbal warnings by other teachers, administrators, and education professors regarding the possibility of being perceived as a pedophile. The authors suggested that symbolic violence may be a result from transgressions of socially endorsed codes, or a trespass into women's space. It would then seem fitting that in an atmosphere of violence, bruisings are likely to occur.

Foster and Newman (2005) described "bruisings" as arising from the societal beliefs that primary teaching is an unsuitable job for a man, either because primary teaching lacks status, or because men could be a 'danger' to young children. It would then be fitting to assume that such bruisings may deter men from teaching. In some cases, men with an initial interest in the profession may lose their attraction to it altogether. While men face potential disadvantages teaching in elementary schools, perhaps male students also cope with their own set of challenges.

In their study of male music teachers, Roulston and Mills (2000) derived teachers' gendered interpretations of masculinity and power within schools. A central need for these teachers was to distance themselves from anything considered feminine or unmanly. The researchers found that these men tended to adopt the practice of being manly which they argue is likely to legitimize homophobic attitudes towards them because they "serve to create what they seek to avoid—the signification of music as an unmasculine activity" (p. 234). In other words, male teachers are prone to reinforcing masculine stereotypes in order to minimize their alienation in an environment in which

they are already a minority. However, such practices may serve to alienate students who do not live up to such societal norms of masculinity. Knudsen (2004) suggests that individuals who place themselves in the gender paradox of the boy-girl gender difference will in fact make a difference in school. She suggests that by placing oneself between the paradoxes, one will create the possibility to find more prolific paths both within and against gender differences. Yet the task is not easy. Sargent (2001) noted that "identities are negotiated until they make sense to everyone involved in the interaction" (p. 41).

Gender Differences in Teaching

Despite the fact that the majority of the teaching population consists of women, men are still present as teachers in America's schools (NEA, 2008). A number of studies center on this topic and the various differences that exist between male and female teachers. Thus, gender differences in teaching will be explored in the areas of sex differences, gender dynamics, and identity formation.

Sex Differences

The majority of elementary teachers are now female (Acker, 1994) and men comprise only a small fraction of the elementary teaching force (NEA, 2008). What then accounts for this discrepancy in the teacher workforce? Sabbe and Aelterman (2007) investigated a large set of survey studies about male and female teachers' educational beliefs. The studies differed by country, region, teacher grade level, and teacher demographics. Despite these differences, they found a number of trends in the results.

They further described how studies of job satisfaction among teachers did not report large differences between male and female teachers. However, differences do exist. Female teachers tend to display higher levels of satisfaction than male teachers and male teachers tend to display higher levels of stress and burnout than female teachers.

As previously stated, Sargent (2001) described how institutions, such as school, create and reproduce differences between men and women which can result in one group receiving unwarranted advantage over others. He further described that jobs are often designed based on sex stereotypes which lead to a division of labor that reinforces orthodox thinking of which jobs are suitable for women and men. Perhaps this division of labor is a contributing factor to the level of job related stress and burnout for male teachers.

When investigating studies on the motivations to choose the teaching profession, Sabbe and Aelterman (2007) discerned that women tend to choose to teach earlier in their lives than do men. Furthermore, they stated that teaching was often not a man's first career choice. Sabbe and Aelterman also argued that studies show that student perceptions of their teachers do not show a considerable difference in regards to gender. They stated that for those differences that do arise, women are typically held in higher regard than men (Bennett, 1982; Feldman, 1993; Hancock et al., 1993; Rowden & Carlson, 1996; Jules & Kutnick, 1997; Galguera, 1998; Leone-Perkins et al., 1999).

When exploring teacher gender and student achievement, Sabbe and Aelterman (2007) found that most studies indicate that a teacher's sex has little if any effect. They also found some evidence that female students develop a more positive attitude towards

mathematics and other “traditionally non-typical female subjects” when taught by a female teacher (p. 527) (Evetts, 1993; Mallam, 1993; Duru-Bellat, 1995; Li, 1999).

Gender Dynamics

Sabbe and Aelterman (2007) explored a variety of studies relating to gender dynamics which occurred through life history narratives, interviews, group discussions, personal reflections, surveys, examinations of photographs and pictures, and representations of teachers in popular culture (television, films, etc.). They found that research demonstrates that teaching is both historically and culturally permeated with numerous discourses and subjectivities of gender. Such discourses have consequences for both male and female teacher identity and how they are perceived (Sabbe and Aelterman, 2007). Carter (2008) suggests that society plays a major role in the social implications that teachers face by suggesting that teaching is a feminine profession. Consequently, he proposes that society views men who choose to teach, particularly elementary school, to be effeminate. It is likely then, that some male teachers may take steps to avoid finding themselves in this role.

As previously stated, Roulston and Mills (2000) found that the male teachers of their study tended to adopt the practice of being manly which they argue is likely to legitimize homophobic attitudes towards them because they “serve to create what they seek to avoid—the signification of music as an unmasculine activity” (p. 234). In other words, male teachers are prone to reinforcing masculine stereotypes in order to minimize their alienation in an environment in which they are already a minority

Sabbe and Aelterman (2007) referred to Acker (1995), Biklen (1995), and Duncan (1996) when they state that teaching is primarily related with femininity, motherhood, and caring. They affirm that a good teacher may be compared to a good mother who loves, cares, and sacrifices for her children. They argue that these comparisons create social expectations towards teachers who are expected to demonstrate traits such as altruism, self-sacrifice, and dedication. They also described how such discourses have overcome the working conditions and career mobility of female teachers since they are depicted as selfless individuals who teach for the sake of their students rather than for any personal or monetary gain (Duncan, 1996; Munro, 1998; Tamboukou, 2003).

Studies by Benton, Decorse, and Vogtle (1997), Sumison (1999, 2000), Sargent (2000), Smedley and Pepperell (2000), Francis and Skelton (2001), Oyler et al. (2001), Cushman (2005), and Hansen and Mulholland (2005) demonstrated that male teachers are also laden with gendered discourses (Sabbe and Aelterman, 2007). Sabbe and Aelterman added that a strong theme from interviews with male teachers is an atmosphere of mistrust that men have to work in. Such mistrust was described in allegations of pedophilia and homosexuality. Furthermore, male teachers are often expected to fill the role of the primary male role model to children of single mothers. Martino (2008) elaborated that being a male role model has become tantamount with being a real man whose job is to ensure that boys' masculinity is properly developed.

Sabbe and Aelterman (2007) conclude that sex difference research has not uncovered many clear differences between male and female teachers. The sex differences that did occur were better described as weak tendencies. However, socially constructed

gender discourses form the professional identities of teachers and the manner in which they are perceived.

Identity Formation

Vavrus (2008) asserts that public schools create an atmosphere filled with sexuality and gender identification anxieties which affect all facets of the lives of children, including their academic achievement. Educators at all levels are also caught up in this atmosphere. Vavrus (p. 384) state that teachers "are likely to be legitimately anxious about the reactions of some parents and, worse, the popular press if they stray into territory considered by some to be too risky (even risqué)" (Epstein et al., 2001, p. 136). He further argues that heterosexuality is the enduring expected future for children and such expectations are regularly reinforced by their teachers. This notion is supported by Green's (1998) assertion that the cultural organization of public schools is patriarchal in nature. These very environments reinforce such heterosexual conceptions.

In his study of teacher identity formation, Vavrus (2008) engaged 38 teacher candidates in generating autoethnographies. After developing the autoethnographies, common patterns emerged amongst the teacher candidates. Every teacher candidate shared their experiences of expectations to conduct themselves according to conventionally approved gender roles. In this study, all male teacher candidates reported that they were expected to display masculine traits throughout their schooling. Every female in this study reported that they were expected to display feminine traits in school. They further shared that they experienced occasions what they now recognize as sexism

that occurred within their schools. It was noted that one would risk the scorn of their peers if their role was breached.

O'Connor (2006) investigated how emotions shape teachers' identity. In her series of in-depth semi-structured interviews with three participants, she found that teachers' experiences of caring are centered in their need to maintain positive professional relationships with students and in their individual ideals towards their role as a teacher. She also ascertains that personal reflection and social contact with others is essential to the growth of teachers' professional identities.

Caring emotions, O'Connor (2006) argues, affect teachers' actions and reflections. Teaching standards attempt to identify and instruct the professional role of teachers. Yet teachers' identities are not only intricate but also socially positioned within their lived experiences. His study's participants drew on their sense of identity as a rationalization for their caring behavior as teachers. O'Connor found that the individual and inherent significance of caring gives value to teachers' work and validates their remaining in the profession. She noted, however, that the magnitude of teachers' emotions is underemphasized in educational policies. Furthermore, feminist theorists regard the ethic of care to be more characteristic of women than of men (Green, 1998). Green (1998) asserts that studies of elementary schools in international settings have indicated that female teachers typically view caring as at the teacher's core. This is characterized by prominent maternal imagery. Green (p. 2) refers to Acker (1995), who describes both early childhood and elementary school teachers as a "kind of reflective practitioner mother" whose teaching pedagogy centers on care and empathy. Green

suggested that limited evidence is available that establishes men as inappropriate people to provide the care and nurturing that is necessary to teach early childhood and elementary education, and yet men are viewed with discomfort when seen in such roles.

Influences and Experiences of Men in Elementary Education

Teachers often enter their profession with ideals that they hope to share with others, namely their students. As Paul, Lavely, Cranston-Gingras, and Taylor (2002) stated:

> Teachers often enter the profession [special education] with a romantic idealism about the role they can play in the lives of children with disabilities. Unfortunately, cultural realities and utilitarian policies of schools can defeat interest in individualizing instruction for students, and the bureaucracies of public education can create an environment that places the individualized care agenda in jeopardy and ultimately defeats the idealism. Some teachers leave; some lower their expectations to save their sanity and stay (p. 3).

The experiences of teachers who enter the field of special education may vary widely. Perhaps their experiences are similar due to the specific work required of the profession and perhaps these experiences simply vary by gender. Therefore, an appropriate review of the phenomenon of men in elementary education must begin with an examination of that which influenced them to teach.

Sargent (2001) researched how men entered teaching by conducting a series of narratives. The responses of his participants indicated that getting into teaching involved experiencing career options that proved unsatisfactory which allowed them the opportunity to have a new understanding regarding their desire to work with children.

Careers that participants found themselves in prior to teaching included working as an architect, business manager, rock and roll musician, contractor, and engineer. Sargent (2001) noted that these early career positions, illustrating men's work, led the participants of his study to recognize that they were not in their professional calling. Sargent noted that one man described that he felt like a "square peg in a round hole" when attempting to function in a "masculine" work environment (p. 37).

Cushman (2005) explored how personal relationships may influence a man's decision to enter the classroom. A common theme that the 17 men expressed was their family's reactions to their decisions to teach ranged from being supportive to being amused or concerned. Many of the participants also stated that they feared others' reactions due to the perception that teaching is a woman's job and that their masculinity would be under question. Many of the participants discussed that their decision to teach primary school elicited the response that they would be better off teaching secondary school, which was perceived as having a better image than primary teaching. However, Carter (2008) found that men who received encouragement and support from their family and friends were more likely to teach. The support and approval they received played a considerable role with their desire to teach. In addition to support and approval, however, does salary play a role in enticing or swaying a man from becoming a teacher?

Ghorbani's (2008) survey found that participants held impractical expectations towards their projected salaries during their first year of teaching. It was noted that the majority of participants expected to earn approximately $30,000, while the starting salary was much closer to $24,000. Since these men placed a strong emphasis on the importance

of money in determining their job satisfaction, Ghorbani suggested that administrator's salaries will tempt them from the classroom and into managerial positions, or possibly leaving education altogether. Yet, it may be argued that the image of financially struggling teachers, especially neophyte teachers, is common knowledge. Therefore, it is anticipated that there were other experiences in their pre-service preparation that encouraged them to enter the classroom.

The participants of Cooney and Bittner's (2001) study discussed improving pre-service education. These men argued that in their college classrooms they often experienced a bias against male students. They spoke of their desire for a more male-friendly experience, which would best be met through being paired with a male mentor. Paul, Lavely, Cranston-Gingras, and Taylor (2002) argue that: "Images of self are critical to the process of becoming a teacher because they constitute the personal context within which new information will be interpreted, and are the stuff of which teaching persona is created (McLean, 1999)" (p. 179).

Gosse et al. (2008) also investigated the experiences of male pre-service teacher candidates at a university in Northern Ontario. Their research focused on the experiences of candidates who did not complete their education degree. Gosse et al. (2008) explained that the participants were attempting to enter the teaching profession, which regularly expects caring and compassion as normal teacher attributes. However, teacher attributes vary for a multitude of reasons. Teachers vary in gender, race, age, values, and personal life experiences. These differences are brought with them to the classroom and invariably influence their teaching (Paul et al., 2002).

Perhaps male and female elementary school teachers share a set of similar professional experiences. Or perhaps men who enter elementary education share experiences that are unique to their gender. Worthy's (2005) longitudinal study following a single male participant's experiences in his first to fifth year of teaching in an urban Texas school centered on the participant's perceptions of his early years of teaching. Worthy's examination identified a growth in the participant's confidence, experience, and competence as he progressed through each year of teaching. She concluded that teacher turnover threatens school reform and even teachers who remain in the profession can experience continuing negative effects if they undergo difficulties in their early professional years. While the participant in the study experienced challenges in his early years of teaching, he was able to successfully meet them and grow to become a skilled educator. Worthy (2005) asserted: "When we don't ease the way for new teachers, it is a sign that they are not valued. Ultimately the students suffer the consequences due to the lack of support for beginning teachers" (pp. 396-397). This apparent general lack of support for beginning teachers has the potential to result in significant consequences relating to their retention in the profession.

The first few years of teaching are arguably challenging for most educators. Worthy noted that the first year of teaching is extremely difficult when teachers encounter challenging students and feel unsupported by their colleagues and principal. When her participant experienced such feelings, they led him to consider a new profession. Yet this man persisted through these challenges. Worthy reported: "Now in his fifth year in the same grade at the same school, Mark [pseudonym] is highly regarded

by colleagues, students, parents, and administrators" (pp. 379-380). It is reasonable to assume that like Mark, most beginning teachers, regardless of gender, would experience similar feelings in such a situation. Yet, perhaps a lack of support is more detrimental to a teacher who is a minority within their school. In Mark's case, he was a minority based on gender. Therefore, gender division is likely a common theme across U.S. schools.

There is an overall lack of a male presence within elementary schools; only 9% are male (NEA, 2003). School reform agendas are continually raising issues relating to the teaching workforce. A prominent issue in schools is the gender division of the teacher workforce. Cohen (2004) referred to Chafetz, who states: "Undergirding all systems of gender stratification is a gender-based division of labor, by which women are chiefly responsible for different tasks than are men (1991, p. 77)" (p. 239). As this division of labor continues, boys and girls will seldom have men as their elementary school teachers (Connell, 2000). Several authors have explored this phenomenon and identified various issues relating to the motivation to teach and the influence of stereotypes.

At what point in life do individuals begin making decisions about their future careers? Increasing support of research suggests that career development is a lifelong process that begins in childhood (Magnuson & Starr, 2000). Career-related decisions that children make during their elementary school years have been regarded as particularly important. Seligman, Weinstock, and Heflin (1991) found that half of a group of children aged 9-10 believed that they had already made decisions relating to their adult careers. Additionally, Trice and McClellan (1994) found that approximately 23% of adults aged 40-55 believed that they had made decisions to enter their current professions as children.

An important conclusion made by Helwig (2001) is that elementary-aged children often hold career goals that are typically unattainable for the generable population, such as becoming a professional athlete. Such career-related beliefs of elementary-aged children imply that they may be inadvertently and needlessly restricting their future career options (Gottfredson, 1981). The American School Councilor Association (ASCA) (2003) argues that career development efforts within elementary schools should develop the children's knowledge of a range of potential career options. Students should also be encouraged from making precipitate decisions or eliminations of potential careers. ASCA describes that this is particularly necessary for those careers that may be viewed as inappropriate for their gender, but may be a good future match for them.

In everyday organizational life a man's performance at work may define his masculine personification (Connell, 2008). Connell reflected Donaldson's (1991) view that such masculine personification may be seen on a factory floor where working-class masculinity is defined in labor that destroys the body over time. Connell further expressed Dasgupta's (2003) view that another personification occurs in offices where middle-class masculinity is identified through codes of speech, dress, and demeanor. Connell concluded with the suggestion that different masculinities are produced in different organizational contexts. Then to what extent are masculinities personified in elementary school and what motivates men to teach?

Cushman (2005) explored the debate concerning both the need for more male primary schoolteachers and the causes of their minority status in New Zealand schools. In this study, all 17 participants stated that their desire to work with children was the major

reason for choosing the teaching profession. Additionally, most of the participants reported that enjoyment of their own school experience was a strong factor in being drawn to teaching. Yet Carter's (2008) interviews with male elementary school teachers found that they shared an authentic inclination to improve the lives of children. Each held the ideal that teaching would allow them to help children through devoted teaching, which Carter attributed to their inner desire to play a role in the greater good. Carter's work suggests that a man's personal experience as a youth in school could steer or deter him from teaching and men who do teach must have an authentic desire to do so.

Carter also found that the men who participated in his study had opportunities to teach and work with children. These positive experiences led them to feel satisfied about their work. Furthermore, these men found that teaching in an elementary setting would be a means in which they could realize the benefits of their working with children. However, while some men feel an internal impetus to teach, there are social forces that often hinder their motivation.

By using a focus group approach with pre-service teachers, classroom teachers, and male professors, Cooney and Bittner (2001) explored emergent issues for men in early childhood education. Their examination identified six categories of issues that included "low salaries, family and other influences on entering the field, teaching beyond the basics, improving pre-service education, recruitment of males, and advantages and disadvantages of males in the field" (Cooney and Bitner, 2001, p. 78). Such information is supported by Bryan Nelson, the founder of MenTeach, a nonprofit organization dedicated to recruiting male teachers. He suggests that three crucial causes for the

shortage of male teachers are low status and pay, the perception that teaching is women's work, and the apprehension of accusations of child abuse (Helen, 2008).

Participants in Cooney and Bittner's (2001) study determined that the category of low salaries was generated through two general themes. They found that teaching is viewed as undemanding, particularly in relation to summer vacations. The participants also espoused that the need to be their family's breadwinner was particularly challenging and many were concerned about adequately providing for their family. The category of family and other influences on entering the field was based in the level of support that the participants' experienced from their family. Many of the participants reported that their mothers encouraged their decision to teach, while their fathers attempted to sway them towards another career. Furthermore, few of the participants had male teachers themselves and those who did, reported that their experiences had little to do with their decision to teach. If having male teachers did not influence their decisions to teach, then this assertion sits in direct opposition to the call for more male teachers. Yet, recent studies argue for male teachers in every grade level.

An important recruitment tool that was identified in Cooney and Bittner's (2001) study regarded having at least one male teacher in every primary grade. This would in turn allow the male students to have teachers with whom they could identify. The participants expressed the opinion that there are advantages and disadvantages to having male teachers in early childhood education.

An additional issue that the men (Cooney and Bittner, 2001) raised was that merely having more men in the classroom is not enough; they must also be good

practitioners of the profession. Furthermore, they stated that there needs to be a balance between male and female teachers to serve as role models for young children. However, these men identified the possibility of feeling isolated in their positions. They also stated that the issues of touch between them and their students was a concern. The issue was not in the act of touching the students, but with the reactions from other teachers, administrators, and parents. Sargent (2001) supported this argument with themes that he found among his study's participants. Sargent noted that the theme that brought forth the greatest emotional reaction from male teachers was having to work with children "under a cloud of suspicion" (2001, p. 49). Cushman (2008) further highlighted this very concern as she describes the perception of male early childhood educators in early 1990s New Zealand. She referred to Hood (2001), who asserts that the country experienced a 'moral panic' that was the result of a single highly publicized instance of sexual abuse from an openly homosexual preschool worker. Cushman argued that the following 15 years, the country tracked the controversial case and media interest was devoted to issues facing men who work with children. The Child Forum (2004) illustrated a 1998 case of another male teacher who was charged with abusing his students. Although he was eventually acquitted, he headlined the news warning men not to become teachers (Cushman, 2008).

Cooney and Bittner (2001) identified a considerable amount of findings in the participant's views of gender-fair learning environments. The male participants discussed feeling isolated and uncomfortable speaking with their female colleagues about their classroom issues. Despite the internal motivations these men reported, external social

forces appear to be a factor that impacts the presence of male teachers in elementary school.

Negative media attention, as Cushman (2008) argued, has only functioned to amplify the public perception that teaching is a low status profession. This issue has significantly prevented men from entering the profession. Helen (2008) reflects on Nelson's description for men entering a career in education. He stated that men ought to get a thick skin. This is done by learning to navigate inappropriate questions, such as "Why would any healthy male want to work with kids?" (p. 1) and learning to challenge harmful stereotypes.

Summary and Implications for this Study

The literature and research affirmed that the issues of low salary, low social status, low social support, and pre-service experiences often deter men from teaching in elementary settings. However, the most influential factor appears to be based on gender and involves impacts on identity. Research suggests that the stereotypical feminized view of teaching is a major deterrent to entry into the profession for men. Not only do these stereotypes have the potential to attack a male teacher's masculinity, they may make them feel isolated from their colleagues. Men reported that the lack of gender-fair learning environments led them to develop feelings of isolation within their schools.

A discrepancy amid these studies was the ability to discover a cohesive foundation of the perceived importance of male teachers. What influences a man's choice

to become an elementary special education teacher? How do men describe their role as special education teachers and their professional experiences within the elementary school setting? How do men represent what it means to be 'male' in the context of elementary education? How do men experience identity within the elementary school setting? What influences enable men to persist in their roles as special education teachers within the elementary school setting? What underlying themes, if any, emerge from male teachers' descriptions and stories of teaching elementary special education? These questions will be addressed in the course this study. Participant responses and representations of their experiences will ideally paint a vivid picture of what it means to be a male elementary special education teacher.

To successfully achieve the intended purpose of this study, Carter's (2008) research on the factors influencing males to teach at the elementary school level guide the methods of this exploration. Although this research does not replicate Carter's work, his influence is evident throughout the course of study. This will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore how men experience their identity as elementary school special education teachers. Specifically, the study investigates how men describe: (1) the factors that influenced them to become elementary special education teachers, (2) how they view their role as special education teachers and their professional experiences in elementary schools, (3) what it means to be "male" in the context of elementary education, and (4) the influences that enable them to persist in their role as elementary special education teachers. The theoretical perspective that will shape this study is the social relations perspective (Tolson, 1977). As Gorski (1998) describes, the social relations perspective on male identity states that it is grounded in the suggestion that identity forms from men's positioning within a variety of social institutions. Thus, to aptly relate this perspective to the purpose of this study, qualitative methodology was employed, with phenomenology as the research paradigm. Case studies formed the design of the study and a combination of two individual interviews for each of the three participants and one focus group interview formed the method of data collection.

