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Shaun-Adrian Choflá

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2016

Abstract

Preschool Educators' Roles in Creating Supportive Spaces

for Gender Exploration and Expression

by

Shaun-Adrian F. Choflá

MA, Pacific Oaks College, 2007

BA, Pacific Oaks College, 2005

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

March 2016

Abstract

Children begin to develop their understanding of gender in preschool, yet there is a dearth of research focused on understanding how preschool teachers affect the gender identity development of young children. Guided by Rokeach's belief systems theory, this qualitative case study explored the pedagogical strategies and perceptions of 4 Sacramento County, California preschool educators related to the gender identity development of young children. Interview data were collected and coded to derive 12 participant-specific themes and 3 common intersecting themes, which showed that teachers' perspectives on gender identity development were influenced by social rules, biases, and a lack of pedagogical knowledge related to more expansive definitions of gender. As a result of the lack of pedagogical knowledge, there was only 1 gender-related instructional strategy concerning gender roles, and this strategy was used by only 1 of the 4 respondents. Although they may have shown confusion relating to aspects of gender, these preschool teachers demonstrated a genuine interest in learning how to create safe spaces for gender exploration in the preschool classroom. These findings have led to the creation of a professional development series designed to educate preschool teachers about gender identity development, provide them with opportunities to develop curricula, and allow them to reflect upon their cisgender-related biases. Educators, administrators, and policymakers may find it useful to apply the results of this study and resultant project when creating educational programs and college-level curricula and policies. The results could also help educators create affirmative educational environments for all children, regardless of their biological sex, gender identity, or gender expression.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to Sue, who was brutally murdered in 1990 by her boyfriend. The lifelong pain from this singular event has fueled my interest in, passion for, and never-ending need to investigate the interplay of lifespan development, power, oppression, gender, and patriarchy. Her death, once I was able to process it truly, helped to give me my own voice, which I use on behalf of others.

Acknowledgments

Throughout the majority of my now 16-year relationship with my husband, Mark, I have been enrolled in a formal education program. During our time together, I have completed two professional certificates, an undergraduate degree, two graduate degrees, and now finally a doctoral degree. Not once has he wavered in his support of my many requests for patience, more time, or a much-needed glass of wine. I would not be earning this degree without Mark's selfless support and continual encouragement.

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Section 1: The Problem

Definition of the Problem

According to gender studies research, children are already forming their views of gender, gender identity, and gender expression by preschool age. Therefore, there is a need for research concerning how preschool teachers influence gender identity development and how biases might influence their teaching decisions; currently, there is an insufficient number of studies on this subject. Over the past two decades, several studies (Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Kosciw & Cullen, 2002; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012) have uncovered discrimination and harassment experienced by students who identify as or are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA) in K–12 public schools in the United States. In 1999, the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) conducted its first National School Climate Survey "to assess the experiences of LGBTQI youth with regard to experiences of school-based harassment and victimization, the frequency with which they heard homophobic language in their schools and their overall comfort in school" (Kosciw & Cullen, 2002, p. 2). The findings suggest that students who self-identified or were perceived as LGBTQIA commonly felt unsafe at school, primarily due to their gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation.

Human Rights Watch (2001), a nongovernmental organization that conducts research and advocacy, later interviewed 140 youths and 130 adults at public schools in California, Georgia, Kansas, Massachusetts, New York, Texas, and Utah to investigate

issues of abuse experienced by LGBTQIA students. Its findings demonstrated a systemic failure by public school administrators, teachers, and staff to promote a learning environment physically and socially safe for LGBTQIA students. Students reported harassment to teachers and administrators but indicated that remedial actions were not taken and the abuse was downplayed. For example, one student provided a log to his principal documenting each day and time he was harassed by classmates over a period of several weeks. The student recounted that the principal verbally indicated that the student had more important things to focus on and threw the student's logs of harassment into the trashcan. Although the study did not focus specifically on transgender and gender-nonconforming students, researchers concluded this subgroup was "misunderstood at best . . . vilified at worst" (Human Rights Watch, 2001, p. 60).

The unique experiences of gender-nonconforming and transgender youth have not been broadly documented due to the limited number of studies focusing on their specific needs (Greytak et al., 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2001). To facilitate their understanding of transgender youth, Greytak et al. (2009) conducted a separate study focused on self-identified transgender students. The researchers' findings supported those of the Human Rights Watch in that transgender and gender-nonconforming youths experienced higher levels of bias, harassment, and physical assault than their lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) peers did. Due to the social climates of their schools and classrooms, a majority of students who identified as transgender stated feeling unsafe at school and skipping class as a result. Greytak et al. (2009) also discovered a relationship for transgender students between experiencing harassment and lower educational

achievement as well as lower aspirations during and after high school relative to their LGB peers.

Since publication of the Greytak et al. (2009) study, the GLSEN has continued to conduct National School Climate Surveys (NSCS) that have served as barometers of school safety for LGBTQIA students. Despite some slight improvements over time, trends of elevated hostility toward LGBTQIA students persist in schools (García & Slesarasky-Poe, 2010). The most recent NSCS survey in 2012 continued to illustrate that LGBTQIA students encountered higher levels of biased language, harassment, and physical abuse (Kosciw et al., 2012) than their straight cisgendered peers. Greytak et al. (2009) and Kosciw et al. (2012) further established that transgender and gender-nonconforming students continued to report the highest levels of discomfort and abuse, with 80% of those surveyed reportedly feeling unsafe at school, a finding that also supports previous research conducted by Human Rights Watch (2001).

The urgency of protecting transgender and gender-nonconforming students has become increasingly apparent over the past several years (Peter & Taylor, 2013). In April 2014, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) added gender identity to Title IX, a law that prohibits discrimination based on gender in federally funded education programs. The language added to the law states, “Title IX’s sex discrimination prohibition extends to claims of discrimination based on gender identity or failure to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity, and OCR accepts such complaints for investigation” (U.S. DOE, 2014, p. 24). This change to Title IX was significant because of its mandate for federally funded schools and because it sent a strong symbolic signal to states and

local school districts regarding the importance of protecting this marginalized group of students. The change of language in Title IX and the range of state laws now in place in California that are aimed specifically at protecting transgender students highlight a growing awareness of the need to support children who are gender nonconforming or who identify as transgender. One considerable omission of these legal protections and the related research, however, derives from their focus on K–12 children and not preschool students.

There is a reciprocal relationship between educational research and the methods teachers use to plan curricula and teach their students. When there is a dearth of research, it is often to the detriment of teaching practice. More specifically, the scarcity of research studies that focus on how preschool teachers influence gender identity development and how biases might influence their teaching decisions is indicative of a gap in the research. In personal e-mail communications with a preschool administrator, an early childhood college professor, a preschool teacher, and a parent of a gender-nonconforming child, it became clear that there is also a gap in practice. Those four individuals, all of whom live in different parts of northern California, highlight the disparity among different teachers' perspectives on and approaches to gender identity.

These individuals link the gap to the fact that the topics of gender identity development and gender-expansive children are not discussed in teacher training colleges or the preschool classroom. Some view gender-expansive or even self-identified transgendered preschool children as too young to require support. One teacher indicated that when gender-nonconforming behaviors occurred in the classroom, teachers often

tried to guide children to behave in ways more appropriate for their perceived gender. Others reported preschool teachers who viewed gender expansiveness through a conservative religious lens and felt strongly that it was a sin. The parent of a child who was gender nonconforming indicated that they enrolled in several preschools until they found one that was supportive and inclusive. These experiential views articulated by educators and a parent of a gender-nonconforming child help illuminate the gap in practice within the preschool environment. Analyzing the way in which the state of California defines healthy child development and quality preschool education might, in part, explain why the gap exists.

Within the state of California, the California Department of Education (CDE) and First 5 define and evaluate developmental gains of preschool children and the quality of preschool teachers and classrooms. To assess children's individual development, CDE mandates the use of an observation-based assessment system referred to as the Desired Results Development Profile (DRDP). While this evaluation system does not specifically focus on a child's understanding of gender, it does assess a child's "Awareness of diversity in self and others." Inside the examples field of this measurement there is one instance of how children might express their understanding of gender: "I'm a girl, and Tony's a boy." This short notation is the only mention or evaluation of gender, gender identity, or gender expression found within the DRDP. Along with the DRDP, First 5 uses three other assessment tools to evaluate quality: the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECER), the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and the Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS). None of these three assessment

tools nor any aspect of the Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) mention or evaluate gender, gender identity, or gender expression, which leaves preschool educators without guidance.

Rationale

Several laws have been passed in the state of California that help to establish an affirmative environment for children attending K–12 public schools, such as the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act (AB 537) and Safe Place to Learn Act (AB 394). Given that gender identity development occurs during the preschool years (Sullivan, 2014), however, these protective steps come into effect after children have already begun to form their views about gender (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010).

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Over the past 15 years, the California legislature has passed a wide range of legal protections for LGBTQIA students attending K–12 public schools. In 2000, the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act (AB 537) became law, putting into motion critical pieces of legislation focused on protecting LGBTQIA students (Knotts, 2009). Eight years later, Governor Brown signed the Safe Place to Learn Act (AB 394) into law to provide clarification and guidance to school districts and the California Department of Education (CDE) on how to ensure compliance with AB 537. The law requires the CDE to monitor and ensure compliance with policies that prohibit discrimination and harassment as defined by AB 537. Additionally, it requires the CDE to offer educators professional development and additional training opportunities that address discrimination-based harassment in schools.