Epistemology

Qualitative methods are employed to conduct this study. Creswell (2007) defines qualitative research as research that:

> Begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes (p. 37).

A phenomenological paradigm was chosen to meet the goals of the study and research questions.

To better understand the phenomenological process, Van Manen (1990) explained that "phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (p. 9). Van Manen (1990) described that it is an exploration of the essence of lived experience. He adds that "phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld—the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it" (p. 9). In other words, "phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (p. 9). Van Manen explains that the results of a phenomenological study begin with an interpretive analysis of texts which are derived from human subjects.

The phenomenological approach is most appropriate to address the study purpose and questions because it is grounded in using participant-generated texts (interview transcripts) to gain a deeper understanding of the essence of their experiences. In an effort to collect the richest possible data, the in-depth phenomenological three-interview series of Dolbeare and Schuman was selected as the primary research tool for the study (Seidman, 2006). It is implicit that the teachers' perceptions of their experiences of

teaching elementary special education are complex and intricate. These descriptions clearly represent their experiences in the world of today's American public schools, and thus phenomenological case studies served as the study's design.

Design

To support the phenomenological approach of this study, case studies formed the design of the data collection process. Case studies were deemed most appropriate to meet the purpose of this study because they allowed for a holistic portrayal of the participants' experiences. Furthermore, case studies supported the organization of an array of information about the participants and then analyzed the cases by seeking patterns and themes in the data through in-depth analysis.

Van Manen (1990) describes the phenomenological case study interview process. He states that the interview serves two explicit purposes. The first purpose is that interviews allow experiential narratives to be gathered and explored. Such information may offer a resource for developing a greater understanding of the phenomenon. The second purpose allows the interview to be used as a medium to generate a conversational connection between the researcher and interviewee regarding the meaning of a particular experience. Van Manen (1990) warns that "one needs to guard against the temptation to let method rule the question, rather than the research question determining what kind of method is most appropriate for its immanent direction" (p. 66). In other words, he cautioned that the interview process needs to be constrained by the essential question that prompted the need for the research.

Creswell (2007) suggested that the data collection in a case study requires a wide range of procedures for the researcher to construct an in-depth representation of the case. Creswell advised that four forms of data may be used in combination when collecting data for case studies. In this study, these forms of data included interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual materials. Interviews served as the primary form of data for this study. The interviews were supported with additional forms of data, such as researcher notes, audio recordings of each interview, and transcriptions of the interviews. The use of these multiple forms of data were ideal for creating an information-rich case study.

Method

The selected method that supported the data collection for the phenomenological case studies was a modified version of Dolbeare and Schuman's in-depth three-interview series (Seidman, 2006). While the study followed Dolbeare and Schuman's structure and procedures for conducting each interview, the third and final interview occurred in focus group form (Seidman, 2006). The final interview occurred as a focus group because it provided a forum in which issues were uncovered that would not otherwise come up in individual interviews. The focus group also helped unearth common themes across all of the cases. The interviews and focus group are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Sargent (2001) noted that while interviews are useful methods of collecting data, they are not without problems. He described interviews as a form of "metacommunication" in which participants receive an impression that communication

rules are being imposed. Interviews also generate the conventional roles of the interviewer and the interviewee. Last, Sargent explained that the reigning communication norms of the culture cannot be monitored completely.

As noted in the previous chapter, a synthesis of Sargent (2001) and Carter's (2008) research on male teachers at the elementary school level guided the methods of this exploration. While Sargent's (2001) influence is evident in the structure and process of the interview process, Carter's (2008) influence is found in the questions asked during the interviews. Although this research did not replicate either researcher's work, their inspiration will be evident throughout the course of this study.

As previously described in chapter two, this study utilized Carter's (2008) study to structure the questions posed during the interviews. Carter asked his study's participant's the following questions (p. 40-41):

> 1. Why did you decide to become an elementary school teacher?
> 2. When did you first know you wanted to teach? When did you decide to opt for the elementary level? Do you remember a specific incident that made you consider this as a feasible possibility?
> 3. What life experiences influenced your choice for this career?
> 4. Did you come straight from school or try other career options first?
> 5. What family influences have affected your choice to be an elementary teacher?
> 6. Describe the male that has had the greatest impact in your life.
> 7. What experiences have you had working with children prior to your professional training and employment?
> 8. Did you have any male teachers when you were in elementary school? What are some memorable experiences from those years?
> 9. Were you successful in school? Did you have a positive attitude toward school?
> 10. What activities did you like best in school? How would you say you learn best?
> 11. As people learned of your decision to teach at this level, how was the news received? How were you treated at the time? What is your perception of how you are treated currently?

12. Who supported you the most in this decision? Who did not support you? What has been your experience with male peers and their attitudes towards your career choice?
13. How supportive did you find your university training to be? Were you able to establish a supportive network? Any male peer support?
14. What part of your personality does the elementary classroom bring out the most?
Is this a part of your personality you have developed/refined over time or has this always come naturally to you?
15. What did you anticipate about the job that has proven to be true? What did you not anticipate?
16. Why not teach at the secondary level?
17. What do you think could attract more men to the profession? In your opinion, is there a need for more aggressive recruitment by universities and public school administrations?
18. Do you think the status of teaching is an issue for male teachers?

This study utilized the above questions by modifying them to better match the participants of this study and by reflecting on elementary special education while separating them to occur over the course of three separate interviews. Table 3.2 of this study provides an organizing summary of this study's three interviews and the specific questions that were posed at each meeting.

The direction for the methodology of this study was governed by its purpose, i.e., to explore the perceptions of the experiences of male special education teachers at the elementary school level. The essential question of this study asks: how do men experience their identity as elementary school special education teachers? Sub-questions were asked to support the exploration of the aforementioned essential question, and are as follows:

- *Question 1:* What influences a man's choice to become an elementary special education teacher?

- *Question 2:* How do men describe their role as special education teachers and their professional experiences within the elementary school setting?
- *Question 3:* How do men represent what it means to be 'male' in the context of elementary education?
- *Question 4:* What influences enable men to persist in their roles as special education teachers within the elementary school setting?

An overview of the selected research methods, including participants, settings, tools, data collection procedures, and data analysis will be provided in the remainder of this chapter.

Participants

This study is intended to provide insights into male teachers' perceptions of their experiences of the phenomenon of teaching elementary level special education. Consequently, the selection of teacher participants is of great importance. Maxwell (2005) describes purposeful selection or purposeful sampling as "a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (p. 88). Therefore, purposeful sampling was necessary to select participants who were willing and able to discuss their experiences, and also willing to persist for the duration of time necessary to complete the scope of the study.

Selection Criteria

Participants were selected based on their ability to contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon under study. A total of three elementary level male special education teachers working in a large urban school district in the mid-Atlantic states were identified as potential participants. These men were purposefully selected to participate in the study based on how well they met the selection criteria, listed below. Additional participants would be invited to join the study if any of the three original participants choose to drop out, which was allowed at any time during the study. Ultimately, this was not necessary as the three original participants saw the research come to fruition. However, had the need arisen, purposeful selection would again have been employed to fill the opening. Additionally, instead of interviewing a larger number of participants, it was determined that in-depth interviews with three subjects would yield richer data. Interviews with a larger number of participants may produce greater breadth of information but it was likely that those interviews would lack the level of depth desired for this study.

Participants of varying age, race, years of experience, and certification were encouraged to take part in the study. It was imperative that the study ensured that the men who were selected to participate in the research were able to provide the most insightful and meaningful representation of their experiences as male elementary special education teachers. Thus, the following criteria were used to select participants for the study. The men were required to currently work in the large urban school district in a mid-Atlantic

state, teach in an elementary school, teach special education, and have a minimum of five years' teaching experience.

Through a series of email correspondence with the school district's human resources department, it was found that at the time of this study the district had a total of 2,428 male teachers working within its borders. Of this population 718 men taught at the elementary school level, of whom 70 taught special education. No details were provided regarding individual teacher information, and the breakdown of male teacher population was not accessible through the district website. Therefore, the only other considerations in selecting participants among these 70 men pertained to their geographical accessibility to partake in the study and their ability to dedicate the time necessary to participate in the interviews.

The School District

In an effort to concentrate the research within a single school district, the study took place in a large urban school district in the Mid-Atlantic States. The district was selected to participate in the study due to its large size. Currently, the district is the largest in the state which it resides and is one of the largest districts in the United States. Furthermore, of its 197 schools, 137 are elementary (preschool through grade six) with an additional nine special education centers and 48 alternative programs and learning centers. The remaining schools consist of middle, secondary, high, and alternative high schools, which were not be considered for this study.

Setting

As previously noted, this study was conducted within the boundaries of a large urban school district in a mid-Atlantic state. With the guidance of the researcher, participants had the opportunity to select a setting that they felt was most practical and appropriate to conduct the interviews. Participants were encouraged to select from a room within their school, local public library, or home. However, the researcher emphasized that the chosen setting should be private, quiet, comfortable, and conducive to the interview process. The researcher emphasized the selection of sites that were most convenient for the participants. However, additional criteria included selecting a site that encouraged a sense of professional purpose yet supported a sense of ease and relaxation.

Instrument

The primary instrument used for data collection in the study were protocols for a three-interview series. Seidman (2006) states that "interviewers who propose to explore their topic by arranging a one-shot meeting with an 'interviewee' whom they have never met tread on thin contextual ice" (p. 17). Furthermore, Dolbeare and Schuman (Schuman, 1982) designed the series of three interviews that "characterizes this approach and allows the interviewer and participant to plumb the experience and to place it in context" (Seidman, 2006, p.17). As previously mentioned, Dolbeare and Schuman's three-interview series was modified so that the final interview would occur in the form of a focus group. The format of the questions was structured in a manner which maintained consistency across the interviews. However, the questions were also open-ended in order

to permit a dialogue as each teacher explored his perceptions of experiences of teaching elementary special education. A copy of the interview protocols can be found under Appendix B. The questions that were posed during the three-interview series were developed to determine if the participants' experiences support the findings that were outlined in the literature review of this study.

The Interviews

As each participant was selected, specific parameters were agreed upon prior to beginning the study. It was intended that both the participants and researcher would be in agreement that each participant would receive a Visa gift card upon the completion of each interview. Gift cards valued at $25.00 were given upon the completion of the first and second interviews. A gift card valued at $50.00 was given upon the completion of the third interview. Thus, each participant received three gift cards with a total value of $100.00. The gift cards were intended to demonstrate the researcher's gratitude for each participant's personal time and energy to partake in the study. It was not intended as a means to induce participation. The participants were also reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time and without consequence. Each interview and the focus group were completed within 90 minutes, but varied within this time span. The interviews and focus group were recorded using two tape recorders to ensure accuracy when transcribing and interpreting the data. All information gathered during the research remained confidential. All participants remained anonymous and recordings and transcripts of the interviews and focus group were kept in a locked file cabinet at the

researcher's home. Each interview was conveniently located to both the participant and researcher with emphasis on convenience to the participant. The interviews occurred at either the participant's school, home, or at a local public library. The location of the focus group meeting was selected so that it was equally convenient for each participant. Each interview and focus group meeting was arranged with consideration to both the participants' and researcher's schedules and all of the interviews were conducted outside of school hours. They were also conducted with no more than two weeks separating each interview. Each participant was asked to review copies of their transcripts, final narratives, and reports of the interview in order to clarify or revise their statements, which helped to ensure the study's internal validity. Participants were required to demonstrate that they understood and assented to these parameters prior to participating in the study by signing a consent form which reiterates them in detail.

Data Collection

As noted above, data collection for this study was grounded in a series of interviews with three male elementary level special education teachers. The interviews occurred on an individual basis and were structured to address the study's essential question: how do men experience their identity as elementary school special education teachers? Four related sub-questions (listed above) were also asked. Table 3.1 provides a visual summarization of the study's data collection plan which details the major questions, data sources, and methods to collect data.

Table 3.1: *Organizing Summary of the Data Collection Plan*

Data Collection Plan		
Essential Question How do men experience their identity as elementary school special education teachers?		
Sub-Questions	Data Sources	Methods
1. What influences a man's choice to become an elementary special education teacher?	Individual participants	Recorded interviews, interview transcriptions, and field notes/memos
2. How do men describe their role as special education teachers and their professional experiences within the elementary school setting?	Individual participants	Recorded interviews, interview transcriptions, and field notes/memos
3. How do men represent what it means to be 'male' in the context of elementary education?	Individual participants	Recorded interviews, interview transcriptions, and field notes/memos
4. What influences enable men to persist in their roles as special education teachers within the elementary school setting?	Focus group	Recorded interviews, interview transcriptions, and field notes/memos

Three-Interview Series

The three-interview series was a critical tool in the exploration of male teachers' perceptions of their experiences of the phenomenon of teaching elementary special education. The first interview set up the context of the participants' experience (Seidman, 2006). The second interview permitted participants to reconstruct the features of their experiences within the context. The third and final interview urged participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences. The third interview occurred in the form of a focus group.

As previously discussed, both Sargent's (2001) and Carter's (2008) research on male elementary school teachers guided the methods of this exploration. This is particularly evident in the structure and process of questioning across the three interviews. The interview questions of this study were structured but posed in an open-ended way, in order to optimally engage the exploration of the participants' experiences. The questions were drawn and modified from Carter's (p. 40-41) list of 18 interview questions and prompts. This study included two interviews for each of the three participants and one focus group interview. This yielded a total of six individual interviews and one focus group. Each had verbatim transcripts, notes, and memos.

Prior to beginning the interviews, the researcher invited the participants to meet as a group for introductions and an informal discussion of the study for lunch at a local restaurant. The researcher desired to create an atmosphere of safety, ease, and comfort in which the participants would feel open to sharing their experiences without guard or hesitation. Furthermore, it was anticipated that by meeting both the researcher and other participants ahead of time, there might be a lessening of any potential anxiety towards participating in the interviews and focus group. Ideally, this first meeting would leave the participants eager and motivated to begin the research.

The first interview concentrated on the participant's focused life history. Seidman (2006) describes that "in the first interview, the interviewer's task is to put the participant's experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic up to the present time" (p. 17). Thus, participants of this study were asked to reconstruct their early experiences up to the time that they

became elementary special education teachers. An organizing summary of the first interview can be found in Table 3.2a.

The second interview concentrated on the details of the participant's experiences. Seidman (2006, p. 18) stated that "the purpose of the second interview is to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants' present lived experience in the topic area of the study." Thus, participants of this study were asked to reconstruct the details of their experiences as elementary special education teachers. An organizing summary of the second interview can be found in Table 3.2b.

The third and final interview took the form of a focus group and concentrated on the participants' reflection on the meaning of their experiences. Seidman (2006, p. 18) states that "in the third interview, we ask participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience. The question of 'meaning' is not one of satisfaction or reward, although such issues may play a part in the participants' thinking. Rather, it addresses the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life." Accordingly, this study asked participants, in a group setting, to look at their present experiences of teaching elementary special education and how the various features in their lives interrelate to shape their current situation. Sargent (2001) notes that the focus group interview will allow considerable insight into how to best structure the final project. He suggested that these focus groups may also support the emergence of themes as the men discuss their experiences and reflections. An organizing summary of the third interview can be found in Table 3.2c.

Sargent (2001) noted the importance of ensuring circularity to the interviews, in which each successive question is grounded in the previous question. Furthermore, he noted the importance of being faithful to the interview guide. He states: “Had I been faithful to my interview guide, I would have been more assertive in structuring the questions, including the order in which I asked them, and insisting the teachers provide “best” answers” (p. 173). This study has strived to structure a protocol that would guide the interview in a fluid and meaningful direction. Although questions have been created to maintain a consistent structure to each interview, they were intended to be responded to in an open-ended manner. Table 3.2 provides a visual summary of the study’s cross alignment of major research questions and the interview questions as they pertain to the individual interviews and focus group interview.

Table 3.2: *Organizing Summary of the Three-Series Interviews*

3.2a Interview One: Cross Aligning Major Research Questions and Interview Questions	
Sub-Questions	Interview Questions
What influences a man's choice to become an elementary special education teacher?	1. Why did you decide to become an elementary level special education teacher?
	2. When did you know that you wanted to be a special education teacher? When did you decide to teach at the elementary level?
	3. What life experiences influenced you to enter this career?
	4. Is teaching special education your first career, or were you in another career before teaching? If so, what influenced you to change careers?
	5. How did your family and friends react to your decision to teach elementary special education? Did they support you? Was anyone not supportive?
	6. Describe the male who has had the greatest impact in your life.
	7. Did you have any male teachers when you were in school?
	8. Did you enjoy school?
	9. Is there anything that you would like to share that we have not already discussed today?
3.2b Interview Two: Cross Aligning Major Research Questions and Interview Questions	
Major Research Questions	Interview Questions
How do men describe their role as special education teachers and their professional experiences within the elementary school setting?	1. What do you actually do on the job?
	2. What is it like for you?
How do you view yourself as a male in the school in which you are working?	3. What are the best qualities that a special education teacher should possess? Which of these do you possess?
	4. Is there anything that you anticipated about the job that you found not to be true? What did you not anticipate?
	5. Describe your relationships with students, parents, teachers, and administrators.
	6. Is there anything that you would like to share that we have not already discussed today?

3.2c Interview Three: Cross Aligning Major Research Questions and Interview Questions	
Sub-Questions	Interview Questions
What influences enable men to persist in their roles as special education teachers within the elementary school setting?	1. Given what you have said about your life, both before teaching and as a special education teacher, what is your lived experience as a special education teacher?
	2. Given what you have stated in these interviews, where do you see yourself in the future?
	3. Do you think that the status of teaching is an issue for male teachers and if so, why?
	4. What do you think could attract more men to the profession?
	5. Is there anything that you would like to share that we have not already discussed today?

The questions were developed to determine if the participants' experiences support the findings that were outlined in the literature review of this study.

Procedures

The researcher contacted the three confirmed participants either by phone or email to discuss the next steps in the research process. At this phase, the interview process was discussed and the first group meeting and interviews were scheduled. Prior to beginning the first interview, each participant was provided with two copies of a study participation consent form, which informed each participant of their rights and established that confidentiality was guaranteed. Both consent forms were signed by the researcher and participant. A copy was maintained in the researcher's confidential records and the second copy was provided to the participant for their personal records.

The three-interview series was employed for this study. The details of the three-interview series were provided earlier in this chapter. Interviews were semi-structured in format and participants were individually interviewed at the previously established location. The interviews were recorded by utilizing two digital audio recording devices as well as the researcher's use of the interview protocol to take notes as deemed necessary. As Sargent (2001) recommends, the interviews were then transcribed and coded. Once the transcribing and coding phase was complete, the researcher then listened to each interview while reading the corresponding transcription. This allowed the researcher to make notes on the transcription document and record any anomalies that he notices during the interview, such as long pauses, a change in tone of voice, and so forth. The researcher then identified commonalities among the participants' thoughts and reflections, and accounted for the individual experiences that were unique to each participant.

Trustworthiness of Data

Issues of validity and reliability are prominent in qualitative research and they may be viewed in a different light when considering the experiences and perceptions of human subjects. Thus several strategies were employed in this study in order to provide both valid and reliable data.

As Brinberg and McGrath (1985) advocate: "Validity is not a commodity that can be purchased with techniques" (p. 13). Instead, "it depends on the relationship of your conclusions to reality, and there are not methods that can completely assure that you have

captured this" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 105). Maxwell (2005) further emphasized that qualitative research design should illustrate how specific possible threats to validity may be ruled out. He describes the importance of collecting rich data as a means to increase research validity. Maxwell (2005) states "both long-term involvement and intensive interviews enable you to collect 'rich' data, data that are detailed and varied enough that they provide a full and revealing picture of what is going on" (p. 110).

An additional aspect of providing valid data is the process of respondent validation. "Respondent validation (Bryman, 1988, p. 78-80; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, referred to this as 'member checks') is systematically soliciting feedback about your data and conclusions from the people you are studying" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 111). The participants of this study were provided with copies of their transcripts and other pertinent data to review in order to eliminate the possibility of the researcher's misinterpretation of their speech and actions. The participants each confirmed that their responses did, in fact, accurately represent their experiences at the conclusion of each interview.

A final note to consider when conducting qualitative research is the generalization of findings. Maxwell (2005) notes that: "Internal generalizability refers to the generalizability of a conclusion within the setting or group studied, while external generalizability refers to its generalizability beyond that setting or group" (p. 115). Since the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore male special education teachers' perceptions of their experiences of the phenomenon of teaching at the elementary school level, only internal generalizability will be of concern. This study sought to identify

shared experiences among the participants and thus generalizations will be made among them. However, this study makes no attempt to make generalizations to the outside population of male elementary special education teachers. This is simply a study of lived experiences of a set of particular cases.

Data Organization and Management

Successful organization of data was critical to the success of this study. Cresswell (2007, pp. 142-143) describes several principles regarding data storage and handling that are appropriate for qualitative research that include: always develop backup copies of computer files; use high-quality tapes for audio-recording information during interviews and make sure that the size of the tapes fits the transcriber's machine; develop a master list of types of information gathered; protect the anonymity of participants by masking their names in the data; and develop a data collection matrix as a visual means of locating and identifying information for a study. The organization of data within this study adhered to the aforementioned principles. However, further efforts were used to ensure appropriate data management.

Transcribing occurred upon completion of each interview. It was decided that transcribing the interviews would be beneficial to the study because it would ease the traversing of data. Rather than sifting through hours of audio recordings of the interviews, transcriptions allowed the researcher to move from section to section and take notes directly on the texts as needed. Furthermore, by allowing each participant to read the transcript of their interview, a dimension of internal validity was added.

Upon completion of the transcribing process, the researcher then listened to each interview while reading the corresponding transcription. This allowed the researcher to make notes on the transcription document and record any anomalies that he noticed during the interview, such as long pauses, a change in tone of voice, and so forth. Hard copies of all transcriptions and related information were securely stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. Furthermore, electronic copies of documents were maintained from the researcher's home computer and saved to two separate external devices. These were also stored in the locked cabinet when not in use. Additionally, numerous drafts of this study required efficient management. Thus, each draft was carefully notated, dated, and numbered to maintain organization. Back-up files of all documents were also maintained and filed appropriately under lock and key. All files and storage devices will either be destroyed or erased upon the successful defense of this dissertation.

Data Analysis

Sargent (2001) noted that in his own research, "analyzing the interview was an ongoing process" (p. 173). Thus, in an effort to address the overarching research question of how men experience their identity as elementary school special education teachers, it was decided that thick, rich descriptions of their experiences would yield optimal data. Thus, participants' descriptions were recorded and transcribed to present actual, first-person accounts of male teachers' perceptions of their experiences of teaching elementary level special education. Transcripts were used for interpreting the data.

Creswell (2007) recommends that data analysis begins with the process of researcher introspection. This practice allows the researcher to describe his or her experiences in the phenomenon under study in an effort to put personal experiences aside, to the extent possible, in order to focus on the participants in the study. Thus, the researcher must make any potential biases that he may introduce to the study as transparent as possible. This is done through the use of a subjectivity statement.

Subjectivity Statement

I have a strong personal relationship with the field of special education. This association with special education will undoubtedly have an influence in the manner in which I conducted this study. It is anticipated that this relationship also influenced the manner in which I analyzed and interpreted the information gained from the research. Due to the expected bias that I may have imposed on this study, it is imperative that I make my subjective relationship to and experiences with special education as transparent as possible.

Van Manen (1990) explained that each researcher introduces subjectivity to the study at hand. He stated that "subjectivity means that one needs to be as perceptive, insightful, and discerning as one can be in order to show or disclose the object in its full richness and in its greatest depth" (p. 20). Qualitative research is primarily concerned with "understanding how a particular researcher's values and expectations influence the conduct and conclusions of the study (which may be either positive or negative) and avoiding the negative consequences" (Maxwsell, 2005, p. 108). Therefore, it was crucial

that I take an introspective look within myself to identify the subjectivity that I bring to this study.

Education is an integral part of my life. As a former elementary special education teacher, I recognized the potential bias that may have entered the research due to my close connection with the topic. As I read the various literatures and engaged in the interview process, my personal experiences were readily recognizable through the voices of the participants.

The moment I first stepped into my wife's classroom many years ago, I knew that teaching would somehow become my future. Amazingly, after just a year from that fateful day, I found myself with a classroom of my own as an elementary special education teacher. While this phase of my life lasted only five years, I learned much about myself and the manner in which I view special education. During my five years of teaching, I worked at two schools and with a myriad of children, both with disabilities and without. I have worked alongside many teachers, instructional assistants, specialists, related service providers, and administrators. As with any relationship, professional and personal, I would never suggest that they existed without flaws. However, as a teacher within elementary schools, I found myself in mutually kind and respectful professional relationships. I was happy.

Although I reflect on my time as an elementary level special education teacher as a period in which I was happy and content in my career, I did have experiences that I believe are unique to being male in a female-dominated milieu. During four of the five years of my teaching career, I was fortunate enough to have fellow male teachers.

Although I never had the opportunity to work with other male special education teachers, I did have the opportunity to work with men who served as regular education teachers and specialists, such as physical education, and music teachers. I truly enjoyed having other men in my schools and the sense of camaraderie and friendship that they provided. This appreciation was fully realized during my fifth and final year of teaching. During the final weeks of summer leading to the start of the school year, it was brought to my attention that the other male teachers had left the school for one reason or another. This came to me as a complete surprise, and an unpleasant one at that. Perhaps grounded in personal insecurity, perhaps for other reasons that I am not yet aware of, I found myself distressed over being the only man in my school. This is not to say I did not have good relationships with my female colleagues. In fact, I had fantastic relationships with them; yet it was also true that I felt isolated.

During the year of being the only male teacher within a school or the years when I had other men by my side, I always found myself centered on the reason that I was there in the first place: the children. I would not trade my experience as a special education teacher for anything. It has allowed me to work with children of varying age ranges and diverse abilities. There were moments that I experienced frustration over a student's ongoing negative behavior or difficulty understanding a lesson, but those moments drove me to be a better teacher. I truly believe that my students all knew that they were my world. I also believe that their parents and teachers would agree that I wanted nothing but the best for each of them. There were, however, moments in which I felt others question my motivation to teach.

I first felt the sting of prejudice at an open house during my first year of teaching. As a fresh face in my school, students and parents did not yet know me or understand who I was as a person or teacher. At the beginning of the open house, I first noticed a father staring me down as he passed me in the hallway. Despite my best efforts to counter his judging glare with a friendly greeting and smile, he walked by without acknowledging me or easing his expression. That day I had additional experiences similar to the one with this man. In fact, I became quite familiar with such treatment over the course of my teaching career. However, I also learned that despite an occasional initial negative reaction that some parents had towards me, I have found that these parents would quickly embrace me as a positive part of their child's life and education. My remaining years as a teacher were ultimately a very positive period in my life. Yet I found the decision to move on to a new chapter in my life rather easy to make.

Due to my education as a doctoral student in Washington, DC, I was allowed exceptional opportunities to serve as an intern to the United States Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). After two wonderful summer internships and a great deal of expressing my interest in serving the field of special education at the national level, I found myself in a new career. I became a full time employee of OSEP, and I was and continue to be thrilled about this sudden advancement in my profession. Although I found myself missing my previous life as a special education teacher, I knew in my heart that I had made a career decision that I would never regret.

My career as an education program specialist at OSEP led me further away from the role of a special education teacher and further into the federal components of special education. My experience at OSEP has been remarkably different from teaching. My new workforce consists of a balance of men and women of varying ages and nationalities. Now that I work with adults, rather than predominantly children and women, I have felt much less isolated during my time as a federal employee and I feel that I am now part of the group, rather than a gender minority.

My interest in better understanding the perceptions of male teachers' experience of teaching elementary level special education was greatly influenced by my own experiences. Now that I have stepped out of the familiar milieu of the elementary school setting, I have spent a great deal of time reflecting on my life as a special education teacher. I have given much consideration to this phase of my life and look back on it with a loving fondness for my past students, colleagues, and schools. I also look back at this time with sadness that despite my own positive experience as a male elementary special education teacher, I never knew any other men in this very specific field. It is my personal belief that men have many positive things to add to this field and schools and students alike are at a loss for their relative absence.

Researcher as Instrument: Addressing Researcher Bias

Since I am an elementary special education teacher and therefore have a close relationship to the topic of this study, it was imperative that I be mindful of the potential influence that I could have on the research process. It is important to note that I have

lived the professional life of the male elementary school special education teacher and I have shared many of the same experiences as the males who participated in this study. Thus, as the researcher, it is reasonable to view myself as an 'insider' or instrument of the study, as my professional background, experiences, and knowledge of elementary special education will be immersed in the research process. Denzin and Lincoln characterize the interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry by explaining that 'qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible'(Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). The researcher's perceptual acuity in observation and finely developed capacity for eliciting detail from respondents are paramount. This concept of researcher as instrument accentuates the distinctive function of the researcher's knowledge, perspective, and subjectivity in data acquisition.

While each voice in this study is individual, I do believe that because I have traversed a similar career path, I share a common bond with the subjects in this study. While this relationship to the topic can offer a deep source of thoughtfulness when conducting the research, it is vital that I be attentive to my role as an elementary special education teacher and as Creswell (2007) describes, bracket it during the interview sessions, to avoid introducing bias to the progression of this study. Van Manen (1990) describes bracketing as "the act of suspending one's various beliefs in the reality of the natural world in order to study the essential structures of the world" (p. 175). The researcher is also instrumental in translating and interpreting data generated from the respondents into meaningful information. Thus, the perspectives that I bring to this study

are multi-faceted and complex. In short, the purpose for this study has evolved from my own experiences and may have impacted my collection and interpretation of data.

Steps of Data Analysis

Creswell (2007) provides a suggestion for conducting a phenomenological analysis. He notes that his approach (p. 159) is a modified version of the Moustakas method of phenomenological analysis. This approach is as follows:

1. The researcher must describe their personal experiences and relationship with the phenomenon that is under study. This is what is known as the researcher's subjectivity statement and it is an attempt for the researcher to set aside his or her personal experiences, to the extent possible, to better focus on the study's participants.
2. A list of significant statements ought to be developed. Such statements come from the interviews and other data sources, such as notes and memos. A list of non-repetitive and non-overlapping statements about how participants experience the topic is created and each statement is considered to have equal value.
3. The significant statements are grouped into larger units of information which are called themes.
4. Textural descriptions are then written. Textural descriptions describe what the participants experienced within the phenomenon. These descriptions are supported with verbatim examples from the interviews.

5. Structural descriptions are then written. Structural descriptions describe how the experience occurred. The researcher then reflects on the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced.
6. The last step involves writing a composite description. Composite descriptions of the phenomenon integrate the textural and structural descriptions to uncover the essence of the phenomenon. This section describes what the participants experienced and how they experienced it.

This study employed a modified version of Creswell's (2007) above steps for conducting a phenomenological analysis. A modified approach was taken in an effort to reduce the number of steps in the process. Thus, this study utilized the following steps to conduct its data analysis:

1. *Describe Researcher Subjectivity and Bias:* I began the analysis of this study by describing the personal experiences and relationship that I held with the phenomenon that is under study. In this case, elementary level special education. This was done in an attempt to not only share what personal and professional experiences I bring to the study, but to also attempt to set aside these experiences, to the extent possible, to better focus on the study's participants.
2. *Transcribe the Interviews:* I immediately transcribed each interview upon its completion to capture the conversations verbatim. When each transcription was complete, they were shared with the appropriate participant to verify their statements. Upon verification, I listened to the interview recordings while reading the transcripts several times before beginning my analysis.

3. *Coding:* At this point, I developed a list of significant statements that described how the participants experienced being a male teacher of elementary level special education.
4. *Identifying Themes:* The significant statements, or codes, were grouped into larger units of information, or themes. The themes described what the participants experienced within the phenomenon and how they experienced it. The themes were supported with verbatim examples from the interviews.

Again, this study closely follows the aforementioned steps and procedures provided by Creswell, but with a shortened approach. A slightly modified visual representation of this model can be found in Appendix C (Creswell, 2007, p. 170).

Human Subjects and Ethical Considerations

Studies involving the inclusion of human subjects require numerous ethical considerations. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) of the World Health Organization (WHO) provides a series of ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects. The following guidelines were employed to ensure the protection of the human subjects involved in the study: provide the subject adequate knowledge of the appropriate facts and the consequences of participating in the study; the anticipated duration of the subject's participation; the anticipated benefits that may result as an outcome of the research; all potential risks or discomforts to the participant; all records will be kept confidential; all research will occur at no cost to the subject; the participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time; obtain a signed form as proof of individual

informed consent. There was no risk or potential harm involved in this study. Nonetheless, extreme care was put into ensuring that each participant in this study be treated with the utmost consideration in regards to these ethical guidelines. Further measures to ensure the ethical considerations of human subjects were delineated through the George Washington University (GWU) prior to beginning the study.

This research was conducted as part of a doctoral degree in the field of special education at GWU. All research conducted at the GWU is required to undergo the evaluation of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to its start. GWU's (2009) Office of Human Research states:

> The IRB reviews research projects which involve human subjects to ensure that two broad standards are upheld: first, that subjects are not placed at undue risk; second, that they give uncoerced, informed consent to their participation…The GW IRBs are responsible for the review of all research activities that involve human subjects, whether directly or indirectly. In addition, the Director of the Office for the Office for Human Research (OHR) is responsible for reviewing all these research activities that qualify for exemption from, or waiver of IRB review, as outlined in the federal guidelines.

This research underwent the IRB review process within GWU before research approval was sought from the school district in question. The school district also created a research screening process that research candidates must undergo before receiving approval to conduct a study. The district's online Office of Program Evaluation discusses the criteria for approval, which are as follows:

> In general, the screening committee weighs the benefits of each proposed study against the burdens it creates for staff or students. Any or all of the following factors may be considered in granting or denying approval: value or relevance of the research topic, questions, and hypotheses to the current needs and interests of

> "the district"; quality and technical adequacy of the study; feasibility of the study, including amount and kinds of resources requested from the school division and amount and kinds of resources supplied by the applicant; competencies and qualifications of the applicant, including the demonstrated quality of writing and research skills; potential disruption of the instructional program and of administrative responsibilities; potential encroachment on the privacy and legal rights of students, parents, and staff members; support of the "the district" administrator who has agreed to be the sponsor.

The researcher met the aforementioned criteria. Upon receiving confirmation of approval to proceed with the research in the district, the researcher identified potential participants. District teachers who committed to participating in this study were treated with the utmost ethical considerations.

Summary

This chapter has described the methodological blueprint and process for this qualitative, phenomenological study which explored how men experience their identity as elementary special education teachers. This researcher has attempted to bring together a variety of approaches, traditions, and strategies. This study drew upon in-depth interviewing for data collection, multiple sources for narrative analysis, and categorical analysis for the identification of emergent themes. As such, the study's purpose and research questions guided the analysis and the end product of the study. The remaining chapters of this study will present the research findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the interviews in this study were generated through a systematic set of questions which focused on revealing how men experience their identity as elementary special education teachers. Specifically, this exploration included an investigation of how men describe: (1) the factors that influenced them to become elementary special education teachers, (2) how they view their role as special education teachers and their professional experiences in elementary schools, (3) what it means to be "male" in the context of elementary education, and (4) the influences that enable them to persist in their role as elementary special education teachers. The participants of this study openly and honestly shared their personal accounts of becoming and being elementary special education teachers. The interviews conveyed that while the participants experienced various challenges in their careers, they also experienced a number of personal rewards.

As with any career, teaching is integrally related to the identity of the individual. By asking the participants to share personal information, the researcher was not certain that they would be fully forthcoming in their responses. Therefore, in an attempt to increase the comfort level of the three participants, the researcher invited them to an introductory lunch meeting. During this lunch meeting, the purpose of the research was discussed and grounded in the overarching research question mentioned above. It was hoped that this experience would enable the men to begin engaging in self-reflection and

support their preparedness for the subsequent one-on-one and focus group interviews. During the following interviews, the men were allowed to respond to each question as he saw fit. Each was sincere and unguarded in his responses.

The Participants

To commence the process of accurately portraying the voice and individuality of each participant, each of the men engaged in a series of two individual interviews before the third group interview. This interview process allowed for a better understanding of how these men experience their identity as elementary school special education teachers. However, the participant's experiences cannot be fully understood or appreciated without first learning who they are. In order to ensure that the participant's information remained confidential in the study, each of the men were provided a pseudonym to maintain their anonymity. The participants, Caucasian men in their early thirties, are referred to as Steve, Matt, and Carl.

Steve

Of the three participants, Steve had a particularly unique childhood. Spending the majority of his youth living throughout the world, Steve moved with his family as his father pursued his business career. Born in Atlanta, Steve moved to Belgium, Minnesota, Thailand, Minnesota (a second time), Michigan, Ohio, and then to a mid-Atlantic state at the time of this study. Now 30 years old, Steve further shared that while he's lived in

number of places, he's lived on the east coast for the past seven years, the longest duration of stability in his life. Steve described his experiences as follows:

> I've had a very incredible life. I've been very fortunate but, you know, it's had its benefits, but it's also been hard. It's been hard trying to have consistent relationships, but here, it's nice because I've lived here the longest. I've been able to build up and maintain relationships, ones that will probably never die, even if I move from here.

When discussing his family, Steve shared that his parents have been married for 40 years, and that he has one older and one younger brother. When asked about his relationship status, Steve indicated that he is currently single but had been dating recently. While Steve does not have a family of his own at this point, he keeps busy with his teaching. When not on the job, he spends a great deal of time engaging in his passion for music, sports, and exercise.

Steve did not immediately enter into elementary special education after graduating from college. In fact, he earned a bachelor's degree in psychology which led him to pursue behavioral therapy upon graduation. After a brief period as an instructional assistant (IA), or teacher's aid, he decided to pursue a master's degree in special education with an endorsement in emotional and learning disabilities. Although not fully sure of his decision to become a teacher, Steve knew that he wanted to work with children as he shared, "I prefer the younger crowd. That's really where I've gotten a lot of my experience from. What I like to do is change the kids when they're still young."

Matt

A 33-year-old elementary special education teacher, Matt comes from a long line of educators. Interestingly, it was the men in his family who blazed the trail for his career as he grew up in Pennsylvania. His grandfather was a teacher, principal, and superintendent; his father taught for 35 years; and even his brother is a high school teacher in the same district that Matt now works in.

Now a father himself, Matt shared that he has been married for eight years. He has two children, a three-year-old boy and a one-year-old girl. Maintaining the importance of education in his family, Matt's wife is also a teacher but has put her career on hold to stay at home with their children. In order for him and his family to be able to live comfortably in the area, Matt and his wife had to sell their townhouse and move further away from his workplace.

As a double major in his undergraduate education, Matt earned bachelor's degrees in elementary education and special education. His general education degree is endorsed for K-6, while his special education endorsement is in K-12 for students with intellectual disabilities. Matt also holds a master's degree in educational administration. This range of degrees has allowed Matt to experience a large scope of the positions and career paths offered within public schools. While he has been a regular education teacher, Matt has found himself pursuing his true passion over the past several years—working with students with disabilities. It was clear that working and interacting with others has been of the utmost importance to Matt during his career.

> I always knew I'd do something with human services. I enjoy interacting with people and, I'm not, I don't like, I like people to be having a good time. I don't like a situation where someone isn't laughing or, I would never want to do something where I would be in a cubicle by myself. I want to be interacting with people. But with education, I never thought I would go into education until I went into education.

Carl

Also from Pennsylvania, Carl is a 33-year-old elementary special educator in the district at hand. Growing up in a supportive family from a small central Pennsylvania town, Carl went to college where he met his wife, also a teacher. After responding to an advertisement for a job fair in the district, the two were offered teaching positions and immediately moved to the area in which this study was conducted. After a decade in the area, Carl has made it clear he and his wife have stayed much longer than they had originally intended. Armed with a bachelor's degree in special education and a master's in education, Carl began his career as an instructional assistant in a preschool for children with emotional disabilities before moving to the district. Eventually, he took the lead in the class. In time, he and his wife moved to their current location.

Carl noted that he taught elementary special education for seven years at the same school. Eventually, he took a position as an Inclusive Schools Resource Teacher (ISRT) which he described as still functioning as a special education teacher, but with extra responsibilities. As Carl shared, "It's just where I have six schools that I was responsible for basically anything in special ed, at the school that they were having trouble with. I was basically that person that could come in and support them. Whether it was curriculum, teaching, personal conflicts, behavior, all of that. That was me, writing IEPs,

doing all that." In the following year, Carl found himself back in the classroom after the ISRT positions were cut. After a year back in the classroom, Carl became a behavior intervention teacher, which he described as "a resource position that supports teachers Pre-K through high school and all of their behavior problems that they are having in the classroom."

What Influences a Man's Choice to Become an Elementary Special Education Teacher?

The men of this study gave an open account of the road they traveled which ultimately led them to elementary special education. While the majority of the participants were not able to credit a specific individual as the catalyst of their career, the overwhelming focus among them was the backing of their families.

Familial Influences

When speaking of his own influences, Steve emphasized that his father has been a key role model in the direction he has taken. Although Steve did not become a businessman as his father did, he has learned much from his father's work ethic and drive.

> I think my dad has been a very positive role model. Because, just of what he's accomplished in his life and I think that he's just done so much for us as a family and I am very fortunate to be able to live the life that I do. Because I know that if I'm not a teacher, I still have my family to fall back on. And I know that a lot of people don't have that opportunity. It's like, I think he, just seeing how long he worked, the hours he worked, it's just, just how he really pushed us through life, you know, but it was never like he pushed us to the point that he was telling us what to do. He never told my brother you can't be a film student. Because there's just no chance you're ever going to be making films, the likelihood of that. He

> was always behind what we wanted to do. He's very proud of what I do and so, I definitely look up to him and I respect that. Um, my mother too. I mean, she put up with three boys and when you're overseas, that's all we had, was each other.

While agreeing that his father was also an influence on his decision to teach, Matt's experience was more visibly grounded in education. Although not a special education teacher himself, Matt's father was aware of the need for special education teachers. This knowledge afforded Matt an insight to the possibility of pursuing a career that was in high demand.

> A lot of it was influenced by my father and him being like I want you to have a job and special education was high push. And back then, there were no males in special education. There were no males in elementary education except maybe the two males in sixth grade, so, there was a lot of him pushing…You know, the feeling of accomplishment that you get with working with kids, with helping someone in special education, I think you get a lot more of it in special ed than in general education…My grandfather was, I was very close to him before he passed away and of course his teaching and being a principal and superintendent and all that, it pushed me, it was a factor that I realized later.

Matt recognized that the position he grew up in, of having both a father and grandfather in education, was exceptionally unique and was a great contributor to his career pursuits.

Educational Influences

When discussing their own educational experiences, the participants reported that they did not have many male teachers throughout their schooling, and among those they had, none were considered to be highly influential on the participants' decision to teach. However, there were a few instances in which they described positive experiences when being taught by male teachers. Steve spoke of his experiences with male teachers.

> I did have a male teacher. He was a weirdo. But that's what I liked about him. He was just so, sort of off the wall. He was off the wall, but not completely off the wall. He would just teach us in a way that was engaging. But I think that it was seventh or eighth grade. It was when we were living in Thailand. And he would read the headlines of USA Today. And I always thought it was kinda cool that he would read that to us and make us feel like we were back home. So that was really cool and he would always talk about his bucket being half full or half empty, depending on his mood at the time. I just loved that and thought that was just so cool. I had a teacher in sixth grade I just hated. He was the most boring guy in the world and the most difficult teacher I had. He wouldn't make the material exciting. He had a projector and he would just go down his notes and we would have to copy the notes.

Carl was less positive about his personal experiences with male teachers and role models during his discussions. He noted, "As far as the positive, really positive males, I don't think so. There were some coaches along the way but nothing that I think I really, really latched onto." Matt expressed both positive and negative experiences with male teachers.

> I remember several male teachers. I think the first male teacher, I remember, the first was in sixth grade. There were two male teachers. The typical two. But my homeroom teacher, there was no impact at all. He was ready to retire and older. Just sat behind his desk and taught. The other teacher I did like was good because he came out and played recess with us and interacted, he tried to form a bond with the students, which I think is so important and a huge part of teaching students.

The appreciation that Matt had for the teacher who engaged the students by interacting with them outside the classroom, was supported by Carl's recollection of the sort of person he remembered teaching special education.

> I do think, the special ed teachers that I knew in high school seemed to be more laid back, kinda easier going type of people. You know what I mean? They weren't so driven with the teaching and they had more of a personality and

> seemed a little happier, a little funnier, a little more flexible…I thought, well, if I'm going to be a teacher, that's the kinda teacher to be. I do obviously want to help and there's a spot in me that sees the kids that are really struggling and I really want to support them and see what I can do for them.

While Carl was never able to cite a specific adult, whether a teacher, coach, or mentor, as an individual who influenced his decision to teach, he was cognizant of the various educators and teaching styles in his own schooling, which seemed to be impactful on their own merit. Matt elaborated on his own educational experiences with a general negativity, especially as compared to the quality education he was now providing as a teacher.