Building on the legal foundation established in AB 537 and AB 394, the FAIR Education Act of 2012 (SB 48) requires schools to include curricula covering the societal contributions of LGBTQIA individuals while concurrently prohibiting the adoption of books that negatively reflect upon LGBTQIA individuals. This law also embeds an additional level of equity into schools' cultures by prohibiting educators from teaching or sponsoring any activity that promotes discriminatory biases aimed at LGBTQIA identity. It extends this safeguard measure by specifically prohibiting any public school board from formally adopting instructional materials such as textbooks that promote homophobia or transphobia. Seth's Law (AB 9), which was named after a California youth who was bullied at school and later committed suicide, extended protections in the California education code (Lambda Legal, n. d.). This law, made effective on July 1, 2012, requires each California public school district to adopt policies that prohibit discrimination, harassment, intimidation, or bullying based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender, or gender identity expression (CDE, 2012). The School Success and Opportunity Act (AB 1266), signed into law on August 12, 2013, outlawed publically funded schools from discriminating on the basis of students' gender, gender identity, or gender expression. More specifically, the law requires that students "be permitted to participate in sex-segregated school programs and activities, including athletic teams and competitions, and use facilities consistent with [their] gender identity, irrespective of the gender listed on the pupil's records" (State of California, 2013, p. 1).

Given the continued challenges that LGBTQIA students face in K–12 schools and the fact that these protections for LGBTQIA students are so new, it is difficult to

determine the effectiveness of these legislative measures. Even if these policies are proven to affirm and empower LGBTQIA students, these policies are in some regard ill timed, as children entering K–12 have already formed views regarding biological gender, gender identity, and gender expression (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). The laws will therefore be only partially effective until they can address the formation of gender views at their earliest root, and prevent the inculcation of harmful ideas about gender roles in preschool. In terms of development, children begin to define their own views of gender identity and gender expression during their preschool years (Halim, Ruble, Tamis-LeMonda, & Shrout, 2013). This includes views regarding what is appropriate for themselves and others. Primary caregivers (including early educators) influence children's concepts of gender as part of their larger influence on the way children see themselves and others (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). All children, including those who are gender nonconforming or gender fluid and those who conform to strict binary (male or female) behaviors, receive messages about gender identity and gender expression (Atkinson & DePalma, 2009; Sullivan, 2009). To navigate this complex milieu of potentially biased and harmful messages (Roberts, Rosario, Corliss, Koenen, & Austin, 2012), preschool children need supportive early school settings and educators.

Due to the history of LGBTQIA-related legislation enacted in California, the state itself serves as a particularly compelling site on which to focus this project. Given that the Sacramento region contains a wide range of culturally and politically diverse regions (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015), both within and outside the city, this area of the state provides a rich spectrum for study. In a region of the state that is culturally and

politically diverse, there are more opportunities to study differing ways that gender is understood and socialized.

Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature

Unlike biological sex, which develops *in utero*, gender identity and gender expression are "learned, constantly reworked and reconfigured, and enacted to the self and others" (Paechter, 2007, p. 14). Despite the importance of gender identity development, there are several complex factors that hamper affirmative gender exploration in early childhood classrooms. To comprehend these complexities of gender, it is important to first analyze the way in which the dominant culture influences (Robinson & Diaz, 2006; Winter, 2014) aspects of an individual's identity development.

Invisibility and disfranchisement. Though American society is often portrayed by media, legislators, and history books as embracing cultural diversity, the country's dominant cultural values often restrict, rather than embrace, diversity. A person's multiple cultural identities can foster divergence from the mainstream in the way they physically appears, behaves, communicates, learns, and thinks. A person's cultural group membership, however, can influence social acceptance or inclusion, agency, or marginalization (Garrett & Segall, 2013; Little, 2001). Sullivan (2009) posited, "In our society, individuals who deviate from the economic, religious, ethnic, gender, or sexual orientation norms are frequently unsupported, ridiculed, discriminated against, ostracized, and/or physically harmed" (p. 36).

Although transgender individuals are part of society, there are several ways they have been rendered invisible (Burt, Gelnaw, & Lesser, 2010; Cook-Daniels, 2010). If an

entire group of individuals is unnoticeable or hiding out of fear, the group's collective voice is silent and powerless (Alexander, 2011; Sue, 2010). As Sue (2010) posited, "There is a conspiracy of silence in our society to keep [transgender and gender-nonconforming] individuals and their issues invisible in our daily lives and in the broader society at large" (p. 186). One reason for the marginalization and silencing of transgender individuals relates to how biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression have been rigidly defined by society (Gorski, Davis, & Reiter, 2013; Menvielle, 2012). The socially constructed definitions of biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression provide an individual with one of two gender options: male or female (Page & Peacock, 2014). Maleness is defined by phenotypic characteristics such as facial hair, muscularity, and the presence of a penis (Gardiner, 2013). Femaleness is defined phenotypically by a lack of facial hair, slenderness, and the presence of breasts and a vulva (Cook-Daniels, 2010). Given that transgender individuals are neither male nor female according to these definitions and thus cannot be categorized within this binary, society explicitly and implicitly renders them invisible (Merryfeather, 2014). During the early childhood years, young children develop their own gender identity and gender expression (Fausto-Sterling, 2012). It is during this formative period that young children begin to gain an understanding of the social rules around gender, including how they perceive others, and how they themselves are perceived (Taylor, 2007).

Hidden curriculum. Institutions such as schools are partially responsible for the maintenance of socially acceptable definitions of values and systems, including an inflexible definition of gender that may harm transgender individuals (Atkinson &

DePalma, 2009; Kitchen & Bellini, 2012). Bias-laden messages about gender are interwoven into the cultural composition of schools and, as such, firmly persist (Sullivan, 2014). Children are forced to choose between being either a boy or a girl, as defined by society's dominant interpretations, and in so doing they must align with a specific set of characteristics assigned to each. Beginning in early childhood, young children learn how to perform gender (Halim et al., 2013; Sullivan, 2009; Wohlwend, 2009) as part of their gender identity development. How they portray their gender is simultaneously influenced by the indirect and direct messages they receive from others (Ehrensaft, 2011; Giraldo & Colyar, 2012). Dichotomous or binary definitions of gender within schools are also promoted by virtue of the neglect of gender fluidity in general, and transgender individuals more specifically (Clark & Blackburn, 2009; Gorski et al., 2013). Knotts (2009) explained, "While schools typically systematize [sic] and make conscious teachings on race and ethnicity, issues of gender and sexuality are often relegated to the covert or hidden curriculum" (p. 599). This calls into question whether and how teacher education programs prepare teachers to create and sustain affirmative classrooms (Fenwick, 2012) for healthy gender identity development and expression (Ainsa, 2011).

Teacher education. In terms of viewing gender identity and gender expression, teachers are socialized in the same ways as children. This highlights how imperative it is for early childhood teacher education programs to teach future educators about gender identity development and expression (Robinson & Diaz, 2006). A critical component of anti-bias education (ABE), a curricular approach developed by early childhood educators, is the idea that teaching young children about bias requires the transformation of adults'

perspectives (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). To prepare teachers for teaching and interacting with young children, certain shifts in thinking about these complex influences that shape all members of society must occur (Foss, Domenico, & Foss, 2013; Martin, 2011). Though there is a dearth of research related to transgender issues in early childhood teacher education programs, a few closely related studies provide a glimpse of potential issues.

In their study of 24 K-12 teachers, Gunn, Bennett, Evans, Peterson, and Welsh (2013) found that most teachers do not identify gender or gender identity as part of their own cultural identities. In and of itself, this presents an inconclusive yet interesting omission that speaks volumes about how sexual orientation and gender identity are viewed. If educators do not examine these elements of their own development within their own cultural identities and experiences in the world, it seems plausible that they would not consider the importance of supporting these elements in the classroom. When asked why they decided to work in K-12, most teachers cited a love for children, but very few cited the importance of "understanding of educational pedagogy, children's learning, or teaching methods" (Gunn et al., 2013, p. 11). Given that effective teaching (including the development of a curriculum) can only occur with a great deal of intentionality, especially when focused on supporting disadvantaged children, this highlights potential topics in need of emphasis within teacher education.

Children who violate common conventions of gender norms and do not adhere to gender-related stereotypes are often targeted for bullying (GLSEN, 2009). As Meyer (2008) stated, "Individuals whose bodies and identities transgress dominant notions of

masculinity and femininity and disrupt the dominant paradigm of a gender binary are the main targets" (p. 557). Meyer was interested in understanding whether and how teachers intervened against gender harassment at school. Through semistructured qualitative interviews, Meyer explored how teachers interpreted and responded to observed occurrences of LGBT-related student harassment. Meyer found a range of factors that influenced how teachers intervened in response to harassment: trust in school administrators, time management challenges, and issues related to education and training.

Trust in administrators and time management challenges serve as barriers to teachers' willingness or perceived effectiveness in mitigating LGBT-related bullying. Meyers (2008) found that teachers would get involved only if they felt they had their school administrator's support. Teaching load also influenced a teacher's involvement in responses to LGBT-related bullying. Whereas these two factors speak to a need for the school administration to lead and support, Gorski et al. (2013) discussed a third factor: education and training. Educators who have not received proper training will find it difficult to support children in navigating biases in positive ways. Sending a child to the principal's office for bullying might protect a child in the interim, but it does not promote a sense of understanding and acceptance. If anything, the practice of removing a child for bullying likely creates even more division and confusion.

This is one aspect related to education and training, yet understanding bias with regard to gender identity is another complex element. Given that bias is learned at a very early age and then propagated by society, it is not surprising that teachers often do not

have an adequate understanding of how to support children. Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) spoke to this process of learning:

> We all become aware of and start learning about the similarities and differences among people very early. Positive and negative attitudes and feelings towards difference begin to develop in infancy. . . . No one escapes learning stereotypes and misconceptions about various aspects of human diversity. . . . And all of us still carry inaccurate and negative messages. (p. 23)

To help coach children in navigating difference, bias, and discriminatory thinking, adults must also reflect on their own biases and understanding of inequality and power (MacNaughton, 2005; Szalacha, 2008). Meyers' (2008) findings, like those of Gunn et al. (2013) and Gorski et al. (2013), highlights the importance of teacher education and professional development. Although these studies focused on K–12 teacher education programs, the studies also shed light on some potential areas to bolster in early childhood teacher education programs.