> I never really had a teacher to inspire me to do, I don't feel like my education was very good. When I see what we're providing and what we're trying to do, I don't think it's even close. Now it could be that times are changing…I think the main factors that I attribute now are that, one, I don't feel that I ever had that. And I feel it's important for kids. I don't ever feel that I had a teacher who ever cared. It was more of a job to them.

Matt continued to discuss a much more positive experience in college in which he had an education professor who was a true source of inspiration. He described, "A professor I had in college who inspired me to stick it out. I guess looking back, there weren't many teachers or professors who inspired me but she did. I think I had several classes with her and her passion for it, kinda inspired me."

Professional Influences

Steve spoke of his early professional experiences when he first moved to the area. Prior to becoming a teacher, he worked as a behavioral therapist for a company that

specialized in applied behavioral analysis (ABA) for children with autism. Steve worked in this job for a year and in time, his aunt brought up the idea of becoming a teacher. Yet he expressed uncertainty about whether he was suitable for the job.

> They were opening classrooms for autism but I didn't know if I wanted to be a teacher yet because I hadn't really had experience in a classroom and I wasn't ready to deal with like seven children with autism at once. I had been used to doing just one-on-one and I wasn't sure about it. I had all these reservations about it. That it couldn't work. That it wasn't really the right thing to do. I mean, I was very much an advocate of one to one when it came to that stuff, but I tried it anyway.

While in high school, Carl knew that he needed to begin considering his direction after graduation. Due to a lack of certainty about his future, he began to weigh his options regarding the possible paths that he wanted his life to take.

> So, come junior, senior year, I was like, what am I gonna do and then, we didn't have a lot of money at the time, and there was a community college. It's one of Penn State's branches that's 20 minutes from my house. So, it came down to the decision, do I want to go to a college far away or do I want to just go there, start something, and see where it goes. And based on that, based on my lack of knowing what I was going to do and, money, it was like, okay, go there, still live at home, drive to classes for the first year and honestly, late in my senior year, I think I began thinking about the special ed route. We had a few special ed kids at my school and it was very backwards. My friends and I still talk about it. They were basically hidden away. I knew who the teachers were but I was like, where were their rooms? It was almost like, I have no idea.

Steve noted his general lack of confidence to become a special education teacher. Given his experiences as a behavioral specialist, Steve was aware of the intense nature of working with children with autism. Therefore, he decided to take a smaller step in become an IA before leading a classroom of his own.

> But I definitely felt like I wasn't ready to do that at that point. That's why I jumped into the IA position. Just to get an idea of what a classroom should look like. If I had the confidence to do it…I watched how she did things and I just kinda fell into it pretty easily and I felt maybe I can actually apply what I've learned in my previous position without too much hassle and it turned out to be pretty fun and we acted both, almost as teachers, rather than one being the IA and the other the teacher, which was kinda nice.

Ultimately, Carl's decision to become a teacher had much to do with self-reflection and looking within to determine what career he was most aptly positioned to pursue.

> I think with me, it was very much, when I look at my skill set and what I do and how I interact, and I'm able to hang out and talk to pretty much anyone, knew that with kids, I don't want to say I had a gift, but something where I could work with kids and I knew that, and all along I've been able to work with the younger kids and I always knew that I was going to work with kids but I didn't always know that I was going to be a teacher. It's kind of the kids first and then, okay, I could be a teacher then. It was kind of natural. Sort of looking in that realm, it was like okay, that's a route that I could use to work with kids. But as far as the middle and high school, I think I never even, high school never appealed to me. I mean, I was 21 at the time. I did do some student teaching in the high school and I didn't, I felt like they didn't know if I was a new student or if I was one of their teachers. You know, there just wasn't enough of a discrepancy with the age. I felt like some of them look older than me anyways. Like I said, I just wasn't into it and I think there's something to be said. I wasn't as comfortable. You know with elementary kids, you can get away with things. If you're not fully prepared, or if you say the wrong thing, they're five years old and they're not going to say anything. But with high school, it's all over. They're all over you like, what, what? And with middle school, sixth grade maybe, but seventh and eighth grade, no. My progression would probably be elementary, high school, and then middle. I have no interest in middle school. There's just so many changes going on with them and craziness that I just feel like with things you're trying to do, they have their own thing going on.

Each of the participants spoke to the numerous individuals whom they have encountered throughout their lives. Additionally, few people were credited as having a large impact on

their individual decisions to become teachers. However, in their discussions, it became evident that all of the men had an interest in working with children in some manner.

A Desire to Work with Children

During the interview process, each of the participants spoke of their desire to work with children with disabilities. Additionally, the men each noted their aspiration to be a positive impact on youth during their early years of life. While it may be viewed as more conventional or socially acceptable for a man to teach in the middle or high school levels, these men recognized they could improve the quality of children's education, both academically and socially at the elementary school level. Thus, the prospect of teaching and interacting with children permitted the men an opportunity to see the impact that they could have upon children's learning and overall development.

Steve was able to recognize his desire to work with kids while in college. Although he already knew he wanted to establish a career that improved the lives of others, it was not until his senior year that he realized he wanted to work directly with children.

> I've always had that attraction to working with kids. And I always felt the need to help others in a sense but I never really thought about autism. I was like child psychology is a cool thing to be in, but I just wasn't sure. So, in my senior year during my undergrad, I went to Los Angeles for a summer. So I ended up working a job out there at the UCLA hospital in their autism center. And I did that for a little while and I sort of fell in love with it and the kids. The kids, there was just such a uniqueness to the kids and I felt like I could just be who I was around them.

Matt echoed his love of teaching children with disabilities as he described the level of personal reward he gets from his daily work. It was clear that his satisfaction is not only grounded in working within the context of special education , but also in the fact that his students are in elementary school.

> You touch the kids, as you do with all kids, but the special ed kids appreciate it more, I think. You really make a difference. I mean I like it. People are like, "How can you go from general ed to special ed? You're crazy." For me, it's just being comfortable with teaching…I never have been really interested in high school…I did middle school for a little bit but it was more of an administrative role. And I liked the age, but in high school, I don't know, I guess I didn't want to come right out of college and be almost the same age as some of the students. That just didn't seem right to me. I just always enjoyed working with little kids. It was always fun for me and, you know, even sixth grade is a little old for me. I really like third and fourth grade. You know, they still love school, they still love you, but they're old enough to do the work and be straight with you.

Carl's experiences also led him to recognize the pleasure he got out of working with a young population. Interestingly, he did not express excitement towards working with children in the lowest grades. Rather, he expressed a desire to be with children who are in the lower to middle years of their elementary education.

> My favorite grade that I ever taught was probably second. I taught third for the majority though, and I taught fifth last year. I originally decided that when I got hired down here it was for a kindergarten position, and thank goodness it did not work out. I don't think that I knew what I was getting myself into with the songs and the cutesy, and that's not me at all. And what happened was, the kindergarten teacher that they thought was going to leave didn't leave so, I, they ended bumping me up to third, which I ended up liking a lot. So, second and third was kind of what I liked the most.

Recognizing his student's happiness towards school, Steve indicated that their joy becomes his joy. With reflection, he recognized that much of their positive reaction

towards school likely has to do with the level of reciprocated respect that they show toward each other.

> All my kids love being in school. They always get off the bus with smiles on their faces. And that's what makes me the happiest. You know, that I'm doing my job in a positive way and they're not crying when they see me. I think in that sense, they're happy because we have a respect for each other. Personally, I can't believe how much they like school sometimes. Like, the other week, I had a student who was really sick. She doesn't really have any language, but when her dad came to pick her up, she was so upset. Just wanting to stay there. I just felt for her and that she, I don't know, maybe school is just better, I don't know. I think I'm so amazed by that positive reaction when they come to school and sometimes they don't want to leave.

Matt reflected on his students and the importance of his interaction with them outside the classroom as essential to developing a positive bond with them. He argued that developing positive bonds is key to being a successful teacher and making school a high-quality experience for students.

> I think a lot of these kids, especially those that are socially and economically challenged as well as special ed need a positive role model…And you know, now that I don't get to go out to recess because that's my planning time, if we work hard enough, at the end of the day we will go out and play a sport. It's important, that bond where they see you as a friend too…I think it's my personality to make that bond. So, again, as a general ed teacher you have to find different places, you have students for lunch or you pick different students at recess that you're going to do an activity with. You have to find that bond with each student.

During the interviews, the participants were asked if they viewed being male when there are so few male teachers in elementary schools, if their presence added a positive element to students' education. Carl noted his own experiences and a sense of

capability to relate to students in a manner that may not be consistent with female teachers.

> And it's, you're a male, and there are things I'm able to do, that is different from the female teacher. There are times that the kids are going to listen to me and they are going to respond to me better than the females. It's kind of the added bonus of being male…Overall, I think, one of the greatest benefits has been being a male in the field that I'm in has helped with the kids. The kids really have responded to me and I think has helped me out a lot. I think you get a little more leeway here and there…I can tell you that my kids loved school.

Steve noted the pleasure he gets from working with his students. Not only does he appreciate seeing his children advance in their education, he enjoys the unique personalities that each of his students bring to the classroom.

> I enjoy the children a lot. I enjoy working with them, seeing them learn, even if it's not a lot. Sometimes it's a lot. Sometimes it isn't. I enjoy them because they're just unique individuals and I think I'm lucky. They respond to me in a positive way. I mean, I, overall, I enjoy the experience.

Matt echoed his love of working with all students as well but he also emphasized his appreciation for special education. Because he has had experience teaching regular education, Matt is poised to draw a true comparison between is experiences between that environment and special education. When drawing such a comparison, he noted not only the importance of building relationships with his students but also the need to interact with them in the classroom on a smaller scale for optimal effectiveness.

> You know, I love being with kids in all situations but the reason I like special ed better is because it's a small group. The way I believe in education is small group and I ran my gen ed class that way, like guided math and guided reading. You have to have a relationship with the students and be able to understand what

> they're thinking to help them. Teaching to 35 students, if I'm lecturing, I can't tell who's missing what. My favorite teaching experience during my career was when I was teaching inclusion in the third grade. It was two teachers in the class all day. We would do a main lesson together, split up, take small groups. The kids were always engaged…We were talking, smiling, we were happy to being there.

Setting himself apart from the other participants, Carl recognized that leaving the classroom presented its own unique experience. In particular, he noted that he has had to sacrifice his ability to develop genuine relationships with students because he has been torn between so many school sites.

> This year, I haven't been able to build as much rapport with the kids as I have in the past because I'm not there enough. I'm getting kicked and spit at by kindergartners because I'm just that big guy that's in their way and they don't know why. And there's not enough time to build that relationship, so basically, I'm just kind of showing the school what you're supposed to do. But in the meantime, I'm just getting pummeled. I've found that a lot of times, if it's a kid I don't know, I try not to get in the middle. But if there's a situation while I'm at a school, I'll usually help.

The positive effect of working with children in a role in which the participants could directly see the benefits of their interaction was a valued key element of their work. By serving as a leader to children, these interactions allowed the men to realize their potential and the impact they could have by working with children on a regular basis.

How Do Men Describe Their Role as Special Education Teachers and Their Professional Experiences within the Elementary School Setting?

In an effort to better understand how each of the participants experience elementary special education in their lives, it is necessary to better understand what they each do and encounter on the job. Therefore, an attempt was made to examine what these men experience as elementary special education teachers on a day-to-day basis. While each man's experience is unique, there was an overwhelming agreement that they each desired to improve the perspectives and school climate for special education.

Finding One's Purpose

Steve expressed his recognition that there seems to be a general lack of societal interest in ensuring that people enter into the field of special education. Without elaborating on the reasons he feels this is so, he stated that: "Special ed, it's just, doing what no one else will do. I feel like I'm doing a service and that's why I keep doing it." The term "service" was brought up repeatedly during conversations with Steve. It was made clear that he viewed teaching special education as his purpose and means of contributing to the betterment of society. Matt added that his purpose is grounded in improving society's perception of the field. He stated: "We just need to change the perception so that we all see that kids learn differently. We all need to work together and break down those walls." Similarly, Carl noted that while he did not originally plan to enter the field of special education, once he did, he too felt a clear purpose.

> I just fell into it sort of and once I started, I kind of figured out that what I wanted to do was change perceptions and change school climates. I wanted to change it so that the kids wanted to come with me. I don't know if you can make special ed cool but you can make it, especially in elementary school, a lot more pleasant for all those kids. So that was my purpose.

On a day-to-day basis, Steve noted that it is imperative that he engage in a great deal of preparation in order to maximize learning potential and manage behavior throughout the school day. He added that doing so is particularly challenging when serving students with a wide range of abilities.

> I do a lot of preparation because all my kids are on completely different levels. So I feel like I spend most of my mornings and after school preparing materials so each student will be able to get the same concepts. During the day, the mornings run the smoothest. I see the fewest behaviors then so I am able to get through the most academics at that point. I spend about, three hours in the morning, working on reading and writing and some math. I spend a good 30 minutes where they're in a morning meeting where I'm having them learn following directions, new vocabulary, just working together and socializing…My IA and I work with the kids in the centers and then the kids have independent work time. They can earn tokens that they can use to earn a snack, computer, or things like that. I learned to use positive reinforcement before I began teaching.

With a slightly larger caseload, Matt works with students in the sixth grade with a wide range of exceptionalities. A large part of his day consists of supporting his students in the regular education environment and pulling them out for self-contained math and language arts.

> I have 15 students on my caseload from the autism label, to OHI, to LD. I have two AA students. AA is academic advanced. It's the new GT…I spend the mornings, the students check-in with me and I make sure that their work is done and get them situated for the day. On an average day, I push in for social studies and science with a group that most of the special ed students are in. And then the

> students come here for math and language arts. Then at the end of the day it's another check-in, check-out thing with the students.

Carl described his experience teaching and noted that it was grounded in inclusion. He expressed his appreciation for co-teaching during that time, which enabled him to work with small groups and maximize his ability to reach more students.

> I did special ed the whole time and the way we did it was very much an inclusive model where we were responsible for a certain grade level and it wasn't LD teacher versus non-cat. We had a lab type setting. Everyone had a class and would then be pulled out for like an hour in the morning for language arts and maybe an hour for math. The lab was a different teacher. For me, I did a lot of co-teaching, did a lot of small group type things. I did third grade, then second and third, and then one year I had a little bit of fourth.

Teaching Preferences

While noting his fondness for working with fourth grade students in particular, Matt expressed the pleasure he finds in working with the students in his own classroom. He made it clear that while his overall preference is to be in a co-teaching classroom, this year he has not found his situation to be conducive to that form of teaching.

> I enjoy being here with the students. In the classroom, this year with how it is, I'm just sort of helping and not so much teaching and in here I'm teaching so it's better…Truly what I like is inclusion. I think there's nothing more powerful than two teachers having a positive relationship that kids can see and learn from. And two adults can do small groups and multiple things. That's how I truly like to run special ed. This year, with my caseload, some of my students are more severe so they need to be pulled out in a self-contained class…And this year, with me having to pull out for language arts and math, there's really not a chance for co-teaching. It's kind of a shame. But, that is my ideal job. Being a special education teacher co-teaching with a gen ed teacher and just doing what we love best.

Carl recalled a positive experience in which he found co-teaching to be not only an effective method of reaching his students, but it greatly improved his overall teaching experience. He noted that he felt a sense of equality and reciprocity from the regular education teacher that he was paired with.

> It was never their class. We just shared it and everybody, on the door it was her name, my name, and it just, I handled a lot of the behavior stuff, and it just worked. I would rather work with somebody that's new and doesn't have the knowledge than someone who's jaded and, you know, both of them were the peppy, nice teachers that the kids liked and were very positive. So my kids just thrived and it went really well.

Carl noted that when he became an ISRT for the district, he encountered a different experience working with teachers, in which he found himself interacting with a much larger number of teachers.

> And then I got an offer in the summer of 2008 to become an inclusive schools resource teacher. I had six schools. And you support them with whatever special needs they might have. So, basically, it's instruction, behavior, testing, pretty much anything and I would go in and work with teachers one-on-one, mentor them, sit in their class, take notes, do all that to help them with whatever their problem is. You know, administration would sometimes have them come in to do small trainings or help with IEPs. It was just everything.

Steve noted the amount of energy that is required to effectively get through each day. Early on, he experienced a fair amount of fatigue, which he has been able to improve upon by engaging in regular exercise. While this may seem like a daily activity that any person should participate in to better their health, Steve expressed just how important it has been in improving his teaching experience.

> Well, when I first started I was more fatigued than I am now. But I'm also going to the gym a lot more, so having, just a more healthy lifestyle, I feel like I can keep up a little more throughout the day. But, you know, there's always, your plan never seems to go, the afternoon just doesn't seem to flow like you planned. I think, everyone in the morning, we're all on, but then in the afternoon, we can sense each other's fatigue…Well, another thing about the afternoon is that the IAs, at that time, their presence becomes a little more unpredictable. One of the IAs is actually a PHA, meaning she goes, she not only works in my class, she's a floating IA, so she goes and helps the kids where she's needed. So, the ratio becomes a little bigger. When you're trying to reach three kids with no attention span whatsoever and they don't understand what's trying to be done, you're just spread really thin and you can't manage their behavior as well as you can in the morning.

While a large portion of the daily experiences the men faced in teaching elementary special education were positive in nature, Carl expressed some of the frustrations that are linked to the job. He noted that work is often added to a special education teacher's plate that may push them out of the field. While not pushed out of the field himself, Carl noted that over time, he found himself ready to leave the classroom.

> Towards the end, I was kind of ready. It was getting to the point that I was doing a lot of testing at the school, a lot of mentoring, a lot of extra stuff and I was like, I'm not getting paid for this. Plus, it was getting to the point where people were like, are you gonna go down this road? Are you going admin? And I felt like I was at a point that I knew it was not a common thing for a male, at the age of 50, to be teaching little kids. But it was a one-year deal because that is when all the budget cuts came and that was its ninth year and I caught the ninth year, and then basically, it got cut…I wasn't excited to go back into the classroom and I wasn't excited to go into fifth grade. I had never taught fifth before. But I knew that if I needed to go to a school, this was the best option. They basically treated me as a fellow admin because the year before I was the person behind closed doors who would tell them what's going on and give them the suggestions and they treated me sort of equally. They were going to let me do my thing. Um, so then, I decided to go there. And it was a great experience.

While each of the participants are at different points in their teaching careers, the common issue among them was grounded in the amount of work that has been required of them. Yet, this amount of work has also been more manageable when shared with other educators, whether they are other teachers or instructional assistants.

The Power of Supportive Relationships

Each of the participants spoke extensively on the various levels of support that they have experienced in relation to their careers. It was apparent that the experience of a supportive network enabled the men to maximize their potential and pursue an occupation in which they could find success and rewards for their abilities and talents. Additionally, these support networks allowed the participants to overcome obstacles that might have otherwise discouraged them from becoming elementary special education teachers. Without such a strong support network, is it possible for a young man to persevere through the preparatory and initial years of teaching elementary special education with success? Although there must surely be men who teach to this specific population in spite of a lack of an effective network of support, the participants each affirmed that various supports were influential and major contributors to their own achievement in this field.

Family

Matt's unique upbringing in a family of male educators positioned him to elicit a positive reaction from his family when deciding to become a teacher himself. He expressed their reaction as excited pride that he was continuing his family's tradition.

> They loved the fact that, you know, they were very excited…My mom, I don't think she knew much about special education. My dad on the other hand, I think he was ecstatic about it. You know, he thought it was great, he would tell everyone.

Carl found himself in a similar experience with his family. He noted that their concern was that he have a stable career, which he was able to find in special education.

> My family was very supportive. I mean, my mom, I think she just wanted me to go in a good path somewhere. Not part-time jobs, not floating around somewhere. She was happy that I had a stable job and that it was going well. But I think everybody's been really supportive. I've never run into the, "Don't you want to make more money type people." You know, my family has never been like that… They're very supportive and excited about what I'm doing.

Steve elaborated on the importance of his family's approval of his career. He noted how proud they have been towards him, particularly his father. Steve said, "He was always behind what we wanted to do. He's very proud of what I do."

Friends

Matt recalled negative reactions of his friends when he decided to enter the field of special education. The emphasis seemed to be on the notion that he would struggle financially as a teacher.

> They thought it was silly, at first. But you know, when you're in college and you get your major your friends are doing the same thing as you and it didn't matter. But in high school friends and stuff, they were like, "You're not gonna make any money, what are you thinking? It's stupid."

Carl also noted that his friends lacked an understanding of special education, however, he never felt judged by them. Rather he felt that it was a sense of unawareness on their part.

> I will tell you that my friends for the most part were like, "What? Like, what are you doing?" And, you know, I have a lot of friends that are, it's a small, redneck town and still don't understand it, they still use the R-word, and don't get special ed at all and are like, "What?" So, for them, they didn't quite understand what I was doing, but they weren't critical of it.

Students

The importance of establishing positive relationships with one's students was first raised by Matt. He noted that it is essential to gain a student's trust and respect before learning can take place. Without an atmosphere of comfort and trust, students will not be open to the learning process.

> No matter where you are, you have to have that bond for the kids to respect and trust you. Once you get that, once they trust you and respect you, the learning's gonna happen much faster. I don't care if they're special ed or not, they have to break that barrier and trust you and feel comfortable or they can be guarded and you're in trouble.

While such relationships are essential for impacting the students, Matt noted that it does not always come with ease.

> The only thing I will say that has changed now that I have kids, I've noticed that when the kids are irritating, I sometimes have to cool myself off before I interact

> with my own kids. I carry over that irritation and then I feel like I'm doing a disservice to my own children. That's part of why I sometimes feel like I need to get a change.

Part of establishing effective relationships with students is knowing how to balance one's role as the teacher and as a friend. Carl expressed that he found success as a teacher once he was able to find that stability.

> And with the students, I think I've had great success. They respond to the fact that I'm human and I'm able to joke and I'm able to kind of laugh at myself. Understanding that it's a job but there's a fine line between being their friend and being their teacher and I try to find the middle somewhere where they know they can come to me and I'm there for them but also, there's a line and if you cross it or are disrespectful, I can't save you from that. You did that and you have to deal with that. And I did a lot of that last year in fifth grade. I had a couple kids that were real challenging and they understood that yes, I am there for them, but they know like in lunch, if they tell the cafeteria host to shut up, I can't save them from that. That was a choice you made and you have to stand behind it. I'm not going to bat for you because we've talked about that and it's not allowed here either. It got to the point last year that when they would mess up they wouldn't want me to know because they knew I'd be disappointed in them. So there's that trust thing there. But also with that, when they have been wronged or singled out because there's that kid with the reputation, that I will go to bat for them. So, in that respect, I think I've been really successful.

Colleagues

Steve discussed how he feels it is important to not only create positive relationships with his students but also with other teachers. When sharing his thoughts, he too, came to the issue of trust and a need to establish it so that he can work effectively with other teachers.

> And you know there are cases still where, obviously, if I want to integrate some of the kids, teachers might get nervous because they don't know really what

> they're getting into, who the child is. So, it helps that they know me and trust me. I've always had a good relationship with the gen ed teachers that my students are with. So, I've never had a bad experience with integration.

Additionally, Steve noted that he puts in great effort to interact with the teachers within his school since there are few opportunities to work alongside them.

> Personally, I tend to do a lot of networking around the school. I definitely know all of the teachers around the school. I know most of the students around the school, so everyone seems to know me and they know what I do and what I teach. And that helps me move, blend my kids in more because they tend to respect the student more because they know me and that I'm here to help them and I think that the more they respect me, the more they'll respect the students.

By creating a trusting and positive atmosphere with other teachers, their classrooms and the students within are able to develop a better sense of acceptance and understanding of one another. Carl noted that his experience was that special education was viewed much more positively by nondisabled students due to his relationship and role in the regular education classroom.

> I didn't know any better because it was my first school but now I realize, like wow, we were really lucky because basically I had a classroom, a huge classroom. She had a classroom and they had adjoining doors. We would keep the doors open and that would give us the flexibility to take, I could take gen ed kids with me, the kids that needed a little extra support but weren't on my caseload and go into my room and do the small group reading…When I would pull kids or be in the class, everyone wanted to work with me, so all of the sudden being special ed was kinda cool. You know, the kids would get used to going with me and say, "Can I go with Mr. "X"? Like, why do they always get to go?" So I would take them sometimes and try to mix it up so all of the sudden it kinda changed. And when I left my first school that's one of the things they said, because I took this other job, and it was, these were my people, and I got a lot of emails that would say that I changed the climate of our school, the culture. Because before that, it was the special ed teacher, the old lady with the cart that would come in and say come on kids, so it changed it.

Special education teachers who conduct self-contained classrooms do not always have an equal opportunity to engage with other teachers during a typical school day. However, Steve expressed that adult interaction and support was still essential to his success as a teacher. In his case, he had the support of two IAs, which helped him to establish and maintain a positive learning environment.

> It can be hard to adjust yourself to one year having four kids, the next year seven kids, and the next year three kids. I mean, you can really settle into a routine in a year, but when six comes along, you don't feel like you know what you're doing…If I didn't have an IA and had to deal with these kids alone, I think I'd go absolutely bonkers. If I didn't have someone to share those ideas with and get feedback from, I'd be a very lonely guy…Having assistants who know you well and who can read you and can help maintain control without breaking from what their supposed to do has really helped my class a lot.

Matt too, works with IA's and he shared just how effective those relationships can be.

> I think my support system is really good this year. My assistants are really good. They know how to read me and I don't have to tell them what to do. They can read me and pick up what they need to do. I think that makes a huge difference. When you have people who don't support you and say, well, you're the special ed teacher so go do this. That destroys everything positive about school.

Carl noted that teaching in a school is much more than simply going to the workplace to do a job. Rather, he cited the importance that his colleagues had in his life.

> It was like my family. It was just one of the things, I tried my best with the kids, but definitely with the adults I made a lot of connections and show, try to joke around and try to make it a fun atmosphere and a fun place to work. And I think it's good and it's bad because I'll tell you, at the end of last year, my room turned into a place, everyone would hang out there. It was like the math teacher would come in and then the reading teacher. It was like where everyone would be.

School Administration

School leadership often generates the tone and atmosphere of a school. The participants of the study noted the importance of forming positive relationships with school administration in order to feel successful towards their teaching experience. Steve described the range of experiences that he has had with administrators over the years. Some experiences have been more positive than others. However, he shared that to date, his most effective relationship with an administrator is his male assistant principal.

> Um, my administrators, it's kind of been up and down with them. I sort of feel that there's a disconnect with what they expect and what they actually know about the classroom…And so, I think, especially with my last principal, was just, she, I don't think she really understood what autism was, but I never felt the need to give her any explanation because at that point I felt like there was enough venom and I was like, forget you. I mean, I had a very difficult time with my last principal. And so, I think I've been taking a more hands-on approach with my principal and letting her know what's going on in my room with the kids and how they, before reaching that point of not understanding each other. I also have a male assistant principal and I've found that's really nice. I tend to go to him more and we can just talk about whatever's going on.

When elaborating on his relationship with the assistant principal, Steve described a greater sense of ease while working for another man.

> There is a bit more calmness, I think being a guy, telling a women your problems, sounds weak in a sense. We just get along really well. He's just more, well, don't worry about it, things will fix themselves. But I don't worry about it. It's just the calmer I feel, the harder I work. Or the more inclined I am to want to do a better job. But if you're stressing me out, I feel like I won't know where to start.

Matt also had a positive relationship with his assistant principal, which he credited to her previous work in special education. He noted that by her having a background in special education, she was able to express a sense of respect that he felt was necessary for his personal success.

> One of the assistant principals was a former head of special education. So when it comes to special ed, she's very supportive. I think both administrators have a lot of respect for me as a teacher so they kind of leave me alone. So, they trust me, that whatever I say is needed.

Again, Matt emphasized the importance of respectful relationships with the school administration. However, he elaborated that in order to be respected, one must also show respect.

> I think it's about respect. I keep coming back to that word but it really drives my philosophy. You have to have respect in your administrators and I think it's key that they have respect in you. I know a lot of administrators who preach respect but not all administrators show respect. That's a huge issue. I did my master's in administration so I have a pretty strong opinion on this. I think a lot of people are preaching this stuff but they don't believe it. But for me, fortunately, I've had good relationships with my administration so it's been able to work.

Carl held a very similar sentiment towards his experience with administrators. By establishing a positive relationship with his school leadership, he was able to find a greater sense of security in performing his job.

> I've had such a positive experience with administrators. My principal at my first school, she and I still email each other. She's retired now…Basically, an open door policy where you could go in there for anything at any time. She wasn't a micromanager. She just wanted to know that you were doing what you were supposed to be doing and you could talk to her if you needed to. So that was an

> amazing relationship. And then, when I went into my ISRT position, I had a pretty good rapport with all the admin.

Parents

Some of the most invested individuals in schools are the students' parents. Each of the participants spoke of their various experiences with parents. Overall, these experiences were positive enough to build successful relationships. Matt noted that a key to developing good rapport with a parent is the ability to see things from their perspective.

> And parents, I think the one thing about parents is, just keep them happy. Let them win little battles. You know, people want to fight them and say they're wrong on everything. It's their kid. You have to understand where they're coming from. Yeah they're gonna fight you tooth and nail for something. You can't blame them. Yeah it's frustrating, yeah it's hard, but it's their kid.

When Carl spoke of his relationship with parents, he noted the benefit of establishing oneself in a school over the course of several years. By remaining in one location, rather than moving from school to school, he was able to become a more integral and recognized part of the community.

> As a teacher, I had awesome relationships with parents because I was there for so long. Parents would come back and visit me when their kids went on to middle school. Parents requested me for, if I could loop with their kids…The resource position that I had after that and the one I have now, you don't really deal with parents. I mean, you're brought into IEPs to share what you're seeing and resolve conflict here or there but I don't have to own it. It's not like they're on my caseload where I am gonna see the parents next week. I may not see them again…I've found that once the kids get older a lot of the parents back off more. They knew the process and were like whatever…A parent who is involved and will support what you're doing is awesome. But there's a fine line because I

> would rather have a parent who isn't involved than one that is over the top. It's just the worst thing ever. You're just under the microscope and it's really hard for the teacher to really, whether they love the kid or not, it's like, your parents are a pain. It's just hard because they constantly feel stressed about that kid. And some of these parents just don't get the line. When parents are over the top and that demanding, it just gets frustrating because they just didn't realize all the extra things that teachers are doing and it's still not enough. And in special ed, if you have a kid with special needs, I'm sure it's really tough but I think that there's this sense of entitlement. I'm just like whoa, everybody is doing the best they can and the line has to be drawn somewhere.

While he noted the positive nature of his interactions with parents, Matt did acknowledge that at times, he felt that he was not treated fairly or that parental expectations were unrealistic for their children.

Spouse

Although both Matt and Carl are married, Steve has not sustained romantic relationships due to the demanding nature of the work of teaching special education. He expressed that the long hours and exhausting work took over his life and there was no time left for a significant other.

> I sacrificed my last relationship because I spent so much time at school doing my work. We just never saw each other. I just think there was so much work piled on me last year that it just ended up breaking apart, that part of my life…I think I just spent way too much time working. I was at the school until 7:00 or 8:00 almost every night and I just never saw her…I just started going to the gym and I decided that I'm not going to let this happen. And it's actually been a lot easier for me. It's just school and gym. That's all I do.

While Matt has established a family of his own, he shared that his wife and children are frequently impacted by his work. However, he noted the importance of

striving to leave work-related emotions at the workplace and not bring them home to the family.

> But I kind of came into this as when school is done, school is done. I'm leaving and not staying…Of course, I'm still stressed when I go home and sometimes I take it out on them so that's definitely a sacrifice but I've always tried to leave it at school. I think growing up in a family of educators with my father and grandfather, I've kind of seen what my dad went through and he was like, you've got to draw the line.

Carl agreed that it can be a challenge to leave one's emotions and exhaustion at school when going home to his family. And while it is difficult to avoid this scenario, Carl also noted that it is unfair to his loved ones, especially his children.

> This year, I'm not like that, but last year, I'd come home and be like, just can't breathe. You feel like your spinning or drowning until they go to bed. Then you're like, okay, good. But that's not good because our kids are cool. I want to hang out and have fun with my son and that's one of the reasons that I needed a change.

Perhaps the key to positive relationships in any workplace is grounded in Matt's philosophy of how to treat others. He shared that: "I believe in making people feel good about themselves. If everyone's smiling and having fun, the kids see that, it changes the attitude of the school and you're going to be a better teacher. I'm a big fan of you know, just making people smile."

The men of this study clearly conveyed that when they encounter positive relationships, their work experiences become much more positive. Additionally, the participants expressed that it was important to each of them that they establish positive relationships through their own behavior and interactions, based upon mutual respect.

Challenging Experiences in the Teaching Career

The men acknowledged that while they have had a great number of positive experiences in their careers, so too have they encountered a variety of challenges. While the participants experienced challenges unique to each individual, there are a number of commonalities among them. These challenges ranged from meeting the needs of diverse learners; varying teaching methods; progressing one's career; insufficient training; a disconnect between regular and special education; a misconception of a reduced workload; time demands; and inadequate pay.

When discussing the challenges of teaching special education at the elementary level, Steve expressed that he felt much more at ease when working with children on an individual basis. He noted that as more students are incorporated into a lesson, it can be more difficult to reach them as their individual needs are so varied.

> It is challenging in the sense that you never know what you're going to get. I definitely find that a one-on-one setting, you can focus on that kid. In a class, you have so many different levels; it's so hard to figure out where you're going at the time.

Matt also spoke to the challenge of teaching in a large group. However, he focused on working in an inclusive setting where he had to take a back seat to the regular education teacher's teaching style. Matt expressed that he is much more comfortable in a co-teaching environment where regular education and special education are combined and all students have an equal opportunity to learn and achieve.

> There's a lot of lecture-style teaching going on so my style doesn't match. I'm more of, my comfort zone is student work, cooperative learning, Kagan, and all these different styles. So, it's hard. At my previous school, where I taught special ed before, it was very much team taught and I never really left the room. The teacher and I did everything together. Which I think is much more powerful…I think the biggest thing that frustrates me is when you walk into a class and they say your students didn't do this. Or when I walk into a class and they're like, "Mr. 'X,' your kids didn't do their work." So, they've associated me with those students and called them out in front of the class. So, it's frustrating to me. These kids already have enough on their plate let alone for the teacher to call them out. I don't want the students to be unhappy.

No longer in the classroom, Carl has experienced career opportunities that the majority of teachers do not get to encounter. Now working as a behavioral specialist, he has found a position in which he feels genuine satisfaction. So much so, that he has expressed his lack of interest in reverting to teaching.

> I won't go back and go into a classroom. At this point, with my job, and what I'm doing, I don't want to do anything different. If I can do this in Pennsylvania, then great. But I'm not leaving here to go back in a classroom and start all over again. Because, I'm slowly starting to move up the ladder here and had my eyes on a few things that could be a possibility down the road. I don't want to start all over.

Every teacher experiences school years that are more challenging than others. Steve discussed how he experienced three consecutive years of varying obstacles and how he dealt with them. While he was able to persevere through these difficult times, Steve noted that it almost got the best of him.

> My second, third, and fourth year were sort of like the rings of hell. I definitely had a lot of trouble getting accustomed to having six to seven kids for like three years in a row and still getting accustomed and the rules changing all the time. I had data issues. Like, I wasn't taking the right amount of data and I was still getting used to the IEP process, so I think, because of that, I think those were my most difficult years but that's also when I learned the most. But I definitely got to

> a low at that point because everyone was sort of attacking me and I felt really targeted…I was doing my master's at that point too, during those three years. And you know, they never taught me about the paperwork, the data, the advocates, the things that sort of sneak up on you. They just sort of teach you the basics. Not how to write an IEP. How to write those criteria, take the data and, I was sort of learning as I went. Um, and then, my schooling felt like they were just giving me the good grades to get me through and I was like, is this for real? But it was such a trying time for me and I felt almost like, it almost made me not want to be a teacher anymore. It was so overwhelming at all time.

Special Education versus Regular Education

As a double-major in college, Matt experienced both regular education and special education programs simultaneously. During his undergraduate education, he noted a discrepancy between the two programs and realized that the divide he experienced there would eventually be evident when he became a teacher.

> The first time I realized there's a huge disconnect between general ed and special ed was in college because I went through both programs at the same time. So, I'd go to one class where they would say general ed does it wrong and then the other would say special ed does it wrong. It was kind of comical to go to class and hear both perspectives. Aren't we all here for the same general idea, to educate students? So, that was probably, the first time I saw that.

Matt elaborated on this divide when he began teaching and found that there were a number of misconceptions of special education teachers.

> A lot of times the big misconception is, I only work with kids an hour a day. The rest of the time I just hang out and do nothing. That's a huge misconception…The way I deal with it is, "You're right, I just hang out and drink coffee all day and I get paid the same as you do." I just kind of play with them. It's the same thing when someone says, "You get summers off, you don't work at all." I'm like, "I know. I love it." I'm like, "Aren't you a sucker for taking a job that makes you work 12 months." I just try to turn it to a humorous situation and then it doesn't bother me quite as much. You're not going to change that person's point of view. I'm helping the kids…I'm doing what I need to do. I'm confident that I'm doing

> what I have to do so if that's someone's perception, that's their perception, not mine.

Carl reiterated this, experiencing a similar state of affairs with his own schools.

> I think that people, I think people think that I have it easier. I think the gen ed teachers think I had it way easier than I did. They would call me the golden boy and I would just acknowledge it. I would just laugh about it but also use it to my advantage to help them get what they need. Like, say third grade wanted to do something but it was shot down by the principal, I could go and talk to her and get the okay. It was totally unfair but then it benefited them. But there's definitely that preferential treatment…It's not easier for me because sometimes I'm like, come on, when you're working with 95% females, sometimes you get in the middle of a lot of stuff… There's a lot of fighting about little stuff and I'm like, come on. This is so dumb. It can get pretty nasty but I try to stay out of it. I can be the neutral, I have kids so I'm supposed to be mature, but. People chuck each other under the bus to get what they need.

After starting a family, Carl also noted the difficulty of continuing working extended hours. He described feeling behind his colleagues in terms of the time he was putting into lesson planning and daily preparations.

> I had a baby. I already have a son. I was like, I don't have time to be the teacher I'm supposed to be. At that school, most of the staff is under 30 and most of them stay literally until 6:00 or 7:00 at night. It's a strong, strong staff. And I felt like, I'm not keeping up with these people. I can't. At this point, I just felt like I was doing what I needed to do to get through and not all the extra stuff. It wasn't because I was being lazy, I just couldn't do it. I was so used to staying but then I had to get home. So when the really necessary stuff came up, I would stay at school, go home to two kids, put them to bed and do work from 9:00 to 12:00. It wasn't fun. It started to be like, I don't want to do this. And I remember last year, I began thinking that I need to do something else. Even to the extreme of what if I was a bartender because I could be at home during the day and take care of the kids. It really wasn't a joke that I was beginning to think that way. Because I probably wouldn't make that much less and I wouldn't have to pay for daycare. You know, it's not that teaching is that horrible, it's just that if you want to be a good teacher, you have to invest a lot of time. I mean I was doing everything that I should have been and do I think I was doing a better job than most of the other

> special ed teachers? Yes. But, I wasn't putting in all those extra things because I just couldn't.

Steve described that his expectation for parental support did not come automatically during his career. He said, "I just thought that all parents would be on board and everybody was going to be in it together. I've felt attacked a lot over the years. So that was a little bit disconcerting." When sharing these experiences, Matt noted that overall, he has developed supportive relationships with his student's parents, but that it did not come without effort.

Salary

When describing his salary, Steve contrasted himself with his affluent parents. He noted the discrepancy between his earnings as compared to theirs, which impacted his feelings of self-worth. During this conversation, Steve acknowledged the adage that those who cannot do, teach.

> Because I don't get paid as much as they have in their lives, I'm not worth the same. And that's sort of my view on that. My weird, paranoid view that because there's a lot of sayings out there that if you can't do, then you teach. I hate that. I think that when it comes to that, when I first heard that saying, my level of paranoia went up and I sort of feel like I have to do more with who I am and I can't be a teacher my whole life. I enjoy what I do and I shouldn't let others try to walk all over me in that sense. My friends, a lot of my friends are teachers too, and even the ones who aren't are respectful. And I try to find people who are respectful and don't judge you on how you live or what you do, you know, how much money you make. I definitely watch out for that kind of thing.

And yet, Steve, along with thousands of other educators, has not seen an increase in his pay in years. With no pay increase in sight, he has had to reevaluate his future in terms of a need for simple financial security.

> And it's a bummer that we haven't had a pay raise in three years and they've already told us that we're not going to next year, so, I mean, that is a real downer, but I cope, for now, because I love what I do…My biggest fear is that I wouldn't know what else to do. I just don't know if I want to make that choice. I enjoy what I do and maybe if I have enough experience with these kids, maybe I can move on to something that will get me more recognition for what I do.

Matt also acknowledged the issue of pay in his career. However, he noted that working for this particular district has allowed him to have higher earning potential than he would likely find elsewhere. Because of that situation, he has found it difficult to find his way back home to Pennsylvania as he and his family had originally planned.

> You know what this area does is it sucks you in. You want to leave but you can't because you'll never find anything that pays as good. We tried to leave before I came here. I was gonna go back to Pennsylvania but the pay was, with a master's and eight years' experience, they were going to start me at $39,000…I mean, the pay, it upsets me. It bothers me. And not so much the pay. I think it's the last three years, I think we haven't had any type of raise and apparently they've just said it will be another two years, which, to me, the expectations are increasing but there's no motivation. I kind of think that people who go into teaching, they go in to help the students and I think we get taken advantage of. And a good teacher isn't going to stop working hard or preparing lessons outside of contract hours. A good teacher is going to make sure those kids get what they need. So I think we get taken advantage of. It is very frustrating and it is very hard to survive on my salary. As a man, you're supposed to be the breadwinner. Well, when you're the breadwinner and you can barely provide for your family, I think take some issue with that. I think we lose a ton of teachers, especially new ones and in this area because the cost of living is outrageous and then there's no pay increase. It's hard. Everyone uses daycare. If we made what a daycare provider does, who doesn't have to have any education at all, we'd be making so much more. And yeah, we're not doing daycare, but in a way, the parents go to work because their kids are being taken care of. It's not daycare but it's education. But, on the other hand, I'm thankful to have a job.

Like Steve, Matt has had to face the reality of whether or not teaching is a suitable career for him to continue when he has a family to be responsible for. He noted, "The

other night my wife and I had the conversation, do I need to go and find something else? You know, it's not fun to be out of school for 10 years and still be scraping by." While his frustration with his salary is clear, Matt described what he felt would ease the financial burden of most teachers.

> If it was year round, it wouldn't be that bad. It's just that people don't realize that we get paid for only 10 months and the reason we get the summers off is because we're taking pay from ourselves. So I think if it was year round, the finances would be better. And you're busy in the summer anyway. What are you doing in the summer? You're picking up jobs anyway. I'd rather be doing what I do all the time instead of that.

Carl also spoke about living on a teacher's salary. Interestingly, his opinion was inconsistent with that of both Steve and Matt. He argued that while teachers are not necessarily paid well, there are opportunities to make additional money for those who are willing to work for it. Additionally, he discussed the benefit of summer vacations, which permit teachers a lifestyle that other full time workers do not get to enjoy.

> I am kind of on the other side of it. I came from a hard working town where you put in the 10 hour grinding days and, like, we do put in extra hours but when you look at the big picture, we have a lot of days off, we have summers, we really only work half the year, so it's hard to say, I see both sides. You just really have a lot of time off. I liked the way it was going. We got the step increase each year. I thought that was fair. You get a little older and you need a little more money, so yeah, it does suck being stuck at the same salary for three years in a row. For me, it really sucks because it's what my wife does too. So we're really stuck for a while. But we both have our master's and that has helped. We're doing okay. Do I think we should be paid more? Sure. You always want to be paid more. Do I think teachers have the hardest job in the world? No. As far as when you're there, sure you have a hellish day here and there but, you just get so much time off…I don't want to go on record saying that I'm paid enough. I do want to be paid more. But there are things that I now know, like after having kids. The benefits are amazing. Basically, if the steps came back, I think I would be okay with it.

However, Carl also explained that he has had to supplement his income over the years to make ends meet. By finding additional opportunities to make earnings throughout the year, he was able to increase his overall financial comfort.

> One of the things that has really helped me was, the last two summers, I was able to get a job, it was called a SPART, and basically you're the special ed administrator for an extended school year site. It's like an extra $6000-$7000 and it's kind of saved us. Other years, I've worked an extra job. It was called a writer's workshop and it was three hours, twice a week. And we made a lot of money doing that. There's enough to live on and get by on a teacher's salary but I've had to supplement for the extras.

While, Carl showed less concern over his salary, he was clearly more apprehensive about the insecurity of his new position. If his job was to be cut, it is clear that he has no intention of returning to the classroom and would rather find another career path.

> I probably would look into sales. Just something where I'm talking to people. Either that, or, bartending. It would be a waste. I've got my master's and to go bartend would be like, well, some things, certain things lend themselves to your lifestyle more at this time. Like I said, I have two little ones, so that would work for my family. I've thought about it, but, I don't want to think about it.