Definitions

This research project uses the following terms related to the LGBTQIA community, queer studies, gender, and early childhood education. Given that each academic field uses similar words and phrases in distinct ways, definitions of these terms are included to clarify their meaning in this project.

Anti-bias education (ABE): An early childhood curriculum approach that focuses on embracing one's own differences, and the differences of others, developing authentic

communities with others, and identifying bias in order to advocate for change (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010).

Cisgendered: A *cisgender* person's gender identity mirrors the biological sex they were assigned at birth. As an example, an individual who was born with a penis, and testes, and who identifies as a male is considered cisgendered (Cooper, Shaw, Beres, du Plessis, & Germon, 2011).

Cisgenderism: The belief system that denigrates gender fluidity, identities, or expressions other than those that support binary male or female genders (Enke, 2013; Lennon & Mistler, 2014).

Curriculum: Within the field of early childhood education, this includes teaching materials, structured assignments, and activities. The field's more expansive definition of this term also includes social interactions, the physical environments of the classroom and outdoor spaces, classroom decorations, books, supplies, explicit rules such as classroom guidelines, and implicit guidelines. All of these elements combined serve as the curriculum of the early childhood classroom (Curtis & Carter, 2011; Stacey, 2011).

Gender expansive: A term used to convey a less restrictive or prescriptive range of gender identities and/or gender expressions beyond the gender binary, and viewed as more affirmative than *gender nonconforming* (Davy, 2008; Human Rights Campaign, 2013).

Gender identity development: The biological, physiological, and social process by which children construct meaning about their own gender, including their perceived

expectation of behavior, characteristics, and value in social groups (Foss et al., 2013; Martin, 2014; Schwartz, 2012).

Gender nonconforming: When an individual's gender identity, expression, or role does not adhere to society's list of prescribed behaviors, responsibilities, or phenotypic characteristics (Killermann, 2013; Sullivan, 2009).

LGBTQIA: An initialism standing for *lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual*. This broad term is used intentionally in this paper to demonstrate inclusivity of the entire queer community (Grewe, 2015).

Personal change: Informed by developmental theorists who posit that individual growth is more or less linear and moves through increasingly complex yet predictable stages (Scott, 1992).

Personal transformation: According to transformation learning theorists, *personal transformation* refers to the shift in a person's meaning perspective (Mezirow, 2000), including attitudes, perspectives, or assumptions about gender (Ehrensaft, 2009).

Significance

Exploring how preschool educators promote or hinder gender identity development and expression, and the role that cisgenderism plays within this context, is important to the early childhood system of the Sacramento region in a number of ways. Research has consistently demonstrated that development and learning experiences during the first 5 years of life have a profound impact on later years of a child's life. Preschool-age children are developing their gender identity and mode of expression as well as their perspectives on others. An especially influential aspect of this process is the

message that children receive from their preschool teachers, classroom environment, and peers. In order to develop affirmative learning environments and teaching strategies for gender identity development and exploration, preschool educators, whether privately or publically funded, need first to be aware of their thinking about gender and the messages they intentionally or unintentionally convey.

Sacramento, the regional focus of this study, has been at the center of a wide range of educational changes. The city of Sacramento is the capital of California and is not only where legislators have passed LGBTQIA-related education bills, but also the location of the California Board of Education (CBOE). Laws passed by the legislature are translated and implemented into school policies by the CBOE. Given the increasing number of state-funded early childhood education centers and the upcoming implementation of transitional kindergarten, the CBOE will have a growing influence on preschool education. The laws protecting LGBTQIA students are currently focused on K–12 public schools, but the CBOE could soon take the lead in extending these curricular and instructional decisions to the preschool classrooms within their sphere of influence.

Guiding and Research Questions

From the moment they are born, children are directly and indirectly socialized to be either boys or girls. Whereas sex organs determine one's biological sex, individuals determine their own gender identity and expression through a complex interplay with family, friends, and society. Preschool is an epoch when most children are developing their gender identity, gender expression, and related perspectives on others. Given the developmental significance of this period, it is essential that preschool-age children have

safe learning environments in which to explore gender. This underscores the influential role that preschool educators, who themselves have been socially influenced to view gender in specific ways, have in supporting children's healthy gender identity development. This study explored the following research questions:

RQ1: How do preschool educators perceive their own curricular strategies as influencing gender identity development and expression in the early childhood classroom?

RQ2: What practices might be present in preschool classrooms that foster the inclusion of gender-nonconforming students?

RQ3: What possible barriers or biases might be present in preschool classrooms that hinder the inclusion of gender-nonconforming students?

Review of the Literature

In her early childhood transgender-focused study, Sullivan (2009) found that studies focused on transgender children in early childhood settings were not available in the literature. Similarly, Graham (2012) highlighted that, when searching for literature using the keywords *transgender* and *early childhood*, she found three studies from the past 5 years. More recently, Ryan, Patraw, and Bednar (2013) found that very little published research examined the methods or outcomes with regard to the inclusion of transgender people and gender expansiveness in the elementary classroom.

For this study, a search of literature was completed using the following terms along with either *early childhood*, *preschool*, or *young children*: *gender nonconformance*, *gender expansive*, *gender identity*, *gender equity*, *gender differences*, *cisgender*, *gender*

nonconforming child, *family response to gender nonconforming child*, *true gender self*, *cisgender bias*, *gender bias*, *anti-bias education and transgender*, *anti-bias education and gender nonconformance*, *gender identity development*, *transgender*, *gender variant*, *gender literature*, *gender harassment*, *gender bullying*, *LGBTQIA*, *sexual orientation*, *homophobia*, and *heterosexism*. The Walden University Discover Service, Thoreau, was used to search simultaneously in a variety of academic databases.

Given the dearth of research focused on young children who are gender expansive or transgender, this literature review covers a range of direct and indirect resources. The first section covers the theoretical framework of the study and introduces key concepts related to biological sex, gender identity development, and gender expression. Combined, these components serve as the foundation of this literature review.

Using Gender-Neutral Pronouns

The way that educators and researchers intentionally use language to describe individuals, whether in practice or research, can be either empowering or potentially damaging (Case, Kanenberg, Eric, & Tittsworth, 2012). After all, the ways in which individuals define and label their experiences inform the fabric of the social world around them (Page & Peacock, 2013). As Foss et al. (2013) posited, “Symbols not only create a particular reality, but they create orientations or attitudes that generate various motives for actions. The labels that are assigned to phenomena in the world suggest ways to act towards those phenomena” (p. 33). From this view, language not only communicates a message to a communication partner, but also influences the communicator. As evidenced by the recent shift toward the inclusion of children with varying abilities in

schools and early childhood institutions, awareness of the power of language is not a new practice in the field of early childhood education. For example, rather than referring to a child as *disabled*, many in the field opt for terms such as *a child who is differently abled* or *a child with varying abilities*. At issue is not simply the use of different terms, but also the way in which speakers deliberately order these terms. To use people-first language, educators might refer to *a child with autism*, rather than to an *autistic child*. In using this intentional language, educators begin to focus on the person first and the diagnosis or area of need second. Children, no matter their current skill level in a particular developmental area, are individuals who should be viewed and treated as people, rather than being labeled or diagnosed.

This informed approach to thinking and speaking about children with varying abilities is similar to how speakers might refer to other social identifiers, such as gender, gender identity, and gender expression. Given the complex interplay of biological and social forces that affect the formation of an individual's biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression, researchers must use terms that reflect a wide variety of individual realities. According to Wilchins (2002), gender is much more multifaceted and individualized than what the socially constructed binary system of gender prescribes:

> Gender is like a lens . . . [that] is strictly bifocal. It strangely shows us only black and white in a Technicolor world so that . . . there may certainly be more than two genders, but two genders is all we've named, all we know, and all we'll see. (p. 13)

Rather than use *he* or *she*, this study uses the nonbinary pronoun singular *they* (Bodine,

1975) or, when possible, avoids personal pronouns altogether. This deliberate step is intended to model a way to refer to others in an affirmative and empowering fashion and to expand researchers' collective perspective of how to frame and view gender (Kuo, 1998).

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in the belief systems theory that stipulates that everyone has an organized—though not necessarily analytical—form of beliefs about the physical and social world (Rokeach, 1968, p. 2). Belief systems, composed of groups of individual beliefs, are malleable, depending on what Rokeach (1968) identified as a belief system's degree of centrality. Rokeach further indicated that a belief's centrality depends on four factors: personal relevance of the belief to the individual, social consensus on the belief by society or other influential individuals or social groups, the individual's firsthand experience related to the belief, and the arbitrary nature of the belief.

All members of society are socialized to embrace a range of beliefs that permeate the social fabric of institutions (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Ramsey, 2004). Included in this socialized range of beliefs are the meanings that individuals assign to gender and their expectations related to gender. Researchers have demonstrated that teachers' individual perspectives or beliefs, including those related to multiple cultural identities, influence teaching practice (curricular, instructional, and assessment decisions; Ramsey, 2004). What is not well understood, however, is how preschool teachers' beliefs related to gender-expansive or transgender children might influence their teaching practice. With belief systems theory as a foundation, the goal of this research project was

to understand how early childhood teachers' beliefs about biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression might influence their teaching practice with young children.

Biological Sex, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression

In contemporary American society—including preschools—biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression are often narrowly conceptualized so that they appear to be simple concepts, when actually they are quite multifaceted (Bettcher, 2014; Halim et al., 2013). One element leading to this complexity relates to the widely held belief that all members of society, including children, identify and express themselves as either male or female. According to this view, a child whose body has a penis will undoubtedly identify as male, behave in the prescribed male way, play with male-targeted toys, play primarily with other male children, and dress in male-targeted clothing. If the child is not male, then the binary societal norm leads to the expectation that the child will identify as female, behave in the prescribed female way, play with female-targeted toys, play primarily with other female children, and dress in female-targeted clothes (Wohlwend, 2009). This view of gender not only simplifies a wide range of biological and social processes, but also disenfranchises children who occupy roles outside of this model (Sausa, 2005; Sue, 2010), while at the same time justifying the rationale for doing so. Although there has been a slight loosening of gender roles, many expectations related to gender remain intact. As with other areas of childhood development, no single domain or area of growth (e.g., language, gross motor, cognitive) should be analyzed without considering the complex array of interconnected components. By looking at areas of development separately, researchers and practitioners are better able to understand how

factors influence one another and how individuals are predisposed to allow factors to influence them in certain ways.

Biological sex. At conception, a sperm cell carrying either an X or Y chromosome fertilizes an egg, which carries only an X chromosome. During the first 6 weeks of the embryo's development, male and female sex organs are identical. At around 6 and a half weeks, the sex-determining area of the Y chromosome (referred to as *Sry*) is activated, which leads to the development of testes (Reiner & Reiner, 2012). At this time, the union of the two chromosomes determines biological sex, or biological gender. If the chromosome pair within the embryo's cells is XY, the production of male hormones begins. Approximately two weeks later, the primitive sex cords begin to form for either the male or female. This begins a series of foundational changes associated with biological sex, including the development of specific anatomical changes, hormone secretion, and genitalia. This assignation of biological sex can be physiologically complex (i.e., a process of genes and sex hormones that science does not yet fully understand), yet distinct and straightforward in other ways (e.g., a child with a penis is socially identified as male and a child with vulva as female). The complications and misunderstanding of people's gender have more to do with the socially constructed meaning applied to biological sex, rather than people's individuality or self-conception (Aina & Cameron, 2011; Ehrensaft, 2011).

Gender identity. Gender identity relates to how individuals view themselves in a gendered way. This developmental process begins in later toddlerhood and continues throughout one's life. Preschool is an especially crucial period as children's views of

gender identity development become very rigid (Halim et al., 2013). Similar to other aspects of identity development, gender identity development is not easily discernible, and thus its importance can be easily overlooked. Although teachers might be able to readily observe a child who is struggling with scissors or who is successfully navigating a difficult play structure, they may lack awareness of a child's gender identity development. Preschool-aged children are in the process of forming their understanding of gender, which includes how they personally identify and express their own gender (Sullivan, 2009). Gender identity is not necessarily hardwired to biological sex, but instead is established as a result of one's individualized development, in part influenced by interactions with family, friends, community, and the media.

A combination of genetic and social factors influences an individual's gender identity. Similar to social-emotional development, identity development occurs reciprocally as one interacts with others. As Foss et al. (2013) explained, "Identity formation involves the ongoing process of how you structure yourself into a being that makes sense to you. As you interact with other people, you construct and reconstruct your identity" (p. 13). Whereas biological sex determines specific aspects of physiology, gender identity relates to how a child emotionally and psychologically interprets their own gender. This subjective view has complex implications for how one expresses one's own gender.

Gender expression. Similar to gender identity, gender expression is informed by a child's understanding of what their own gender means in the social context. Gender identity and expression are bound to each other, such that the way in which others view

and react to a child's gender expression informs the child's gender identity development. Page and Peacock (2013) explained that one should "think of the body as a frame or scaffolding, where culture hangs the fabric of meaning and interaction. The individual, through interaction with himself or herself and others, molds the structure into the shape of an identity" (p. 644). Based on their gender identity and the reciprocal feedback of loved ones, peers, and the community, young children learn how to express their gender. They are, as posited by Martin (2011), gender investigators attuned to what it means to be male or female and to the boundaries of these two inflexible dichotomies.

In American society, specific colors and clothing have been assigned to one of two genders, as well as certain movies, books, toys, and activities and a variety of prescribed behaviors (Ehrensaft, 2011; Sullivan, 2009). Thus, preschool-aged children express their gender via the clothes they wear, the characters they develop during dramatic play, the toys they choose, and the peers they socialize with (Duron, 2013). Peers often ostracize children whose gender expression does not align with others' expectations based on their biological sex (Browne, 2004; Martin, 2011). Children and adults might also issue corrective statements regarding what is appropriate for a male or female to do, say, or wear. Some children might even receive varying levels of verbal or physical abuse from adults or children due to their perceived misalignment of their biological sex and gender expression (Biddulph, 2006). The issues affecting this group of children and the steps that adults should take to create safe spaces for all children's gender identity development and expression are discussed later in this literature review.

Anti-Bias Education and Gender

Anti-bias education (ABE), a curricular approach underpinned by a range of theories, including beliefs system theory, was first introduced to the early childhood profession in 1989. According to Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010), "The heart of anti-bias work is a vision of a world in which all children are able to blossom, and each child's particular abilities and gifts are able to flourish" (p. 2). ABE provides a framework that assists teachers in developing equitable learning communities where all children, no matter their cultural differences, are able to thrive. There are four overarching goals with respect to how ABE should be used in the classroom with young children:

- Goal One: Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.
- Goal Two: Each child will express comfort and joy regarding human diversity; accurate language for human differences; and deep, caring human connections.
- Goal Three: Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.
- Goal Four: Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions. (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, p. xiv)

Biases, whether internalized within one's own beliefs and actions or interwoven into the institutions with which one interacts, are incredibly complex and often indiscernible to the individual who has internalized them. They "undermine the healthy

development of all children, in one way or another, and all children benefit from being made visible and equitably included in daily classroom activities" (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010, p. 6). To support young children adequately in identifying biases and promoting social change, teachers of young children must concurrently develop a deeply reflective understanding of their own individual biases. Teachers, just like the children they guide, have been influenced by bias-laden messages and must work toward unraveling their own predispositions. ABE also includes a range of strategies intended to help support teachers in revealing their own prejudicial perspectives and actions so as to reengineer their views. Through supporting children's identification of and actions upon confronting biases, teachers simultaneously develop a keener understanding of their own biases; each works to inform the other. These changes begin in the classroom, but the common result of ABE is that this transformative "change work" extends outside the classroom into other spheres of influence (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010).

The overall goal of ABE is for all children to learn and grow in a safe and enriching learning community, which requires teachers to understand that no one is immune to the influence of biases. According to Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010), a prerequisite of ABE is for teachers to "examine and transform their understanding of children's lives and also do self-reflective work to more deeply understand their own lives" (p. 3). This is important because an early childhood teacher's attempt to support all children in their classroom might be hampered by a teacher's biases related to one or more social identifiers such as race, sexual orientation, or ability. ABE includes a framework for understanding how bias in occurs in society in general, and more

specifically, how one's own identities relate to both privilege and oppression. For example, a teacher who understands their own privilege as an educated White male may more easily recognize the ways in which a young girl from Mexico who does not speak English might encounter oppression. Of course, becoming aware that privilege and oppression can be intrinsically linked to one's own social group does not inherently provide a teacher with effective strategies to support all children in understanding and responding to biases.

To support teachers' pedagogical development, ABE includes curricular guidelines based on culture, language, race, economic class, family structure, gender, and ability. Though ABE includes pedagogical frameworks for supporting children's gender identity development, the implied definition is built upon a binary classification of gender. Gender-related curricular guidelines are focused on gender equity between boys and girls, rather than promoting a wider, more flexible definition of gender for all children. ABE is a resource for preschool teachers who are seeking guidance to promote more equitable classrooms. Unfortunately, ABE's guidelines for gender exploration beyond a binary perspective of gender provide preschool teachers with very strategies. Without approaches, teachers may not be able to effectively teach young children the skills children need to critically analyze messages they will receive from others about gender.

Gender Socialization by Family

Biological sex is an incredibly important aspect of one's identity in the dominant North American culture, so much so that, before a child is even born, their sex is often

identified and celebrated by families. Sullivan (2009) went as far as concluding that questions such as "Is it a boy?" and "Is it a girl?" demonstrate that a child is not viewed as a real person until they have been gendered. Pitman (2011) indicated that

> We get so anxious about not knowing the sex of our baby that we've developed all sorts of technologies to help us identify the sex as soon as possible . . . And when we ask the question 'What is it?' we're expecting one of two answers. (p. 128)

This begins to reveal, however, that gender is something both biological and socially constructed. Ryan et al. (2013) explained that the moment a child is determined to be a boy or a girl, whether in the womb or upon birth, the child's gender identity is subject to social construction. As Foss et al. (2013) further expanded, before a child is born, family members begin "constructing gender stories for [the child] and about [the child]" (p. 11), and eventually with the child. Although every member of a family might view gender through their own individualized experiential lens, a lens which includes a range of gender expectations, it is likely that most if not all family members will define biological sex as either male or female. As elucidated by Ryan et al., "Children are either boys or girls, and those labels come with a long list of behaviors and ways of being that you have to do 'right'" (p. 84). In their quantitative study of 126 lesbian, gay male, and heterosexual couples, Goldberg, Kashy, and Smith (2012) explored the gender-typed play of young children who were adopted by the couples. The results of their study demonstrated that children of same-gender parents exhibited fewer stereotypical gender-typed play behaviors. Notable in their findings, and illustrative of the powerful influence

of parental socialization, was that boys of lesbian couples exhibited the greatest divergence from stereotypical behaviors.

Prior to a child's developing an understanding of their own individual gender identity and expression, family members socialize their child based on biological sex. In the process of this gender-role socialization, family members also indirectly or directly teach and maintain that there are two typical and distinct forms of gender identity and expression, which are based on two corresponding biological sexes: male and female (Page & Peacock, 2013). With this cisgendered system of socialization as a foundation, young children begin preschool with a history and foundation of cisgenderistic experiences and expectations (implicit, explicit, and modeled) concurrent with the development of their individual gender identity and expression. In most cases, children learn from their families that individuals are either boys or girls, which in turn provides two established ways of thinking and being. This binary model of gender is first taught through socialization with a child's family and often replicated by their preschool educators in the classroom (Blaise & Taylor, 2012; Martin, 2011; Payne & Smith, 2014).