None of the participants cited that they went into their careers as elementary special education teachers for financial reward. However, it was clear that job opportunities and career stability were enticing factors for them. Yet, after a number of years in the field, the men acknowledged the difficulties they have encountered in making ends meet. This led them to the realization that in time, they may have to consider alternative career paths.

How Do Men Represent What it Means to Be "Male" in the Context of Elementary Education?

The participants discussed their experiences of being male in a female dominated profession. And while the conversations focused on how engaging in such work may influence their masculinity, the men tended to focus more on their self-confidence as teachers and less so on their masculine position within the female dominated milieu of elementary schools. In the context of this study, the term "self-confidence" is used to describe one's comfort level in performing the role of a male elementary special education teacher. It is not intended to challenge the participants' 'masculinity', or qualities or characteristics considered typical of or appropriate to a man. It was the manner in which, as men, they fit into the female dominant elementary school environment that challenged their comfort of being in this minority position.

The Male Stigma

Steve noted that because he teaches among other men, he feels less singled out as a man in an elementary school. However, he admitted that if his situation were different and he was the only male in his school, his experience may be different. Steve described his experience of feeling very little discrimination within his school, yet he noted that such negative attitudes do exist.

> Not here because we do have a good population of men at this school, so I think people are used to men being around. If I was by myself, I think maybe. I never feel discriminated against. I feel like my classroom is discriminated against but, you know, I don't think that I am personally.

While he has not felt the sting of discrimination over his gender, Steve acknowledged that he may be viewed with heightened scrutiny when interacting with his students.

> If a female student wants to hold my hand, I have to hold it away. Or when I'm monitoring my kids when they're leaving school, I keep my hands in my pockets because I don't want parents to misinterpret anything. So, I try to avoid any contact with my students.

Carl also noted that there is often a stigma held towards male elementary school teachers, as his experience has been. However, he also shared that once people get to know him better, whatever negative perceptions they may have held are soon disregarded.

> I think at first people may wonder why but once they get to know me, I think they realize I could teach whoever. I mean, I think there's a definite stigma for elementary male teachers. There's questions of, I don't know how to get into that. But once people hang out with me they get my deal and who I am. I think with me, parents felt like their kids were getting the best of both worlds. They had the female gen ed teacher and the male special ed teacher. So it was like we balanced each other out.

Matt too has experienced questions of his masculinity. While questioning perspectives can be offensive, has not taken them to heart.

> I think if you look from someone's perspective that is not a male elementary teacher, they may think you're not masculine enough but I think that's just an ignorant point of view. I know my friends in college are like, you're doing what? I just sort of laugh about it because it really hasn't changed me. But I do think that people have that perception.

Preserving One's Masculinity

Steve described strategies that he has employed to balance his sense of masculinity. While the nature of working with young children requires teachers to

interact with them on their level, Steve noted that he has been able to alleviate his sense of this by engaging in what he considers masculine activities.

> I mean, working with kids will always affect your masculinity because you have to reach them on their level. You may have to raise your voice a little bit, a little higher, you may have to sing, you have to read in an animated way. I guess I try to balance that out by being a little more masculine when I'm not on the job, like going to the gym.

Sharing his strategies for preserving his masculinity while teaching, Steve noted that he frequently utilizes his female supports to engage in what he described as female oriented tasks.

> I leave the crafts stuff to my IA's. Or I leave those kinds of things to them and I take care of the teaching, the math and reading, and all that stuff. They kind of handle all that feminine, cutesy stuff…I do think I try to carry that characteristic of being masculine. I do wrestle with my kids and do things outdoors and get them chasing after each other. Just doing things that are a little more manly so it makes me feel better.

Carl echoed that he too used his female colleagues to engage in feminine activities, while he retained his masculinity.

> I was in the co-teaching thing and I was fortunate because I'm just not the singer and I can't stand that stuff but I was co-teaching so it all worked out. We basically had an agreement where all the super cheesy stuff was on her and we worked that way.

Matt added that what he described to be masculine interaction comes in playing games with the students. He stated, "I think you definitely earn a different level of respect by playing football with them. You're human." Perhaps the most important benefit to

being a male teacher in an elementary school is best summarized by Carl. He noted that men not only interact with students differently than their female counterparts, but that they are able to be role models that some students would not otherwise have. Carl said, "I think there's a certain way about what we're teaching and how we're teaching. Especially for the boys and how we conduct ourselves. A lot of these kids don't have a father figure. And they see that and you can really get them to buy in." Carl then shared his strategies for engaging the students that began outside of the classroom.

> Like last year, I spent every recess playing with the kids. I got my gossip in but not during recess and plus it just cuts down on so many behaviors and what I have to deal with later. If I take the 20 kids with the most behavior problems and play football, I don't have to deal with quite so much later. Plus it lets me get to know those kids on a more personal level. And they're more cool with me because I can throw a football. It also give me an inside track with a lot of those kids, even if they're not on my caseload. A lot of the gen ed kids came to me too over their gen ed teacher and that's because I'm a guy and they think I'll get it.

The participants all conveyed a sense of self-confidence when describing their masculinity in the context of teaching elementary special education. However, it was evidenced that despite their self-assuredness, there is still an occasional air of perceived gender discrimination against them. However, it was noted that this tends to be less of an issue in schools where there are multiple men.

Qualities of an Effective Elementary School Special Education Teacher

It may be that there is a lack of male elementary special education teachers due to the fact that there is a general lack of individuals who possess the qualities to excel in the

field. Each of the participants spent time reflecting on the qualities that they felt made a strong special education teacher, particularly at the elementary level.

Steve expressed that good teaching does not likely have to do with gender, but rather is about having a personality that enables one to be a successful educator. He stated, “I think that you have to have the right personality but you can see that in either male or female.” Matt differed and argued that men do, in fact, introduce an element to the classroom that is not present with female teachers. He argued, “I think we interact with the kids differently. I think we bring a whole different card to the table.”

When discussing the characteristics and traits of an effective elementary special education teacher, Steve noted the importance of being able to manage a classroom. He noted the importance of “just knowing how to manage the classroom the right way. I think behavior management is the most important thing because without it, you’re not going to be able to teach a thing.” Furthermore, he expressed “You have to be larger than life. Just being, knowing when it’s a time to play and a time to be serious. That’s something that these kids really need to know.” Matt described an effective teacher as being grounded in flexibility and compassion.

> They have to be flexible, caring. I think an individualizer. You need to be flexible because the schedule changes all the time and you’re usually the last to know. I believe that teachers who are going to have a stress attack at school are the ones that get flipped out by that. I’m kinda like, whatever, there’s nothing you can do about it so why get stressed. It’s usually best for the kids. Like an assembly might pop up. Well that’s good for the kids. They need to be exposed. What I’m going to do in math I can do tomorrow. You have to be patient, compassionate, and caring. You know, these students are special ed for a reason. They need support. Think how frustrated you get. They’re about 10 times more frustrated because they’ve been doing this their whole life and you’re just working with them for a little bit of time. They deal with it all day. So, a lot of that, I think you have to be

> a self-reflector. I think you have to be quick on your feet. You plan an entire lesson and it's going to go right for maybe five minutes and then you're swimming. If you can't think quick and push along, I think you're going to flounder. And if you keep pushing through with your lesson plan, the kids could be hurt. You have to be able to assess and go.

Carl agreed with this description by emphasizing the need to be flexible. However, he added that there are so many positions in the field of education that there is a place for nearly anyone to be involved.

> I think that takes flexibility and a certain personality. And then, the same way for self-contained settings, I think that's the same thing. You're kind of on an island and you don't see many adults. So, I think it takes a certain personality but I think there's something in the scheme for everybody. You just have to figure out where you fit. But there's always the piece that I think it does take more patience and flexibility and the ability to let things roll off that just aren't, are kind of silly. I don't think just anyone can do it.

Carl stated that perhaps one of the most essential qualities that is needed to teach elementary special education, and special education at all grades for that matter, is the need to empathize with the students. Carl also noted the importance of having a compassionate attitude towards the children.

> You need to be able to look at the situations and look at these kids and understand what they're going through and realize that you're their advocate and the person at their school who can make a difference. I think having a sense of humor is a huge piece. I think some of the things you deal with are ridiculous and you have to be able to let some of this stuff roll off. Also, I think you have to be able to work with other people and be collaborative or have the backbone and be able to say, "No, I'm not your instructional assistant." You need to have communication skills to deal with other teachers. Especially the ones who think you're their assistant. Then, I think there's the teaching stuff. The organization, the diligence. I mean, you have to put in a lot of time. You need to learn the gen ed curriculum, modify, adapt it. There's a lot of time that you need to put in and it's one of those jobs that you never really finish. So, I think those are all very important. The other

> thing too, is, if you don't speak up and support these kids around your school, your school perception isn't going to change. I tried to change how special ed was viewed. It wasn't the old, take them in this room and we don't really know what they're doing. They were a part of the gen ed and pulled when they needed to be and were a part of the school.

When reflecting on the qualities of an effective special education teacher, Matt noted that these descriptions should be reflected in anyone who is a good teacher. They should not adhere only to special education or vice versa.

> I think a good gen ed teacher does the same thing. I think a good teacher is a good teacher. You can do either side of it. I think special ed programs, skills, and practices work great for general ed students…You can get stuff from trainings but I think there are people who just can't work with kids. You could be the most trained person in the world but it could be like they're dealing with aliens when they get around the kids. I think you have to have that personality…If you don't enjoy what you do, you're not going to be effective.

When asked if the qualities that each participant shared described themselves, each responded with varying levels of assurance, but all answered "yes." Additionally, it was shared that these qualities should apply to both special and regular education teachers. As Matt stated, "Good teaching is good teaching."

What Influences Enable Men to Persist in Their Roles as Special Education Teachers within the Elementary School Setting?

A minimum qualifying factor to be a participant in this study was that the individual have a minimum of five years' experience as an elementary special education teacher. Not only did the participants meet that minimum qualification, but the majority

exceeded it. Therefore, it was prudent to explore how these men have been able to persist in their roles as special education teachers within the elementary school setting for so long.

Dealing with Stress

From time to time, everyone experiences a bad day at work for one reason or another. How we deal with those difficult days likely has an impact on the manner in which we are able to endure those tough times. Steve described some of his strategies for dealing not only with a stressful day of teaching but also getting through his everyday routine.

> If I feel like I've had a bad day then I'll go to bed a bit earlier that night. And I like going to school early, taking the long route to school and home. Just having time without human interaction. I just try to have alone time, which may or may not be the best thing for my social life. But I look at it as I give so much during the day that I just need time to myself. It certainly affected my last relationship. I didn't really want to hang out with my girlfriend too much after school. And I think we broke up because we weren't seeing each other too much. And there were plenty of times that we could but a lot of the time I was like, I don't really want to be around anyone. I just want to spend time by myself.

While Steve has been able to find strategies that allow him to recover from a tiring day of teaching, they have not come without sacrifices. If the need to be alone after a long day is the price of teaching but it is costing Steve his relationships, is it really worth it for him? For now, it seems to be, but he acknowledged the need to move on in time.

> I do enjoy what I do but I have good days and I have bad days. Apparently, I have more good days because I keep coming back. When I do have those bad days I do think about a total life change and, thank God I don't have those too much, but I

> know I can't stay in special ed forever. I know that. I have to start thinking about other things. But I enjoy it when I'm in it. But I need to sort of move on.

Similarly, Matt has found methods to calm and relax after a long work week. Part of his strategy includes using humor to help both he and his colleagues process and reflect over the week that has passed.

> At the end of a Friday I usually sit with a bunch of teachers and just talk and laugh about some stories and just de-escalate everyone. Especially everyone who works with me. I kind of take it as my responsibility to joke around and get them loose again because you don't need to take that home. You know, it just depends on the day, but I always try to leave happy. And I'm going home to my kids and that makes me happy. I don't want to take my frustrations home and give that to my own children.

Matt noted that much of the reason that he makes a point to de-escalate at the end of a difficult day or week is to minimize the amount of work-related stress that he brings home. However, he also noted that the nature of the job is such that it is impossible to block this out completely.

> I usually spend that night sort of pondering how I can do this better and I'll usually come with a new fresh attitude about how I can approach that issue in a better way. It will kind of mentally destroy me for a night where I'll be fixated on it and replaying it in my head.

Working with Other Men

When discussing the nature of being a male in an elementary school setting, Steve noted that his experience has been slightly unusual in the fact that he works alongside several other men.

> In my school, considering we have more males than in most other elementary schools, I think that adds to the male camaraderie and we want to hang out with each other. It's kind of nice having all these other males around to bring contrast to all the estrogen.

Matt also had the opportunity to experience working alongside other men. However, Matt's experience was different as he noted that the men who were already established in his school were slightly territorial when he transitioned in. Furthermore, because he came so highly recommended from his previous school, Matt described that he was met at his new school with slight incredulity and cynicism from the other, more established male teachers.

> At my school, there were a lot of males when I came in. So I came in highly recommended by my principals and they were like, "Here's the golden boy coming in to steal our thunder. This is our school." I can still see it. Like when we're in a meeting and I say something, there are guys that are quick to second-guess what I'm saying and I think that's because this is their school and I'm on their territory. And that's okay. I know what I'm saying is right so you can make yourself look silly. I know I'm going to come off looking good.

While Matt had the ability to look at the situation with humor, he was also able acknowledge that the nickname he was branded was also representative of the manner in which he was treated among the school community. He expressed, "I'm definitely the golden boy at both my schools. At my other school, it was even worse because I was the only male. When it was my birthday, it was like a national holiday. I definitely benefited from it. There's no doubt."

On a similar note, Carl described that he experienced tokenism in his career. He also shared that given the nature of the challenges that males face in this particular career, that he was fine with a little preferential treatment.

> I'm a token male in my program, right now. I believe it had something to do with me getting the job but I also believe at my school, there is preferential treatment over some things and I was okay with that. It's to everyone's advantage though. If a team was running into something and the principal was kinda being, doing her thing and not into it, I would go talk to her and suddenly we were allowed to do it. So everybody won. But I also acknowledged it. Like I said, at my old school, they called me the golden boy and I was like, alright…But there's also stuff that we do that others aren't dealing with so I think we should get that back…We're in a building full of females who have different ways of doing things and have different perspectives on things and their communication is different and things can be misinterpreted. I think that I sometimes spend time clearing up things to get these two to talk so that the kids don't suffer. And just things that I think I can do differently. I actually think there are things that we bring to the school that really benefits the school…I do think males, I will say, there's benefits on the side of behavior and school climate but there is something to be said for planning, curriculum, and really knowing the content. I just know, even with myself, sometimes I was like, I'm really not where I should be at. But I also can deal with that kid and she can't. So there's pluses and minuses. I do think if there were too many males that would be an issue too. I think in elementary schools, it gets territorial. It's different in high school. I think they realize it's 50/50. But in elementary schools, I have my school, and that's your school. I know when I came here, they had their alpha male. Now we're cool… But I think that's more in elementary than anywhere else. I have sat in high school and they seem cool with each other. It's just different in elementary.

A Look Towards the Future

When reflecting on the possibilities for the future, Steve noted that he desires to have a family but that it would be difficult to address the needs of one in his current career. This concern was predominantly grounded in his financial status.

> Perhaps that's why I'm sort of on the ropes about marriage because I'm not sure I'm really confident enough in my ability take care of a family because I'm not

> really getting paid that much. So, at this point, I'm saving up what I can in the hopes that I can have enough by the time I've decided. And, um, it is pretty tough. I mean being single, it's easy to live off of that but I don't want to stay single my whole life.

Matt agreed that he too sees a need for better pay for teachers. As he noted, being responsible for a family on a teacher's salary is challenging to say the least.

> I think the financial aspect of it, being the breadwinner in the family is what pushes more men away from it. For me, right now, my wife stays home with the kids and my salary can't even cover the bills so she has to go and work. We don't even see each other except on the weekends or until 9:00 at night. I think that would push people away from it. Elementary, it seems elementary gets pushed away from more than high school.

While he echoed the assertion that it is difficult to make ends meet on a teacher's salary, Carl also emphasized that it is possible to supplement one's income with various undertakings. Yet, a large attraction to teaching is the fact that educators have summer vacations. It is fair that a teacher must give up those hard earned vacation days to supplement their income?

> I think there's something to be said with the afternoons and summers. I made a lot of money on the side tutoring and doing all these things. Now during the summers, my wife can stay home with the kids and I can still work and that's an extra $10,000 or whatever it might be. So that does kind of add in. So I do think there's a way to maximize your earnings as a teacher but you have to be willing to work a little more… I grew up having summer jobs and working and I think with females, it's a little easier to take the time off. I feel like if I'm not busy, I'm not making money for my family. Sometimes I think it's harder to take care of two kids than work anyway.

Carl then went on to describe potential career paths that he may traverse in time. While he acknowledged that administration is a sensible route, he is also aware of the lives that

school leaders live and recognized that they are not without their own set of challenges and sacrifices.

> Those are things that I have thought about. Going down the admin road. But I've put a lot of thought into that the last few years and the APs that I know stay at school until 8:00 every night. At this point in my life, I can't do that. A couple of years from now, maybe. I'm very much in the state of, I'm very happy with what I'm doing right now, the behavior job. That's the only thing that I'm clinging to right now. If that goes away, I don't know what I'm going to do. I really don't. And I don't want to just settle. If my job gets cut, I'm sure I can go back into the classroom but that's going on, in my head, my heart's not going to be into it and it won't be good for anybody…I do run into that where I'm seeing one of my buddies from home and I'm like, he's a dummy but he's making $120,000 and I'm like, how the hell did that happen? And he's got this big house and his wife stays home and I'm like, huh, that's when I question or I'm like, maybe I made a wrong turn somewhere. Because I just know there are some people making a lot more money than me and I'm just like, how did that happen? Um, but I think that's where, I'm getting to that point, I don't want to get to the point where you're watching every penny. It's just if you're making double what you're making now, you don't have to worry about it and that's not going to happen for teachers.

Carl also expressed that he made the most of his career as a teacher. Consequently, his move into the behavioral specialist position that he is currently in has been particularly engaging.

> I think I've kind of maximized what I could do. I like where I'm at. There was a point in time that I wanted to get my admin degree and I still might but I've watched admins stay late until like 9:00 every night and that's not where I'm at right now…I started to get, it wasn't really burned out. I just knew that it wasn't what I fully wanted to be doing. I just, all the piling on, I couldn't take it. It was starting to get to be too much. I have kids at home and it just got to the point where I was doing things that I didn't think were all that important to be doing at midnight and it's just tiring. It just got to that point. And now with this job, if I'm working at midnight, I at least know that it's going to be presented to a school team. Someone will actually see it. So I'm good where I'm at now.

Steve also reflected an interest in moving his career beyond the classroom in time. While he expressed a financial motive for transitioning into something new, he also acknowledged that greater recognition would be a reward that may help him persevere.

> I love what I do but I wish at this point, I could be recognized more for what I do. Be paid a little more. But, it is what it is. I'm probably gonna stick it out for a few more years and see what happens. Hopefully something will happen in the next couple of years…There are private schools that are looking for a program director. Somebody who knows a lot about autism and applied behavioral analysis which is kind of what we use in the classroom. Those kinds of opportunities, I think I could really get into them. So I wouldn't be working in the classroom but I would be working with the teachers being the admin or sort of respected role in the school.

Matt made it clear that he has been satisfied with his career to this point. He expressed, "I wouldn't change anything. I'd keep it the same. There's a lot of advantages to teaching, like having summers off. People make fun of it but it's a great perk." Yet, he also acknowledged that he is ready to do something new.

> I enjoy what I do but I'm ready to make a change. I mean, I've changed several times from general ed to special ed but it's, um, with the special ed aspect, I would rather team teach. I think it's more powerful as opposed to what I do now with pull out with students. I would rather do push in. But I enjoy what I do.

These participants reflected the belief that the lives of teachers, particularly those who enter special education, give so much of themselves to their students and school community. Much more than most would expect. Perhaps Steve put it best when he said, "being special ed, it's a hardcore job."

This chapter has presented the results of the research process, which included a series of interviews. Each participant shared his experiences of teaching elementary

special education openly and honestly during these interviews. The results were organized according to the four main research question of this study. The final chapter of this study will present the researcher's analysis and conclusions of this information through thematic interpretation.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how men experience their identity as elementary school special education teachers. The investigation examined how men describe: (1) the factors that influenced them to become elementary special education teachers, (2) how they view their role as special education teachers and their professional experiences in elementary schools, (3) what it means to be "male" in the context of elementary education, and (4) the influences that enabled them to persist in their role as elementary special education teachers.

This study was grounded in theory related to the social forces that shape an individual's identity and therefore was framed through the conceptual lens of the social relations perspective which was formed out of the feminist movement. Andrew Tolson (1977, p. 11-12), a profeminist authority in the social relations perspective, and whose theory serves as the genesis of this study, describes the roots of this point of view:

> My starting point is perhaps the most basic of all feminist propositions: the distinction between biology and culture. When we talk about 'masculinity,' or when we respond to the masculine 'social presence', we draw uponcertain specific forms of social knowledge. This is to say, although certain aspects of sexual behavior are obviously functions of biological sex (including genetic aptitude and physical development), by far the major part of sexuality is cultural (encompassing personality, social behavior; and involving symbolic meanings transmitted in linguistic communication).

Tolson described how the foundation of male identity development begins during childhood. The family serves as the initial cultural and emotional influence on male

children. However, other major social structures in a child's life play a significant part in the formation of male identity. One such social structure is school, where the conception of masculinity takes root.

The researcher was able to uncover the essence of the phenomenon by utilizing the conceptual lens of the social relations perspective and by employing Creswell's (2007) suggestion for conducting a phenomenological analysis. Therefore, this chapter discusses, analyzes and makes meaning of the descriptions in Chapter Four and the themes therein, presented in direct and speculative conclusions. For the purpose of this analysis, direct conclusions are those which discuss and interpret how the specific study findings either align with or depart from current theory and literature. Speculative conclusions are broader in nature and involve wider implications for practice, policy, and future research.

Although a number of unique dynamics and distinctions influenced the participants' decisions to become elementary level special education teachers, four themes surfaced as a result of the research process: (1) a desire to improve the lives of children with special needs, (2) a desire to improve the social milieu of elementary schools for special education, (3) the importance of entering the field with a strong sense of self-confidence in one's maleness to be an effective elementary special education teacher, and (4) the importance of growth and advancement in one's career.

Direct Conclusions

What Influences a Man's Choice to Become an Elementary Special Education Teacher?

A strong element that the participants of this study shared was the fundamental message that their desire to improve the lives of children with special needs drove their decisions to become elementary level special education teachers. This is the first finding of this study. Each of the participants possessed an ideal that drove their need to help others. Teaching special education has been a means of providing such service. It has allowed them to engage their inclination to work with children, with elementary school as a sensible environment to do this in. However, during the interviews, it became evident that none of them knew early in their lives that they would eventually become special education teachers.