Gender Socialization by Preschool Educators

Based on the analysis of their qualitative study of 12 district-level school administrators, school principals, and classroom teachers across five schools, Payne and Smith (2014) concluded that

> The "complex constellations" of sex, gender, and sexuality function in school to create strict parameters for who students are allowed to "be" in educational spaces—and those who do not conform are either invisible or marked as

threatening the social order of the school. (p. 402)

Preschool educators, like the majority of American society, have been shaped from an early age to view biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression as a dichotomy containing two modes: male or female. Due to the limited amount of literature focused on early childhood, the ways in which cisgender-related biases influence preschool educators are currently difficult to map. Based on K–12-related research (GLSEN, 2009) focused on heterosexism, and in light of the way gender is typically viewed as a binary, it is plausible that preschool teachers express cisgendered ideologies and behaviors (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Halim & Ruble, 2010; Killermann, 2013). Additionally, even those preschool educators who are more aware of their own biases, such as those who teach using equity pedagogies such as ABE, have themselves been influenced by bias (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). Although there are no locatable research studies that have explored how cisgenderism influences a preschool educator's pedagogical decisions, there have been studies focused on gender bias (Martin, 2010) and educator fear that provide some insight into this process. It is especially important for teacher training to address cisgender bias in order to keep step with growing awareness at home, as gender-nonconforming or transgender: "As a result, we are witnessing a generation of trans kids who can actually be trans kids" (p. 160). To help support educators, though, it is important for us to understand how they promote cisgenderism.

One way to understand how educators promote gender bias is by looking at what educators do not do, rather than what they necessarily do (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Martin, 2010). This absence of action or direct effort at inclusion is significant

because "the most effective way to keep a group out of any discourse is to keep them invisible" (Martin, p. 184). Or, as Blaise and Taylor (2012) stated,

> Gender discourses are more than ideas and beliefs about what it means to be female or male. They also regulate our gender behaviors by establishing what society considers to be 'normal' or 'natural' and thereby determining what is desirable and rewarding what is acceptable. (p. 90)

When educators do not challenge or critically analyze their students' gender stereotypes and the prescribed binary nature of gender, they instead promote an unnatural restriction of an otherwise organic process of gender self-identification and expression (Payne & Smith, 2014).

Separation by gender. As part of a qualitative 2-year longitudinal study, Martin (2010) found that young children commonly segregate by biological sex when given the option. She concluded that, by allowing children to segregate by gender without more intentional interaction or scaffolding on the part of teachers, preschool educators' nonaction promotes a binary view of gender. Slesaransky-Poe, Ruzzi, Dimedio, and Stanley (2013) posited that a more direct way in which preschool educators support and promote a binary perspective of gender occurs when boys and girls are separately lined up for certain activities such as going to the bathroom, washing hands, going outside, coming inside, and in various circle time activities. When teachers prompt children to place themselves in a line for boys or girls, they are providing two distinct options in which children are to place themselves. As indicated by Foss et al. (2013), in these situations, there is no space for gender fluidity or gender creativity, but rather two distinct

choices. For children who do not identify or express as concretely boy or girl, these types of distinct separations can be quite jarring and psychologically harmful (Vega, Crawford, & Van Pelt, 2012). For all members of the learning community, children and adults alike, this prevents others from recognizing that there is a range of gender possibilities. This in turn can make it difficult for children to respect the varied gendered differences of others because these differences are not allowed to be visible or more deeply understood (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Su, 2010).

Promotion of gendered behaviors. Preschool educators often promote specific gendered behaviors for boys and girls in a range of intentional and unintentional ways. Page and Peacock (2013) posited, "as individuals socialized in a heteronormative society, we choose to see those characteristics that reinforce traditional conceptions of gender and sexuality" (p. 651). The socialization process is especially caustic for children who do not conform to prescribed identities. As mentioned by Sullivan (2009), these children must, without a supportive space such as a classroom, find a way to express gender in a form that is acceptable to others.

The promotion of gendered behaviors constrains all children in what they view as possible for their biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression. Martin (2011) observed that girls helped teachers with chores more often than boys within the early childhood center she observed, mirroring the findings of Thorne (1993). Rather than challenging this gender-based stereotype of girls being the ones who are expected to do chores, educators often allow the tendency to continue and even promote it. Martin discovered that these biased gender differentiators are also found in the language that

teachers use when speaking to and about children. Comments like “boys will be boys, and girls will be girls” help support the expectation that all boys act one way and all girls act another. Martin (2011) also posited that expressions such as “boys, stop shouting” more covertly attach gender with specific stereotypical behaviors. Conversely, mixed messages about gender are also given such as when teachers explain, “We don’t have a girls- or boys-only table.” Bias of any kind, including gender bias, when analyzed critically, is nonsensical and produces conflicting results. These discordant behaviors of preschool educators seem to exemplify their own misconceptions about gender and the various ways teacher behaviors are influenced by their own biases (Browne, 2004; Sullivan, 2009).

Educator fear. To understand educators’ views better, Payne and Smith (2014) interviewed elementary school teachers who were actively teaching transgender children. Teachers indicated that their initial response to having a transgender student was apprehension, which was exemplified by phrases such as “freak out,” “panic,” “crisis,” and “fear.” These terms show the depth and ubiquity of a specific reaction (apprehension) when faced with teaching transgender students. The teachers felt unsure of how to teach children or promote critical thinking related to the gender binary, how to create safe spaces for gender identity development and gender expression, and how to meet the specific needs of transgender students. This fear, when explored more deeply, revealed three areas of fear: lack of preparedness, fear of questions from students and families, and fear of complaints from the broader community (Payne & Smith, 2014), which findings are supported by other studies (Goldner, 2011; Goodrich & Luke, 2014).

Lack of preparedness. Teachers reported feeling unprepared and confused. They lamented that they lacked specific education and training in college to prepare them for their situation. Another source of fear for educators was the lack of defined policies and procedures on what to do. Payne and Smith (2014) found, as did Mayo (2013), that sexuality or gender identity were often connected with conversations about sexual activity, which is developmentally inappropriate for young children. The fear of transgender children or of not knowing how to teach about gender and support transgender students is thus compounded by mixed messages of silence, avoidance, and aversion. Even if an educator is supportive and understanding, the lack of policy definitions at the early childhood level can make it difficult for teachers to know when and how they can share information about a child's gender identity or expression.

Fear of questions from students or families. Another related fear is the fear of questions from students or families. Payne and Smith (2014) discovered that some teachers' concerns related to a fear of how they should respond to questions from families while protecting a transgender child's right to privacy. This more logistical concern points to the need for structure and definition in the situation, and could be ameliorated by prescribed policies and procedures. Payne and Smith (2014) also found that some educators viewed the physical presence of transgender children as threatening to the development of other nontransgender children. This fear reveals one potential way cisgenderism influences educators' views on transgender children. Payne and Smith explained this situation and outcome in this way: educators "frame transgender children as dangerous and carefully create a boundary between them and their gender-normative

peers, and they incite a distance from the other ‘normal’ children” (p. 411). Rather than providing an affirmative environment for gender exploration and capitalizing on the inherent teachable moments (Mayo, 2013), teachers often marginalize gender-nonconforming or transgender children (Surtees & Gunn, 2010), and these actions (and inactions) imply that gender identities and expressions outside the binary norm are negative (Bryant, 2008; Sullivan, 2009). This, as Sullivan found, can lead gender-nonconforming or transgender children to feel lonely and isolated.

Gender Socialization by Other Preschool Children

Increasingly, children are expressing their gender in more expansive ways, as there are wider ways for children to acceptably express their gender. These children, in turn, enter preschool classrooms where many students have absorbed and thus are practicing a binary discourse of gender (Martin, 2011) in order to feel that they belong or in order to avoid ridicule (Browne, 2004). As Ryan et al. (2013) posited, it is not only gender-nonconforming children who receive these messages about appropriate gender identity and gender expression, but all children. However, it is within these socially-constructed and therefore not-natural binary discourses and spaces that young children who are gender-nonconforming must either change or risk being ostracized. Studies by George (2007), Martin (2011), and Sullivan (2009) have illustrated some of the ways young children socialize their peers.

Child development scholars have long understood that play during early childhood is especially important for young children’s cognitive, physical, and social development (Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Vygotsky, 1980). It is during play, more

generally, that young children are able to learn and practice new skills and process a range of complex societal expectations. As Vygotsky highlighted, during play, children operate at a higher developmental level than when not engaged in play. Though some might consider play as less developmentally significant, many scholars regard young children's play as a physical and psychological space where children thoroughly process a range of new skills and societal messages (Jones & Reynolds, 2011).

Although gender identity development and expression are individualized processes, there are powerful social underpinnings that force or shape children's conceptions of gender. Martin (2011) identified three interrelated stages that explain how young children learn to socialize with one another in learning and practicing gender. Children learn how to categorize individuals as boys or girls, they participate in shared activities defined by gender, and they exemplify knowledge of gender by the use of prescribed objects. These three overarching categories will be used to frame the following discussion of how children socialize one another to embody and express gender.

Gendered Categorizing

During early childhood, young children form (and reform) schemas about people, places, animals, and objects. This same rudimentary process of categorization that sometimes causes a child to label all animals with four legs as a dog might also lead them to believe all individuals with short hair are boys and all those with long hair are girls (Nutbrown, 2011). It is during this developmental period that children also have especially inflexible definitions of gender (Halim et al., 2013). For example, although a

young child’s aunt might identify as female, the child might insist their aunt is a boy because of the aunt’s short hair (Renold, 2005). Developmentally, children during preschool age find it difficult for them to rapidly shift views on any schema. A child’s evolving understanding of gender, though, has lifelong implications in how they view themselves and others, and how they experience the world around them.

Historically and currently in American society, one’s gender is related to a considerable amount of social agency and power (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Johnson, 2014). As a result, children not only begin to categorize boys and girls based on physical attributes (Drescher & Byne, 2012) they also begin to associate boys with power and girls with powerlessness. Considering the ways in which people categorize each other along perceived gender lines, the ways that children express their views of gender power dynamics is rarely a subject for examination. Martin (2011) found that young children during free play often reproduce the same gendered power relations they experience and view at home, in the community, and in the media (Levin, 2009). This calls into question how children specifically promote established conventions of gender within the context of the classroom.

Gendered Activities

Along with a range of other influences, preschool children effect one another in the way they promote and participate in gendered activities. George (2007) posited that the way in which young children segregate by gender is one way they promote the gender binary. Though there are exceptions, young children most often play with other children who reflect their own gender identity and expression. Martin (2011), Thorne (1993), and

George (2007) all found that young children in school developed relationships with peers based on shared activities and gender, both of which are entrenched in societal expectations. Along with the segregation that was observed to occur along perceived biological gender lines, it was observed that young children police these invisible gender lines. Martin (2011) observed that preschool-aged boys seemed to avoid contact with girls and would engage in a range of physical movements intended to exclude or scare away girls. It was not just gendered spaces within the classroom that were policed by children, but also objects and activities. Martin (2011) explained this gender border work:

> Boys and girls policed the boundaries so strictly because to allow children of the opposite sex to use each other's technologies and gain appropriate knowledge would undermine and allow challenges to the individual and the collective gendered power that goes with the use of ropes and footballs. (p. 86)

One can imagine the fear, discomfort, and loss that children who are transgender or gender-nonconforming would feel in the face of these prescribed spaces, activities, and objects. It is unclear where, if anywhere, they would feel they belong and how they could be their authentic selves in such restrictive and gender-marked classroom spaces.

Implications

This study might increase preschool teacher effectiveness in developing early childhood curricula, teaching practices, and classroom environments that promote affirmative gender exploration. Additionally, the study may indirectly suggest that young children who are better able to understand and embrace varying gender identities and gender expressions, whether their own or those of their peers, are able to express their

own identity more confidently. This study will employ a case study research design and, as a result, intends to construct in-depth understandings of four early childhood educators' curricular planning and views related to gender. The findings of this project could also help inform future early childhood professional development workshops, college curricula, and textbooks related to creating safe and empowering early childhood learning environments for gender exploration.

Summary

This review of literature examined fundamental concepts related to gender, gender identity development, gender socialization, and the theoretical framework scaffolding this study. To understand how bias might influence the curricular decisions of an early childhood educator, it is important to view gender more complexly than the gender binary of male or female. To communicate more complex views of gender to young children, college educators must first correct the bias of educators, and to correct their bias, must first understand it. A child's gender identity development involves their biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression. These three interrelated components are what inform each child's unique perspective on their gender and the gender of others. Understanding gender from a more holistic standpoint also provides a context for the analysis of how bias occurs in the classroom.

Given the dearth of topical research, there is a multitude of potential areas of new inquiry, which could include foci on children, adults, or both. The following section outlines the methodological design of the proposed study, including how data will be

collected and analyzed. The concrete steps that will be taken to ensure participant protection and increase study validity will also be outlined.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This project's purpose was to explore how early childhood educators promote or hinder gender exploration beyond the gender binary in their classrooms as well as the role of cisgenderism in early childhood educators' curricular decisions and perceptions of students. Given the complex interplay between educators' views and their observable actions, a case study methodology was used to provide in-depth understanding (Yin, 2014). One principal benefit of qualitative research over quantitative research is the way that qualitative research promotes a deep, more holistic understanding of a present-day phenomenon. Qualitative research allows an individual's story or a group of individuals' stories to inform researchers' collective understanding of phenomena. As Merriam (2009) explained it, qualitative research seeks to unearth "(1) how people interpret their experience, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 23). These reasons and the underlying purpose of this study to reveal how educators understand the meaning behind phenomena justify the use of a qualitative methodology.

All qualitative methodologies share an aim to understand how people experience their lives or related experiences (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). Ethnographic studies are conducted in an effort to understand an individual's experience by examining their relationships with others, as well as the culture in which they work or live. An ethnographic study would have allowed for a deep understanding of an educator's perspectives and biases related to gender, but not for comparison across varied schools.

Phenomenology is a research strategy that focuses on exploring the essence and foundation of the phenomenon itself. It confines data to focus on a specific phenomenon. Because the research questions were geared toward understanding educators' views and biases, this methodology would not have been wholly suitable for the study's aim. Phenomenology might help to reveal aspects of questions related to bias and experience, but it would not be appropriate for making pragmatic decisions related to curriculum and instruction. It is important to mention that the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology inform other aspects of qualitative research in the way that qualitative research seeks to understand one's experience (Merriam, 2009). It is not that this study did not aim to understand the essence of the educators' views, but rather that phenomenology, as a methodological strategy, would have strayed from its goal.

Although the research questions could be partially examined using ethnography and phenomenology, these methodologies would require changes to the study's overall purpose. Given all of the current study's variables, a case study methodology was deemed to be the most appropriate approach. A case study, in general, provides a comprehensive means to explore several individuals' stories alongside collected contextual factors (Yin, 2014). This deep exploration provides multilayered understanding of each bounded case as well as the ability to juxtapose, compare, or contrast cases with others. It does not provide as deep an understanding as an ethnographic study of one school or educator would, but it does provide the flexibility to investigate the experiences of more than one educator from multiple schools.

Only a handful of studies have focused, directly or indirectly, on how early childhood educators can affirmatively support children exploring gender identity and expression beyond the gender binary (Sullivan, 2009). A search of literature was completed using the following terms, along with either *early childhood*, *preschool*, or *young children*: *gender nonconformance*, *gender expansive*, *gender identity*, *gender equity*, *gender differences*, *cisgender*, *gender nonconforming child*, *family response to gender nonconforming child*, *true gender self*, *cisgender bias*, *gender bias*, *anti-bias education and transgender*, *anti-bias education and gender nonconformance*, *gender identity development*, *transgender*, *gender variant*, *gender literature*, *gender harassment*, *gender bullying*, *LGBTQIA*, *sexual orientation*, *homophobia*, and *heterosexism*. I found no studies that directly explored the relationship between cisgenderism and an early childhood educator's teaching decisions related to gender. Gender identity and expression are individualized within each child and influenced by a child's family, teacher, school, and peers. Thus, the case study design is well suited to open this new area of research and begin a new academic conversation, providing an in-depth and context-rich exploration of the topic.

Participant Selection and Protection

Using purposive sampling, I focused the study on four early childhood educators who were living in the greater Sacramento region and teaching children ages 3–4. Of the 16 teachers who responded to the study advertisement voluntarily, four were not qualified to participate because they lived outside the region. The four participants included in the study were invited because of their teaching licensure, their gender (one male and three

females), and their schools in different areas of the Sacramento region. The diversity of these participants was further expanded by the types of preschools in which they were employed, including (a) community-based state-subsidized; (b) parent-run cooperative; (c) private school; and (d) religiously affiliated. All participants were licensed to teach preschool-age children in California with either a state-issued child development permit or another form of teaching credential. Participants served as lead teachers, working with children between the ages of 3 and 4 at schools located in suburban, urban, and inner-city areas of the Sacramento region.

To recruit participants, I posted study advertisements in early childhood education-related social media channels, trade publications, and e-mail LISTSERVs. Because of the small participant pool, this study's results provide an in-depth understanding of each educator's views. To maintain research ethics, each study participant reviewed and signed an informed consent form (see Appendix E) that articulated their rights of participation, including the option to terminate involvement at any point. To protect confidentiality, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Only I had access to these identifying pseudonyms.

Researcher–Participant Working Relationship

Much as in a teacher–student relationship, complex elements of power are bound within the relationship between a researcher and research participant. Regardless of whether researchers are unaware of these forces or choose to ignore their power and privilege over participants, these complex factors influence the research's effectiveness. Similar to teacher–student relationships, the overall effectiveness of research can be

undermined without the implementation of effective strategies that temper power influences between researchers and participants. Dundon and Ryan (2010) indicated that a rudimentary element of affirmative working relationships with research participants is an aim to understand the participants' situational and cultural contexts. The researcher's role during the interview process is to record and document a participant's experiences and views. Researchers promote rapport and develop authentic relationships with participants by attempting to relate to them and seeking to understand their perspectives. Creswell (2013) posited that narrative forms of research provide the ability to explore the experiences of those involved in the study. They suggested, "Additionally, for participants in a study, sharing their stories may make them feel that their stories are important and that they are heard" (Creswell, 2013, p. 502). This is significant for a variety of reasons, but with respect to rapport building, this space of psychological validation will help promote more authentic sharing. Given the complexity of educators' views on the topic of gender conformity, this form of storytelling allows for a deeper understanding of the educator's experience (Ryan, Patraw, & Bednar, 2013). As such, this study may begin to add layers of understanding to a topic that has not yet been explored in academic studies.

Role of Researcher

Throughout the duration of this study, I was living in the Sacramento region while serving as a professor of child development outside the local area. Having no prior working relationships with the participants or the schools at which they were employed, I had the primary research role of information gatherer. During the classroom visits when I

collected observation data, my role shifted to that of an observer who was not a participant, given my limited interaction with the learning community.

Although I do not have past or current professional affiliations with this study's settings or participants, I do have experiences and biases related to this topic. Because of my experiences and struggles related to coming out and living as an openly gay man, I view individuals who identify as LGBTQIA as members of a family, even if I do not know them personally. As the founder of Gay and Gender Research and former vice president of the board of directors at the Sacramento LGBT Community Center (the Center), I have developed close personal and professional relationships with a multitude of LGBTQIA individuals. More specifically, because of my associations with individuals who identify as transgender, genderqueer, gender fluid, and gender expansive, I have come to see gender as much more than a binary. These relationships have deepened my understanding of how often gender-expansive individuals are victims of abuse and discrimination (Grossman, 2006; Keuroghlian & Shtasel, 2014).