Each participant conveyed a sense of tremendous caring for children. Additionally, each participant ultimately found his way to the career path of teaching elementary special education based on a desire to nurture children with special needs. Yet, this course was not planned. While one participant had an inclination that he would become a teacher early in his life, the others described that they "fell into" special education without advanced planning. Rather it appeared as a suitable and stable career at the time of making such a decision. Because of the participants' shared preference to work with younger children and belief that they could have the greatest impact on them during their early years, they each decided to teach at the elementary school level rather

than the middle school or high school levels. In spite of that preference, none had ever taught at those upper grade levels. What then drove their partiality? Perhaps they would be surprised and find that they enjoyed age and grade ranges that are beyond elementary school?

The participants spoke extensively about their own schooling. While they each noted that they encountered a male teacher at some point during their education, none were credited with having any influence on their desire to teach. This attitude was consistent with Cooney and Bittner's (2001) study, which found that few of the participants had male teachers themselves, and that those who did reported that their experiences had little to do with their decision to teach. However, the participants of this study noted that their male teachers who were engaging and took time to interact with the students outside of the classroom were at least held in a positive regard. Those who did not make such efforts were viewed more negatively. The participants were clear that much of their own satisfaction with teaching has involved the opportunity to interact with their students outside of the classroom. Perhaps developing a bond with students is essential to one's happiness as a teacher. Perhaps one must have a true desire to work with children to be driven to engage and interact with them in this manner.

The participants were able to identify that an effective teacher should have a propensity for engaging with their students. Each must have seen that trait within himself before deciding to teach. Paul, Lavely, Cranston-Gingras, and Taylor argued that "Images of self are critical to the process of becoming a teacher because they constitute the personal context within which new information will be interpreted, and are the stuff of

which teaching persona is created (McLean, 1999)" (2002, p. 179). The participants of this study demonstrated a sense of self-confidence when describing their abilities as teachers, as well as an understanding of who they are as individuals. Yet, they denoted that images of self are not enough to become a teacher. One must have a genuine desire to work with children.

Carter's (2008) interviews with male elementary school teachers found that they shared an authentic inclination to improve the lives of children. Each maintained the ideal that teaching would allow them to help children through devoted teaching, which Carter attributed to their inner desire to play a role in the greater good. When the participants of this study discussed their desire to be a positive force in the lives of children, they noted the importance of reaching them while they are young. Thus, the end result is that these men care so much for the wellbeing of children, that they were willing to become a gender minority to see their abilities come to fruition as elementary special education teachers.

Feminist theorists regard the ethic of care to be more characteristic of women than of men (Green, 1998). Green asserts that studies of elementary schools in international settings have indicated that female teachers typically view caring as at the teacher's core. This is characterized by prominent maternal imagery. Green (p. 2) refers to Acker (1995), who describes both early childhood and elementary school teachers as a "kind of reflective practitioner mother" whose teaching pedagogy centers on care and empathy. Yet, the men in this study centered their purpose of working with children on a strong sense of caring for their students. Is it fair to view elementary school teachers with

maternal imagery? Should men who teach at the elementary level then be viewed with paternal imagery rather than through feminine associations? Green suggested that limited evidence is available that establishes men as inappropriate people to provide the care and nurturing that is necessary to teach early childhood and elementary education. However, the experiences of the participants in this study provided evidence that men do have the propensity to be excellent sources of care and nurturing to young children.

The participants of this study clearly care for their students. This corresponds with O'Connor's (2006) study, which found that a sense of identity provided a rationalization for teachers' caring behavior. She also found that the individual and inherent significance of caring gives value to teachers' work and validates their remaining in the profession. She noted, however, that the magnitude of teachers' emotions is underemphasized in educational policies, which was reiterated by the participants of this study who stressed that the workload, testing requirements, and teaching conditions are driving them out of the field. Therefore, it seems that no matter how confident a teacher is, or how much they care for their students, it is possible for each to have a breaking point.

How do Men Describe Their Role as Special Education Teachers and Their Professional Experiences within the Elementary School Setting?

When describing their roles as special education teachers, the participants' resounding message was that their role was grounded in the purpose of changing perspectives and school climate for special education. This desire to improve the social milieu of elementary schools for special education is the second theme of this study.

The selfless nature of these men has enabled them to persevere in the predominantly female profession of elementary teaching. Despite working under such circumstances, these men have not wavered in their desire to provide their service to improve the social milieu for special education. This is consistent with Sabbe and Aelterman, who described how such discourses have overcome the working conditions and career mobility of female teachers since they are depicted as selfless individuals who teach for the sake of their students rather than for any personal or monetary gain (Duncan, 1996; Munro, 1998; Tamboukou, 2003). Such an altruistic description of female teachers is in line with the determination driving these men to be special educators.

Each of the participants described how they have experienced working with general education teachers at some point during their careers. The men noted a consistent undertone of division between regular and special education when working with older and seasoned teachers. This divide was best portrayed as the regular education teacher who ran the classroom, and the special education teacher who was there to manage the special education students. These men also described that the regular education teachers often identified them as an assistant rather than a fellow educator. While these men found that such attitudes were those they hoped to change, they also noted that is has been extraordinarily difficult to do so given that such teachers are generally set in their ways. However, when presented with a co-teaching opportunity with a younger and less experienced teacher, these men noted a much more positive experience. In every instance, both the regular and special education teachers were able to share a sense of

equality and reciprocity with one another. By so doing, they created learning environments that were receptive in the inclusion and fair treatment of all children, regardless of if they were in special education.

How do Men Represent what it Means to be "Male" in the Context of Elementary Education?

The participants of this study shared extensive stories of their lives as elementary special education teachers. They have also had the opportunity to make a wealth of positive contributions to the elementary school setting. Such opportunities have undoubtedly led them to encounter a range of both advantageous and disadvantageous experiences in their careers as male elementary special education teachers. Additionally, the men in this study each demonstrated a core belief that they possess the skills to be capable and effective teachers. Yet, their conversations also reflected nuances that indicated that while they are confident in their abilities in their role as educators, they are less so about their place as men in a female dominated milieu. Therefore, the third finding is the importance of entering the field with a strong sense of self-confidence in one's maleness to be an effective elementary special education teacher.

Nearly 80 years ago Western culture stereotypically labeled men as aggressive, competitive, and instrumentally oriented. Conversely, women have been labeled as passive, helpful, and expressive (Connell, 1995; Sabbe and Aelterman, 2007; Terman and Miles, 1936). Little has changed since then and such stereotypes have become pervasive in the present American society. Connell (1995) described almost 60 years after this

initial assertion, the cultural expectation for men and masculinity. He explained that, "Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell, 1995, p. 77). Connell (2000) later described: "Masculinities and femininities are actively constructed, not simply received. Society, school and peer milieu make boys an offer of a place in the gender order; but boys determine how they take it up" (p. 162). Furthermore, Sargent (2001) elaborated that institutions create and reproduce differences between men and women which can result in one group receiving unwarranted advantage over others. He added that jobs are often designed based on sex stereotypes which lead to a division of labor that reinforces orthodox thinking of which jobs are suitable for women and men.

The participants of this study have been able to engage in a profession that is typically reserved for women while maintaining their masculinity. However, each of the men noted that it was necessary for them to engage in "male" activities, particularly in the area of play by engaging in rough-and-tumble activities such as wrestling and playing football, so that they establish and preserve their masculinity within their schools. Despite this nuance, these men are clearly masculine, yet none of them showed any sign of aggression or competition. Nor did they show signs of passivity. Rather, they have been able to identify themselves through merging these polarizing traits to become masculine men who have the tenacity to care for the well-being of children.

Each of the participants recognized that by teaching special education in an elementary school, they would be viewed with amazement by their community for taking on an atypical role and, in fact, becoming a gendered minority within their schools. However, each participant expressed their view of the need for more male teachers in the elementary milieu. Additionally, they all noted that both their preference and skill sets were best matched with children of this age range.

Nonetheless, the gender stratification of public schools is likely deterring men from this field. This is consistent with Connell's (2008) argument that elementary schools serve as institutions that influence gender in organizational life. Additionally, Sargent (2001) elaborated that institutions create and reproduce differences between men and women which can result in one group receiving an unwarranted advantage over others. He added that jobs are often designed based on sex stereotypes which lead to a division of labor that reinforces orthodox thinking regarding which jobs are suitable for women and men. The men of this study acknowledged that they have received preferential treatment at some point during their teaching careers. Some even viewed it as tokenism. Yet, none seemed to take issue with such preferential treatment. Rather, it was viewed as an entitlement that they deserved for stretching so far outside the boundaries of typical gender roles and functioning in an environment that challenged their maleness.

Gosse, Parr, and Allison (2008) also found that the participants felt that they were constantly being policed when having physical contact with children, such as hugging or holding hands, while it was a near non-issue for their female colleagues. Again, the participants expressed that although they did not feel a sense of discrimination for being

male, each realized that it was imperative that they limit their physical interaction and maintain strict physical boundaries with their students to avoid any potential suspicion of wrong doing.

Based on the participants' descriptions of their experiences in elementary special education, it is clear that they are all committed to their work and are able to recognize both the pros and cons of their chosen career path. By reflecting on their role as male special education teachers, these men have been able to develop a strong sense of self-confidence as teachers, which has enabled them to realize their innermost desire to help children grow, both academically and socially, so that they too can become positive contributors to society. However, despite their confidence as teachers, the overwhelming feminization of elementary schools has continually challenged their self-confidence as males in this female dominated milieu. Therefore, it is not enough to be confident in one's skillset as a teacher. It is imperative that one also be confident regarding their maleness in elementary schools. If society were to demonstrate a greater value and respect for the field of education, then perhaps more men would opt to teach at the elementary level and perhaps they would be able to do so without fear of society's judgment of their masculinity.

What Influences Enable Men to Persist in Their Roles as Special Education Teachers within the Elementary School Setting?

The participants equally espoused that most men would not find elementary special education an alluring career path. However, for those who do, it is of the utmost

importance that they have the conviction, support, and ability to persevere to overcome the social norms and minority status that they will surely face. Yet, even those men who demonstrate such inner strength may decide that in time, they need to move on to a new career, which is consistent with the future prospects of this study's participants. Thus, the fourth finding of this study is the importance of growth and advancement in one's career.

The participants all spoke extensively about the role that positive relationships have had on their persistence and career success. The encouragement and support that friends and family have provided gave them the foundation to establish and maintain themselves as elementary special education teachers. This ideal is in line with O'Connor's (2006) study which found that teachers' experiences of caring are centered in their need to maintain positive professional relationships with students and in their individual ideals towards their role as a teacher. She also states that personal reflection and social contact with others is essential to the growth of teachers' professional identities.

The influence that family, friends, and colleagues have had upon the participants' success as special educators at the elementary level may not be the decisive factor in their decision to teach or in persisting as special education teachers, but there is no doubt that the challenges that these men have faced have been made easier due to the positive nature of these relationships. Carter (2008) found that men who received encouragement and support from their family and friends were more likely to teach. The support and approval they received played a considerable role with their desire to teach. This is consistent with the experiences of the participants of this study. Each noted that the

backing that they have received from others has supported their entering the field of elementary special education and success therein.

While speaking of their various experiences in elementary education, the participants each focused on how valuable they found positive relationships, both personal and professional, to be regarding their ability to persevere as special education teachers. While establishing and maintaining positive relationships have been essential to their success, none of the men were able to identify a single individual who was against their choice to teach. Regardless, the men of this study made it clear that whether the backing comes from their parents, siblings, spouse, friends, or colleagues, having a person whom they value to support their decision to teach special education at the elementary school level was crucial to their success.

Consistent with the participant's experiences, Sargent (2001) asserted that U.S. culture continues to maintain gender order through the sexual division of labor, which is evident in the way a hierarchy of gendered jobs has been established and reproduced. Furthermore, Coleman and Hong (2008) observed that women have faced discrimination for centuries. Moreover, women have faced lower social status and experienced restrictions in the roles that are offered to them due to the stereotypes of being female. Coleman and Hong further suggested that an individual's self-perception may be influenced by their awareness of their own identity. While each of the participants in this study have demonstrated an awareness of their own identity and have overcome the gender stereotypes associated with teaching at the elementary school level to excel in their careers, they are not immune to the gender stratification within elementary schools.

Each of the men noted that in time, they will leave the classroom, likely to pursue administrative positions within a school system. Such positions would be more in line with the expected roles men should take within the school environment. Furthermore, it was conveyed that much of the reasoning for such future prospects was grounded in finances, with the intent to improve their ability to serve as the primary breadwinner for their family. However, it was also noted that this is also about maintaining their masculine positions within the elementary school milieu. It was shared that it would not be acceptable to spend the entirety of their careers as special education teachers. Teachers often enter their profession with ideals that they hope to share with others, namely their students. Consistent with Ghorbani's (2008) study, which found that men placed a strong emphasis on the importance of money in determining their job satisfaction, the men of this study advised that administrator's salaries are tempting them from the classroom and into managerial positions. They also noted that the only other plausible option is to leave education altogether.

The participants also espoused that the need to be their family's breadwinner has been particularly challenging. There has been a clear concern about adequately providing for their family. Therefore, if any man is to contemplate a possible career as an elementary school special education teacher, it is imperative that they not only have the self-confidence and capability to endure and negotiate the minority position in which he will be placed in their profession, but must also have the financial means to make it work.

Speculative Conclusions

The participants of this study all based their decisions to become teachers upon their desire to work with children, particularly those with special needs. Given their shared career path, it is evident that there are men who aspire to teach. Yet, it is unclear as to what percentage of the male population actually fit into this small classification. Additionally, little is known regarding the benefits of what men bring to the elementary school milieu.

Each of the participants agreed that as a male, they were afforded an opportunity to interact with their students in a manner which they felt was not typical of their female counterparts. Much of this interaction occurred in the form of play, particularly during recess. Finding time for such interactions has permitted the men to develop firm relationships with all students of those particular grades, not simply their own. The simple act of engaging all students has promoted and supported the positive inclusion of students with disabilities among their peers. Furthermore, it has provided the students, particularly the males, with a role model. While research does indicate that teacher gender does not necessarily impact student achievement, it may impact their behavioral and social-emotional development. If that becomes the case, it would make sense that men provide a particularly strong role model for young children receiving special education services, as they often require additional support in the development of these areas. Thus, if the experiences of these men are consistent with the greater population of male educators, then perhaps schools, particularly elementary schools, and special

education therein, benefit from their presence. This, however, cannot be achieved in the current educational climate.

There is a pervasive public attitude that people chose to become teachers because they have no skills to offer other professions. That those who cannot do, teach. While the participants of this study encountered much more positive attitudes, they did acknowledge that they have observed brash views when witnessing some people discuss public education. Like other teachers, the participants of this study held professional degrees. In fact, they held graduate degrees. Why is it then, that in a field where its professionals possess such impressive credentials, they are at risk of public ridicule? Perhaps such attitudes have emerged from a deterioration in American society's value for public education. Perhaps the minority status of male teachers and the perception that teaching is of a lower social status than other careers has generated such attitudes. Or perhaps the insufficient pay that teachers receive is the underlying culprit. These are both questions that warrant more investigation.

If the participants of this study do leave their careers as elementary special education teachers for something more financially rewarding, as was indicated repeatedly throughout the interview process, then their schools and students therein are in store for a substantial loss. Even if these men continue to work within the walls of elementary schools, but as school administrators, they will undoubtedly have far fewer opportunities to interact with and touch students on such a personal level. Until teaching becomes a financially reasonable career path, far too many individuals will continue to leave the classroom or avoid entering it all together.

Recommendations for Further Research

It is quite possible that more men desire to teach than what we currently see in our schools. However there are subtle systems in place that are discouraging them from doing so. Thus, the limited amount of literature on the topic of men who enter the field of elementary education points to the need for further research on the topic. While current literature notes that there is a significant shortage of males of all grades and subjects at the elementary school level, the paucity of individuals who enter the career path of elementary special education is even more extreme. Therefore, further exploration of the personality traits of male elementary special education teachers might help in determining what drives men to enter and persevere in this very specific field.

Although current literature espouses that teacher gender has little to do with student achievement, there is no research available to confirm that such findings are the same within the context of special education. Furthermore, teaching involves much more than academics, particularly within the milieu of elementary schools. This is a key time in the lives of children, when they are developing socially and emotionally and positive adult influences are essential to that development. It may be the case that male elementary school special education teachers are afforded a dynamic that their female counterparts do not have when interacting with their students, particularly males. Further research into the social-emotional and behavioral impact of male elementary special

education teachers would shed a great deal of light on this question and may help determine if more men are truly needed in the field.

The notion of masculinity may play a key role in a man's decision to become an elementary level teacher. Therefore, further research on the topic of masculinity and teaching ought to be conducted. In this light, such an exploration should include the progression of the definition of "masculinity" over the past century. By identifying trends from the past, we may uncover those for the future and provide a better insight to the type of man who decides to teach children of young ages.

As teacher recruitment and retention become issues of increasing importance, further research needs to be conducted to determine precisely what attracts individuals to the field of elementary special education and what keeps them there for the duration of their careers. Additionally, a great deal of emphasis is placed on teacher salaries, yet it seems unlikely that this is a singular force in shaping the declining teacher workforce. While the financial implications of teaching need to be further researched, so too do the working conditions, social strata, and gender dynamics of the field. Only then can we have a better understanding and ability to attract and maintain the best elementary level special educators, an, in fact, teachers of all subjects and grade levels.

Practice

Due to the role that college and university programs have in teacher preparation programs, it is imperative that they take into account the various obstacles and minority status of males when preparing future educators to enter the field. Additionally, further

emphasis and attention should be placed on those who may be interested in pursuing areas in education where males are particularly scarce, such as elementary school and special education, and the rarest of all, elementary school special education teachers. Recognizing the motivations of such individuals may help inform their purpose in pursuing their career path and their successful recruitment.

In an effort to recruit males into the field, support programs should be instituted to provide young men with exposure to the experiences that are necessary to determine if elementary special education is a suitable career for them. In this regard, such programs should begin in high school, where mentoring could take place between students and currently practicing elementary special education teachers. Whenever possible, such mentoring should be done by practicing male elementary special education teachers.

Similar practices should be extended into the college and university realm. All students regardless of gender should be encouraged to consider elementary special education as a viable career choice. If students of teacher preparation programs in both regular and special education were required to be exposed to the actual practice early in their schooling by expanding student teaching requirements to the freshman and sophomore years, perhaps more individuals would be brought into the field. In addition, perhaps other individuals could learn before entering a career in elementary special education that it is in fact not a desirable path for them. They could avoid making a major commitment by being afforded an opportunity to explore the field before entering the teaching workforce. In that light, only the highest quality teachers who are truly invested in the field would be left as practitioners of elementary special education.

For those men who do choose the path of becoming an elementary school special education teacher, school districts ought to develop an outreach program that connects this small population from across schools. By doing so, these men will have a core group of teachers with whom they can identify, share experiences, and encourage to remain in the profession.

Policy

The President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (PCESE, 2002) stated that there is a shortage of adequately qualified personnel to provide special education services to children with disabilities. PCESE noted that the U.S. Department of Education-funded Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE) found that the nation's excess of 12,000 openings for special education teachers were unfilled or filled by substitute teachers in 1999-2000. The PCESE also commented that despite the growing diversity of children, they project that teachers will continue to be predominantly white, middle class, female, and monolingual. If American schools are growing increasingly more diverse, then it is imperative that as educators we know how to best reach those changing populations. Therefore, additional studies must be conducted to determine not only if a teacher's gender has an influence on their work with students, but also if their race impacts their ability to reach students of varying cultural or socioeconomic communities.

If there is a pervasive attitude in American culture that those who cannot do, teach, then perhaps it is time to begin to shift such attitudes towards those of value and

respect for all educators. In that regard, teacher preparation programs would benefit from increasing the stringency of their admission processes. By admitting only those students who have met a set of rigorous standards, the attractiveness of the profession to high-performing students would have the potential to increase greatly. This would also result in a reduced teacher workforce; however, that workforce would consist of not only the best and brightest, but also those who are the most committed to the practice of teaching.

With an emphasis on increasing the quality of the teaching workforce in general, more must still be done to improve the conditions for both prospective and practicing educators. If it is found that teacher pay is in fact a major contributing factor that is inhibiting the recruitment and retention of highly qualified educators, then the issue must be addressed. Although the argument to increase teacher salaries nationwide would be a sensible argument at face value, it is not practical, particularly in such difficult financial times. Therefore, alternative methods should be employed to increase teachers' earning potential. This could begin by significantly reducing or eliminating federal, state, and local taxes for all teachers, regardless of the subject or grade they choose to teach. Additionally, loan forgiveness programs would encourage students to earn degrees in the field of education. However, areas of high need, such as elementary special education, should offer generous signing bonuses. All of this should come in exchange for a contractual agreement to teach for an established number of years.

Methodological Process and Recommendations

This study explored how men experience their identity as elementary school special education teachers. By employing the qualitative methodology of phenomenology, the study took the form of case studies, which included a combination of two individual interviews for each participant and one focus group interview. In an effort to collect the richest possible data, the in-depth phenomenological three-interview series of Dolbeare and Schuman was selected as the primary research tool for the study (Seidman, 2006).

A case study design was deemed most appropriate for this study because it allowed for a holistic portrayal of the participants' experiences. Furthermore, case studies supported the organization of an array of information about the participants and then allowed an in-depth analysis of the cases by seeking patterns and themes in the data.

Participants were selected based on their ability to contribute a better understanding the phenomenon under study. Thus, a total of three elementary-level male special education teachers, working across a large urban school district in a mid-Atlantic state were identified as potential participants. These men were selected to participate in the study based on how well they met the selection criteria listed in Chapter Three.

What Worked Well

As a former elementary school special education teacher, the researcher found himself particularly invested in the topic of this study. Noticing the same level of interest from the participants, both they and the researcher agreed to participate in a lunch meet-and-greet prior to the inception of the interview process. This activity was found to be

particularly beneficial as it gave the participants and researcher an opportunity to engage with each other in an informal setting where they could not only get to know each other but also attain an improved understanding of the purpose of the research. Therefore, by creating a forum in which everyone could be put at ease prior to the interviews, the research environment was established in an atmosphere of comfort and trust.

By employing a research process that utilized both individual and focus group interviews, the participants were given a multi-faceted opportunity to share their experiences. Each of the men was fully engaged during the individual interviews and went into them ready to participate both openly and honestly. Given their previous introductions, the men then went into the focus group interview with a level of familiarity with each other. They quickly reestablished the connection that was generated at the lunch meeting several weeks earlier. Furthermore, they engaged each other with energy as they swapped stories and compared their experiences as teachers.