Given my predispositions and expectations, this study included a range of procedures to limit researcher bias during the data analysis phase (see Data Analysis). Throughout the data collection and analysis phases of this project, I maintained a log of my perspectives and assumptions about the data. When reviewing transcripts or observation notes, I documented which of the data's specific elements provoked a visceral response in me. This ongoing dialogue with myself allowed me to identify how my perspectives might influence the data and project more easily. These areas were also revealed to the external reviewer during data analysis to help ensure that my

preconceived notions did not taint the data's soundness.

Data Collection

The data in this study were collected individually from all four participants by four sources: (a) initial participant interview (Appendix B); (b) one classroom observation; (c) children's book analysis (Appendix C); and (d) follow-up participant interview (Appendix D). The initial semistructured participant interview was audio recorded, facilitated over the telephone or in the participant's classroom, and lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. This initial interview was followed by an observation of the research participant and their classroom environment that lasted 1–3 hours. This observation occurred within 2 weeks of the initial interview. Using a researcher-provided form (see Appendix C), the participants analyzed one or more randomly selected children's books in their classroom for embedded gender values. Study participants selected children's books recently read to children in their class and then responded to a set of questions (see Appendix C) related to how gender was depicted in the selected books. The final semistructured interview was audio recorded, facilitated over the phone or in the participant's classroom, and lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. Along with prewritten, open-ended questions (see Appendix D), this closing interview included questions related to the classroom observation and the participant's children's book analysis.

The collected data are presented in the form of a multicase study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009) so that each educator's autobiographical narrative is preserved within the context of their classroom. The initial case serves as "the first in a

series of studies or as the pilot for a multicase study" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 69). As recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), fieldwork was completed one case at a time to improve efficiency and to allow the first case to refine a "focus to define the parameters of the others" (p. 70).

Data Analysis

This study used explanation building as the form of data analysis (Yin, 2014). As overlapping themes were revealed across the four case studies, only those specific cases that most vividly represent themes were included in the final case analysis. Transcripts and field notes from each case were manually precoded and then coded using ATLAS qualitative software and analyzed through belief systems theory and anti-bias education curricular lenses.

Immediately following the first participant's initial interview, manual precoding was conducted by marking and highlighting field notes. After the interview transcript was finalized and a member check was conducted, this precoding informed descriptive and value coding that was conducted using ATLAS qualitative coding software. All data collected from the first participant were coded and then these codes were revisited after the three subsequent participants. This process of precoding and then coding for descriptive and value data were repeated for all four participants. Data collection initially generated 105 codes that were then organized into 14 participant-focused themes (see Figure 1) and three common themes.

To avoid selective bias, which Yin (2014) warned against when using this form of analysis, and to increase validity within and across cases, this study included method and

data triangulation, member checks, an external reviewer, and a formal process for discrepant cases.

Data Source and Time Triangulation

Data were collected from four different sources, one participant at a time: (a) two audio-recorded interviews; (b) one classroom observation; and (c) a participant-completed book analysis form. To triangulate data by time, the interviews and observations occurred on different days of the week and at different times of day. To allow time to conduct the classroom observation and for participants to complete a children's book analysis, there were 4–5 weeks between the initial and final interviews. Along with providing a deeper—and possibly clearer—understanding of each case (Thurmond, 2001), the multiple data sources served to increase the study results' validity and transferability (Merriam, 2009).

Data Organizational System

All audio-recorded interviews were transcribed within 5–7 days of each interview by a professional transcriber who signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix F). The audio files, transcriptions produced in Microsoft Word, and ATLAS data were password protected on an encrypted, password-protected computer. When not in use, the data were placed on an encrypted external hard drive with password protection that is stored in a locked safe.

Member Checks

During each interview and after transcription, participants were asked to respond with corrections, clarifications, and further insights to their respective transcript. These

participant checks served to bolster rapport between myself and participants and to verify accuracy. No significant changes were indicated in any member checks.

External Reviewer

Throughout the data analysis stage, a practitioner with expertise in child development and anti-bias education (ABE) served as an external reviewer for the study. The reviewer's insights and recommendations were documented and incorporated into the written analysis. She has had experience with ABE during her 30 years in the field of early childhood education. The reviewer has served as an editor of a national early childhood magazine and several books. She has also authored books and developed hundreds of college courses and several undergraduate and graduate degree programs focused on (or influenced by) ABE.

Formal Process for Discrepant Cases

For this study, there was a process in place to handle discrepant cases, which included sending additional follow-up questions to participants. This additional step provided the opportunity to ensure that all counterevidence was fully explored. Each participant's perspectives and the themes revealed in their responses reflected nuanced differences within the context of their experience.

Qualitative Results

The aim of this research project was to explore how early childhood educators promote or hinder gender exploration beyond the gender binary in their classrooms as well as the role of cisgenderism in early childhood educators' curricular decisions and perceptions of students. Four early childhood educators, who were selected using

convenience sampling, served as the study's participants, and data were collected from interviews, with questions partially informed by classroom observations and children's book analysis forms. 12 themes emerged from their data and are presented in four individual cases.

Ash

Ash is a 44-year-old early childhood educator who has been teaching young children for "twenty or so magical years." Ash identifies as a white, married, "definitely heterosexual" female who takes pride in being a real Christian, mentioning it as "the foundation of everything." Ash grew up and lives in a suburban area of northern California that was once predominantly rural but is now a mixture of urban and rural. Ash teaches at a private, nondenominational preschool that is physically located at a Christian church. The collected data revealed three themes important to Ash: (a) Ash's traditional views on gender; (b) discomfort with an expanded definition of gender; and (c) religion as a factor in informing pedagogical decisions related to gender.

Ash: Traditional View of Gender

Defined through theory, gender identity development includes biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression, all of which create a complex interplay between biological and social influences. When asked to articulate her definition of gender, Ash cited biological sex as the sole factor:

> I would say that gender is, it's really predetermined. It's, it's hardwired in the womb. You know when you have . . . a male and a female, the sex hormones . . . determine the gender of your child and so, . . . you may wish you want to wear

> something else but like, I wish I had blue eyes but I don't, so it's just sort of that's how it is so… gender is hardwired.

Ash also highlighted that historical changes have expanded the social norms and roles influencing what men and women can do, describing the belief that gender is biologically derived and binary.

> Over our [American] history what it means to be a boy and girl has changed a bit, but then there are many ways it has not. Women still give birth to children but can also be much more than a baby-making machine. We [women] are still mothers, but we can also be leaders and thinkers. Sure, children are influenced to understand all of the things they can now do. Boys and girls can do sports, be political leaders, be authors, scientists, and artists. Boys are still boys and girls are still girls, and no matter what we do for them or around them is not going to change this [in a louder voice and slower cadence].

Rokeach (1968) indicated that an individual's beliefs—in this case, how Ash defines gender—are held in place by personal relevance, social consensus, firsthand experience, and the arbitrary nature of the belief. The belief that gender is binary and defined by one's biological sex is a widely held belief that is personally relevant to Ash and seems to reflect her experience. Though this belief does not align with current research or, arguably, the life experiences of some Californians, Rokeach's theory can explain its seeming truth in Ash's mind.

Ash: Discomfort With Expanded Definition of Gender

All participants were asked to share their views on a more expanded definition of gender that includes biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression. While each participant's response demonstrated different ranges of understanding or comfort, Ash's response seemed to evince considerable discomfort with the expanding concept of gender:

> I think that [the updated definition of gender] is the most ridiculous piece of crap I have ever heard. You are either a boy, girl, man, or woman. If you have a penis you are a male, a vagina a female, and everything [*sic*] else needs therapy. I don't know what researchers are trying to sell, but this shit is bull crap and I bet everyone I know agrees with me. I am tired of the gay community making stuff up just so they can get rights. I have gay friends, so it isn't that I don't care, but this doesn't have anything to do with the messages we should be telling children, teachers, and families.

Ash's comments support assertions made by Aina and Cameron (2011) and Ehrensaft (2011) that an individual's perceptions of gender have more to do with the socially constructed meaning applied to biological sex than one's individuality or self-conception. Biases are internalized within one's own beliefs, incredibly complex, and often undetectable to the individual who has internalized them (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). Ash's unwillingness to accept other ways of viewing gender illuminates how one's biases might influence one's thinking.

Individuals have unique perspectives that are shaped by myriad biases. Ash's perspective is not only an individual way of viewing the world, but also influences Ash's teaching philosophy and pedagogy. Referring to developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), Ash said:

> This just isn't appropriate for young children. It is as appropriate as child porn. It is wrong, disgusting, and not developmentally appropriate. This is not something that I plan to teach. . . . I wouldn't teach about gay sex; I am not going to teach about gender identity development. . . . It just doesn't belong in any course curriculum for young children.

Teaching children about gender identity development, in fact, expresses the three core areas of DAP: knowledge of child development, individualized practice, and cultural responsiveness (Copple & Bredekamp, 2010). Ash's comments provide additional examples of the ways personal biases about gender seem to be shaping not just Ash's views, but also Ash's teaching practices. More notable is the way that biases are influencing Ash's perspectives about teaching and child development.

Ash: Religion's Role in Influencing Pedagogy

Several studies have demonstrated a relationship between individuals who practice Christianity and higher levels of transphobia (Davis, 2013; Nagoshi et al., 2008). While these studies did not include early childhood educators, they do demonstrate a relationship between an individual's faith and the validation of their bias. Ash justified discrimination against transgender or gender-expansive children by referencing faith and the Christian values of the school:

> We are all genetically either a male or female, just like Adam and Eve, and this is the divine plan. . . . I have never worked with children who are transgender. If I had a child who was transgender, I do not think they would be allowed to wear whatever they want. We promote Christian values at our school, and that simply is not Christ-like. Children should be children, not trying to pretend to be adult. . . . If children are allowed to be children they would not be worrying about how to dress, not dress, and that sort of thing. They would just worry about having fun, solving puzzles, creating art, and engaging with others socially. . . . I do not think wearing dresses as a boy has anything to do with early childhood, and it has no place in a center.

No one, including educators, can avoid having learned biases, and many people have beliefs about others due to experience, cultural upbringing, or prejudicial thinking. Biases, though, "undermine the healthy development of all children, in one way or another, and all children benefit from being made visible and equitably included in daily classroom activities" (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010, p. 6).