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed. Originally, the researcher anticipated that he would hire an outside party to transcribe the hours of audio recordings. However, he ultimately decided to undertake the task himself. While this task took hours to complete, it was found to be extremely beneficial. By doing so, the researcher was able to immerse himself in the various conversations and truly analyze the information contained in each recording; non-verbal information was key. Each pause, laugh, and sigh provided a deeper message and the researcher may have missed these non-verbal aspects had he opted to leave the job of transcribing to an outside party. Additionally, each participant was provided with a copy of each transcript so that they could verify the

information contained therein. Through employing such validity checks after each interview, the researcher was able to progress with confidence that his information was as accurate and representative for each participant as possible.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study provided a small window into how three men experience their identity as elementary school special education teachers. While this study was progressive in the subject matter of the research, the nature of phenomenological case studies is such that the findings of this research cannot be applied to any population outside of the three participants. While it may not be fair to consider this a limitation, it is necessary to acknowledge that there would be great benefit to expanding the scope of this study. A larger, national study on the topic of how men experience their identity as elementary school special education teachers would provide a greater insight to this question. And by so doing, a number of comparisons could be made among states and regions, providing a wider and more synoptic perspective on this very unique population.

Given that the researcher was fairly new to the research process of conducting semi-structured interviews, he found that three interviews were restrictive. Each of the interviews was concluded in the planned timeframe. However, the final focus group interview entailed a long and broad series of discussions which felt overwhelming as the meeting progressed and more and more time had passed. This time issue may have been alleviated had the researcher been more adept at transitioning the group's conversations. However, the researcher opted to permit the flow of conversation as he did because he

felt it was imperative not to alter the direction of the conversations in any way. It would seem then, that for neophyte interviewers, it would be beneficial to split the focus group into two sessions to allow adequate time for the natural flow of conversation without fear of time running out. Otherwise, experienced interviewers may have the expertise to keep the flow of discussion to one session without risking the quality of conversation.

While the research generated thick, rich descriptions of the participants' experiences as elementary special education teachers, the information came only from interviews. Perhaps a study that included a multilayered approach to its data collection would result in more well-rounded findings. To add additional layers to the research process, a brief survey could be sent to the participants in advance of the interviews which collects demographic information as well as information relating to their educational background, experiences as a student, and satisfaction with their current career as an elementary special education teacher. Additionally, a series of three full-day, school-based observations of each participant would allow the researcher to view the men in their environment and draw potential additional conclusions.

Conclusion

Given the female majority of elementary school teachers, a man who chooses to teach within that milieu must have a strong sense of self. Additionally, he must be confident in his abilities as a teacher. Only by being honest about one's inner identity can one move beyond society's stereotypical views of gender roles and rigid views of appropriate behaviors and personality traits. The participants of this study have

demonstrated a clear understanding of who they are. Because they have established a clear inner identity, these men have been able to succeed in a path where few have had the courage to do so. This study has demonstrated that these men were able to successfully enter and persevere in their careers due the three "C's": they each possessed the care, confidence, and capability to beat the odds and become elementary special education teachers.

What can be done to attract more men to the field of elementary level special education? Since no two people are the same, the answer will undoubtedly be different for each potential teacher. However, four themes emerged from the experiences of the three participants of this study. Each recognized a desire to improve the lives of children with special needs. Each described a desire to improve the social milieu of elementary schools for special education. The importance of entering the field with a strong sense of self-confidence in one's maleness to be an effective elementary special education teacher was of great importance. Finally, they recognized the importance of growth and advancement in one's career.

The genuine issue of the lack of male teachers in elementary schools is one of values. If more males are to consider becoming teachers, particularly elementary special education teachers, then American culture must make a significant shift towards becoming a society of value and respect for men who choose to work with children. In a democratic society where egalitarian values of equality and fairness are promoted for all, our schools have nonetheless become institutions in which gender stratification has taken root and perpetuated the stereotypes and gender roles that so many have sought to

eliminate. All teachers should be shown the respect and status they deserve for serving their communities. If we, as a nation, do not return to a culture of respect for our teachers, we will continue to see a decline in the number of those who teach, and areas of high need, such as elementary special education will be left to flounder.

References

Acker, S. (1994). *Gendered education.* Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

American School Counselor Association. (2003). *The ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs.* Alexandria, VA.

Blount, J. M. (1998). *Destined to rule the schools: Women and the superintendency, 1873-1995*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Brademas, J. (1987). *The politics of education: Conflict and consensus on capitol hill.* Norman, PA: University of Oklahoma Press.

Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2009). *U.S. Department of Labor, occupational outlook handbook, 2008-09 edition, teachers—special education.* Retrieved on August 19, 2009 from http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos070.htm.

Carter, Daniel J. (2008). *Factors influencing males to teach at the elementary level: An interview-based exploration of the thoughts and rationale for their career choice.* Doctoral dissertation, Indiana State University, 2008.

Coffey, A. & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Cohen, P.N. (2004). The gender division of labor. "Keeping house" and occupational segregation in the United States. *Gender and Society, 18*(2): 239-252.

Coleman, J.M. & Hong, Y. (2007). Beyond nature and nurture: the influence of lay gender theories on self-stereotyping. *Self and Identity, 7*(1): 34-53.

Connell, R.W. (1995). *Masculinities*. St. Leonards NSW Australia: Allen & Unwin.

Connell, R.W. (2000). *The men and the boys.* Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Connell, R.W. (2008). A thousand miles from kind: men, masculinities and modern institutions. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 16*(3): 237-252.

Cooney, M. & Bittner, M. (2001). Men in early childhood education: their emergent issues. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 29*(2), 77-82.

Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches, second edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Cushman, P. (2005). It's just not a real bloke's job: male teachers in the primary school. *Asia Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 33*(3), 321-338.

Cushman, P. (2008). So what exactly do you want? What principals mean when they say 'male role model.' *Gender and Education, 20*(2), 123-136.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research (2nd ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Education Commission of the States. (2007). *Special education: teacher issues*. Retrieved on November 19, 2007 from http://www.ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueid=112 &subIssueID=120.

Feeney, S. & Freeman, N. (1999). *Ethics and the early childhood educator. Using the national association for the education of young children code.* Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Foster, T. & Newman, E. (2005). Just a knock back? Identity bruising on the route to becoming a male primary school teacher. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, *11*(4), 341-358.

Ghorbani, D. (2008). *Characteristics of male pre-service elementary education candidates in North Dakota: An exploratory study.* Doctoral dissertation, The University of North Dakota, 2008.

Gorski, P. (1998). *Racial and gender identity in white male multicultural educators and facilitators: toward individual processes of self-development.* Doctoral dissertation, the University of Virginia, 1998.

Gosse, D., Parr, M. & Allison, J. (2008). Researching the halted paths of male primary school teacher candidates. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, *6*(1), 57-68.

Gottfredson, L.S. (1981). Circumscription and compromise: A developmental theory of occupational aspirations. *Journal of Counseling Psychology Monograph*, *28*, 545-579.

Green, C. (1998). *Two male early childhood teachers' perspectives on their occupational specialty and caring: A cross-national ethnographic case study.* Doctoral dissertation, the University of Georgia, 1998.

Helwig, A.A. (2001). A test of Fottfredson's theory using a ten-year longitudinal study.*Journal of Career Development*, *28*, 77-95.

Knudsen, S. (2004). Gender paradoxes and power: Theoretical reflections with empirical awareness. *Nordic Journal of Women's Studies, Gender Practices and Power*, *12*(2), 102-112.

Lortie, D.C. (1975). *School-teacher: A sociological study*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Magnuson, C.S. & Starr, M.F. (2000). How early is too early to begin life career planning? The importance of the elementary school years. *Journal of Career Development, 27*, 89-101.

Martino, W.J. (2008). Male teachers as role models: addressing issues of masculinity, pedagogy and the re-masculinization of schooling. *Curriculum Theory*, *38*(2): 189-223.

Maxwell, J.A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: an interactive approach, second edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Mead, Margaret. 1935. *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*. New York, NY: Dell.

National Education Association. (2003). *Wanted: more male teachers*. Retrieved on November 19, 2007 from http://www.nea.org/teachershortage/03malefactsheet.html.

National Education Association. (2008). *Inflation continues to outpace teacher salary growth. Average teachers' salaries declined over the past decade.* Retrieved on December 7, 2009 from http://www.nea.org/home/29399.htm.

Nelson, B. (2008). Dr. Helen talks about stereotypes that male teachers face. *MenTeach.* Retrieved on August 2, 2009 from http://www.menteach.org/news/dr_ helen_ talks_about_stereotypes_that_male_teachers_face.

O'Connor, K. (2006). "You choose to care": Teachers, emotions and professional identity. *Teaching & Teacher Education, 24*(1): 117-126.

Paechter, C. (2006). Reconceptualizing the gendered body: learning and constructing masculinities and femininities in school. *Gender and Education, 18*(2), 121-135.

Pan American Health Organization Regional Office of the World Health Organization. *Ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects*. Retrieved on June 6, 2009 from http://www.fep.paho.org/english/env/ethics_guide.pdf.

Paul, J., Lavely, C., Cranston-Gingras, A. & Taylor, E. (2002). *Rethinking professional issues in special education.* Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education. (2002). *A new era: revitalizing special education for children and their families*. Retrieved on May 28, 2009 from http://www.ed.gov/inits/commissionsboards/whspecialeducation/reports/images/res_Rep.pdf.

Pulliam, J.D. & Van Patten, J.J. (2007). *History of education in america, 9th edition*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Hall.

Roulston, K. & Mills, M. (2000). Male teachers in feminized teaching areas: marching to the beat of the men's movement drums? *Oxford Review of Education, 26*(2), 222-237.

Sabbe, E. & Aelterman, A. (2007). Gender in teaching: a literature review. *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice, 13*(5): 521-538.

Sargent, P. (2001). *Real men or real teachers? Contradictions in the lives of men elementary school teachers.* Harriman, TN: Men's Study Press.

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: a guide for researchers in education and the social sciences, third edition*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Seligman, L., Weinstock, L., & Heflin, E.N. (1991). The career development of 10 year olds. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling, 25*, 172-181.

Smith, J. (2007). 'Ye've got to 'ave balls to play this game sir!' boys, peers and fears: the negative influence of school-based 'cultural accomplices' in constructing hegemonic masculinities. *Gender and Education, 19*(2), 179-198.

Terman, L. & Miles, C. (1936). *Sex and Personality*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Tolson, A. (1977). *The limits of masculinity: male identity and women's liberation*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Trice, A.D., & McClellan, N. (1994). Does childhood matter? A rationale for the inclusion of childhood theories of career decision. *California Association for Counseling and Development Journal*, *14*, 35-44.

Tyack, D., Anderson, J.D., Cuban, L., Kaestle, C.F., Ravitch, D., Bernard, S.C., Mondale, S. & Streep, M. (2001). *School: The story of American public education.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Tyack, D. & Hansot, E. (1982). *Managers of virtue: Public school leadership in America, 1820-1980.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. (2007). *Education and communication: Occupational segregation in education*. Retrieved on November 19, 2007 from http://unece.org/gender/genpols/keyinds/education/educonce.htm.

United States Department of Education. (2007). *The 29th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2007. Vol. 1.* Retrieved on June 22, 2011 from http://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/osep/2007/parts-b-c/29th-vol-1.pdf

United States Department of Education. (2007). *The 29th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2007. Vol. 2.* Retrieved on June 22, 2011 from http://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/osep/2007/parts-b-c/29th-vol-2.pdf

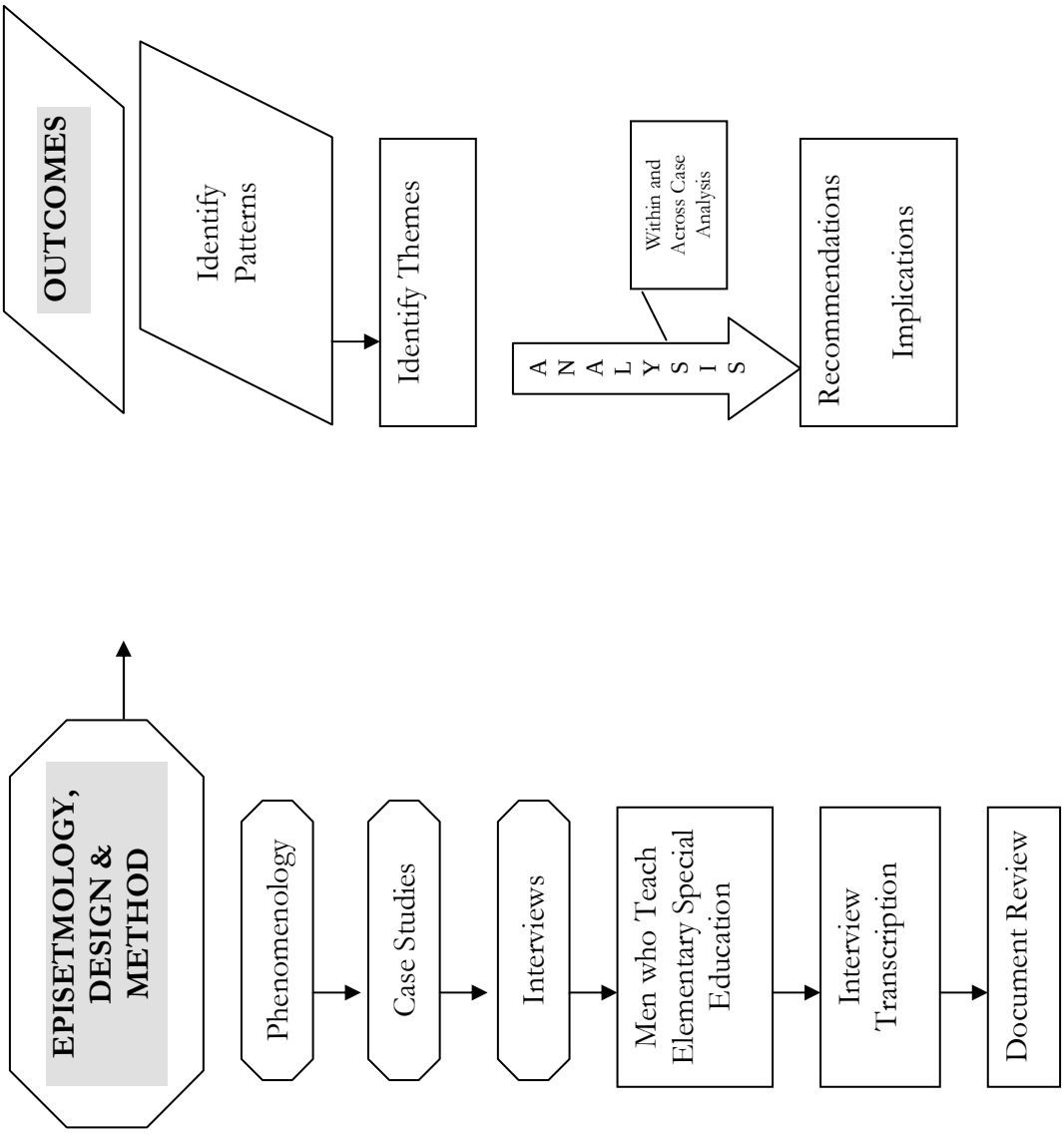
Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. The University of Western Ontario, Canada: The Althouse Press.

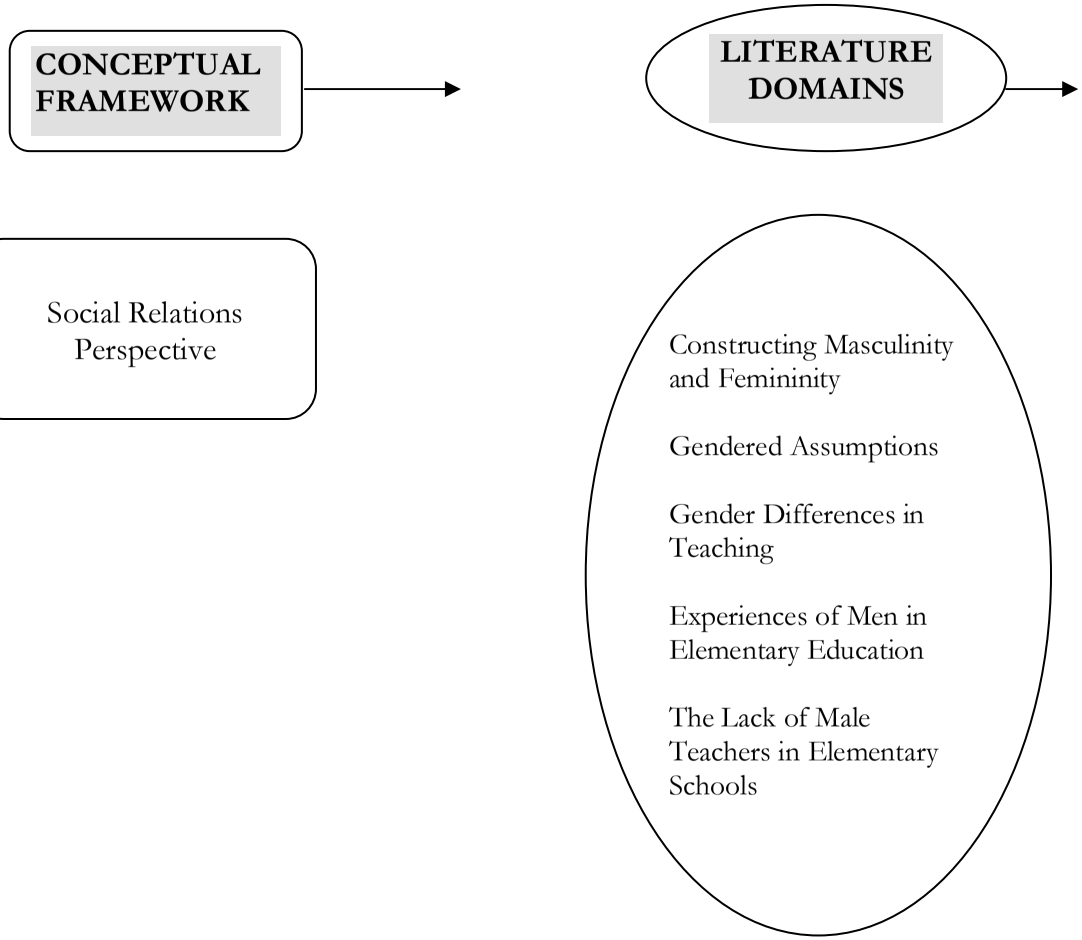
Vavrus, M. (2008). Sexuality, schooling, and teacher identity formation: A critical pedagogy for teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *25*, 383-390.

Worthy, J. (2005). 'It didn't have to be so hard': the first years of teaching in an urban school. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 18*(3), 379-398.

APPENDIX A

Logic Model




CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
LITERATURE DOMAINS
Social Relations Perspective
Constructing Masculinity and Femininity
Gendered Assumptions
Gender Differences in Teaching
Experiences of Men in Elementary Education
The Lack of Male Teachers in Elementary Schools

APPENDIX B

Sample Interview Protocol Forms

Interviewee Name _____ Date _____

Interview One: Focused Life History

1. Why did you decide to become an elementary level special education teacher?

2. When did you know that you wanted to be a special education teacher? When did you decide to teach at the elementary level?

3. What life experiences influenced you to enter this career?

4. Is teaching special education your first career, or were you in another career before teaching? If so, what influenced you to change careers?

5. How did your family and friends react to your decision to teach elementary special education? Did they support you? Was anyone not supportive?

6. Describe the male who has had the greatest impact in your life.

7. Did you have any male teachers when you were in school?

8. Did you enjoy school? Describe your experience.

9. Is there anything that you would like to share that we have not already discussed today?

Interviewee Name _____ Date _____

Interview Two: The Details of Experience

1. What do you actually do on the job?

2. What is it like for you?

3. What are the best qualities that a special education teacher should possess? Do you possess these?

4. Is there anything that you anticipated about the job that you found not to be true?

5. What did you not anticipate?

6. Describe your relationships with: students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

7. Is there anything that you would like to share that we have not already discussed today?

Interviewee Name _____ Date _____

Interview Three (Focus Group): Reflection on Meaning

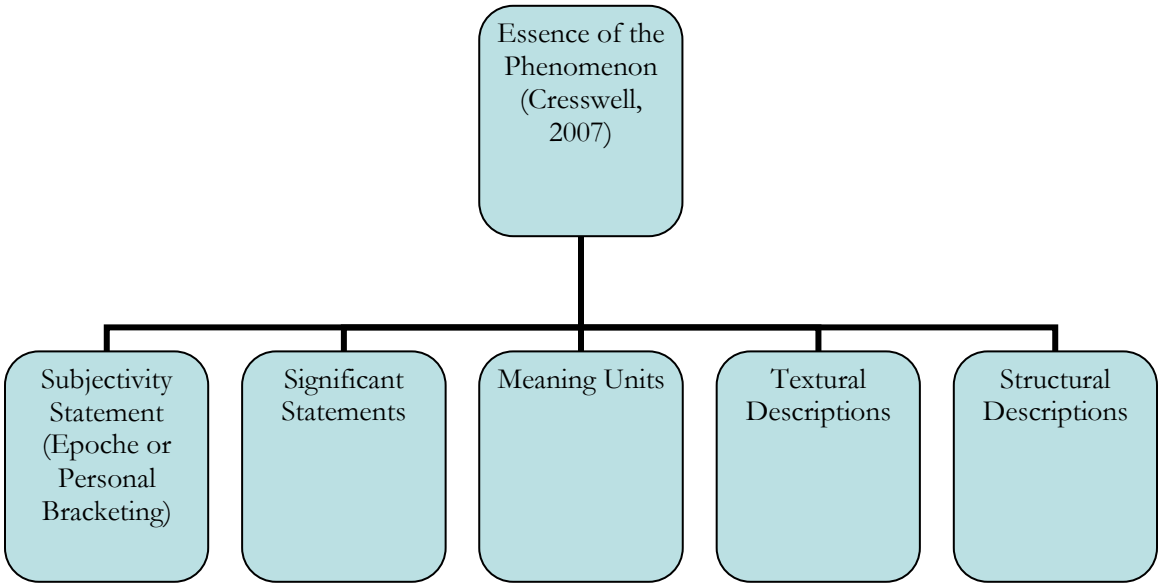
1. Given what you have said about your life, both before teaching and as a special education teacher, how do you understand special education in your life?

2. Given what you have reconstructed in these interviews, where do you see yourself in the future?

3. Do you think that the status of teaching is an issue for male teachers?

4. What do you think could attract more men to the profession?

5. Is there anything that you would like to share that we have not already discussed today?

APPENDIX C

Template for Coding a Phenomenological Study