Erin

Erin is a 57-year-old, married, self-identified heterosexual male early childhood educator who has been teaching young children for 20 years. Erin identifies as a "third-generation Japanese American, childless, vegetarian, atheist" and is "politically progressive without apology." Erin has spent most of his life living and working in urban areas throughout northern and southern California. He currently serves as a master teacher at a state-funded preschool situated in a low-income, urban area in a northern

California city. The collected data revealed three themes relevant to Erin: (a) the importance of male early childhood educators; (b) the function of gender tokenism in promoting gender roles and the gender binary; and (c) the role of families in gender socialization.

Erin: Importance of Male Early Childhood Educators

As one of few male early childhood educators, it is always an exciting event for me when I enter any early childhood center. As a male in a female-dominated profession, young children run toward me, remain close by, and socially engage me within minutes, as if I am a magnet. In speaking with early childhood educators, this is a common situation when other male-presenting educators or community members enter an early childhood classroom.

Although approximately 25% of K–12 educators are men, only 2.3% of those teaching children under the age of 6 are male. Erin highlighted this issue as a general problem in the field and mentioned that more male teachers would help promote acceptance of broader and less stereotypical forms of gender expression and gender roles:

> [Having so few male teachers in the classroom] is the giant elephant in the room . . . I think that more male teachers will un-gender the classroom. [Gender influences] teachers' biases, teachers' preferences, teachers' teaching styles, teachers' value systems, [and] conflict resolution skills. If [these elements of the classroom are] not a diverse set presented to children, then how can they learn about [diverse ways of doing gender]? It would be [a] beautiful day if there were three [male] teachers and three [female] teachers, [especially] if all the guy

> teachers were very different [regarding their gender expression and gender-related roles].

Diverse expressions of gender by educators provide young children with a broad range of examples that support their understanding of gender identity and expression. The more varied the ways of expressing the diversity of gender young children experience in the classroom, the broader their understanding of their own genders (Rokeach, 1968) and the genders of others (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). Erin emphasized the effect of having more varied expressions of gender in the classroom on children in the following way:

> A child [whose teachers exhibit greater gender diversity] would then think, "I can be this, I can be this, I can be this," and a child [would likely think], "I can be loved by this, I can be loved by this, I can be loved by this." And, you know, absent that, children know that they can be loved by women, but I don't think enough children know that they can be loved by men, and I think that affects girls just as much as it affects boys . . . You know, in our profession, I've learned more about anti-bias here (within early childhood centers) than I can imagine I would have learned anywhere. But the [lack of male educators in the field] should be this huge affirmative action thing if you ask me, because . . . [there's] too much that children aren't learning [due to the absence] of men.

A core element of ABE is understanding and appreciating difference and this comes through experiences with different people (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). The absence of varied expressions of gender, whether cisgender or otherwise, limits

children's understanding that gender identity and expression exist along a spectrum (Cerezo & Bergfeld, 2013). Though it is uncertain if more male preschool teachers, in and of itself, would necessarily provide children with enough diverse models of gender to fill the void, this scarcity has implications on children's relationships with teachers as well as their understanding and acceptance of gender expressions outside of the gender binary.

Erin: Role of Token Males in Promoting Gender Roles and the Gender Binary

By being the only male educator in an educational setting, Erin's individual characteristics are often viewed as a product of his maleness rather than as unique qualities. Conversely, given that all of Erin's coworkers are female, their ways of doing things, such as the ways they manage conflict, are connected with their femaleness. This situation promotes children viewing and defining gender through narrow characteristics and the gender binary. As is common with tokenism in general, stereotypes and social constructs—masculinity in this case—are held firmly in place. Erin's own bias related to gender roles and what it means to be male or female is revealed when he speaks about differences between himself and his female colleagues:

> The drive for trying to attain consensus (implying that women typically seek consensus) is . . . infuriating. It's, like, come on, majority rule; let's make a decision so we can move on. We don't have to talk about this anymore. I don't care if I'm on the side that won or lost—I just don't want to talk about this anymore. And I would be at meetings where I'm, like, "no wonder there's no more guys here" because I can't [act a certain way because it promotes the]

> stereotype of men being results driven and product driven and the stereotype of women being process driven and consensus driven. And I've seen it affect preschool teams where it might take weeks to figure out how they're gonna (sic) do lunch breaks. Or, who's inside or who's outside because someone doesn't like outside as much as someone else, or they all want everyone to have the same amount of outside time . . . I'll stay outside all day, so that's how we do it—I stay outside. So the children rotate and I pretty much just stay there because I only care about the results. Let's go on . . . let's not have a meeting spent talking about this; let's just figure out a way to get the results that we need for the children. And so I'm product driven, I'm results driven . . .

In the early childhood classroom, as one of few male educators, Erin is actively aware that he is a gender minority. Though there are many reasons why Erin's communication, teaching, and other cultural styles might differ from those of other teachers, they are attributed to gender. In making the distinction that gender is the sole cause for these variations, gender roles and the gender binary are modeled for children and reaffirmed in Erin's own worldview. As suggested by Rokeach (1968), Erin's firsthand experience and observations, along with the subjective nature of beliefs, help to maintain these perspectives.

Erin: Role of Families in Gender Socialization

Parents are significant forces in shaping young people's understanding of biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression. Erin highlighted the role that parents have in teaching and maintaining gender roles:

Definitely, [but not all], parents tend to send the children [to school in stereotypically gendered clothes]. The girls [come] to school neater, with dresses, barrettes, beads, bows, hair bands, and skirts . . . so the parents apparently tend to put a lot of gendered outward appearance into the equation. The children, from what I can tell, rebel against it for the most part because they're still . . . jumping with their skirts flying and everything like that . . . I am wondering if gender really is . . . an adult construct that's imposed upon children that [the children] would rather not . . . deal with. You hear [statements such as] "Mom says I can't play in the garden today" . . . much more among the girls. [You might also hear] "Mom says I can't play in the garden today because I have my good shoes on" or "I can't get these shoes dirty" or "I can't play in the water play area today because . . . these are my nice clothes." It's much [rarer] to hear a similar sentiment expressed by a boy. [I do remember] one boy did come up to me because he had brand new shoes on and he said, "I'm not gonna get these dirty; these are my Despicable Me shoes, and so I'm not gonna go in the garden today." But it was more . . . his choice not to go versus the girls who tend to echo maybe more the parents' sentiment of "don't get dirty" or "don't get messy" or who make statements such as "My mom will be mad at me," "Oh, I got dirt in my hair—my mom will be mad at me," or "Oh, I got wet—my mom will be mad at me." It's much less often that [the boys state], "Oh, I got dirty—how wrong of me," so . . . it does seem like [parents] influence the outward appearance of gender.

Clothing is one way that young children learn about the gender binary as well as each gender's associated roles. As Erin indicated, however, children seem to rebel by doing what comes naturally to them, such as jumping in a skirt. The argument could be made that over time and after consistent reminders, young children soon learn the proper way to dress as a boy or a girl and the characteristics associated with their gender. The way in which these expectations are couched as either boy or girl further promotes gender as a binary. Given that young children receive so many messages about gender roles and the gender binary, there are few ways for them to learn other ways to view or express gender. Early childhood programs have the potential to offer a variety of messages that would help young children expand and explore their thinking about gender while feeling supported and safe.

River

River is a heterosexual 50-year-old female early childhood educator who has been teaching young children for 20 years. River has spent most of her life living and working in urban areas. She currently teaches at a private nondenominational preschool located in an urban area of northern California. The school is well-known in the community for its progressive values and teaching philosophy as well as its focus on supporting the whole child. The collected data revealed four themes relevant to River: (a) conflation of sexuality and gender identity; (b) awareness of and deep interest in understanding gender fluidity; (c) modeling varied ways of doing gender; and (d) the need for professional development.

River: Conflation of Sexuality and Gender Identity

Sexuality and gender identity, though distinctly different concepts, are often misunderstood (i.e., thought to mean the same thing). Although it is not developmentally appropriate to discuss sexuality with young children, when sexuality and gender are conflated, it prevents open dialogue about gender identity. River's thoughts about gender identity and confusion about the meaning of gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation highlight the ways these terms get conflated, making them difficult to discuss with young children:

> I definitely have sensitivity [and more awareness] to sexuality, or to, gender not sexuality but to gender . . . I noticed that from [conversations in the media] . . . it sounds like there's this new way of talking . . . people identifying themselves male [or] female with their sexual preferences, but there's a sensitivity of how we're going to talk to each other using, you know, male [or] female so I've been more sensitive to that . . . [For example], I noticed Miley Cyrus said she's pansexual [and I thought], "what the heck is pansexual?" So I asked my [biological] children, who couldn't really tell me. They told me a little bit so then I just kept exploring [the difference]. So then I looked it up and I was like, "well what's the . . . difference between a pansexual and a bisexual?". . . And the only thing I could really . . . figure out on my own, with my own ideas, is that the difference is in how they want to be . . . referred. [It's] naming a sexuality and so . . . then I started to realize that some of these names that people want to have are not related, are not connected just to the sexual preference . . .

River likely understands that gender identity development is different than sexual orientation or sexuality. One could posit that when some early childhood educators think about discussing gender identity development, they might also think about sexuality and sexuality orientation and avoid further discussion. According to developmentally appropriate practices, teachers of young children must consider what is best for individual children, appropriate for families, and respectful of the early childhood center's culture. Without a strong understanding of these concepts, educators may be forced to err on the side of caution, even though they might be unintentionally promoting unhealthy social environments for children.

River: New Awareness of and Interest in Understanding Gender Fluidity

At the beginning of the study, River expressed confusion about the terms transgender, gender nonconforming, and gender expansive. She said, "I've not had any experience with transgender . . . and . . . not sure what gender nonconforming means. . . . I haven't experienced either of those." Although, River mentioned that River's own definition of gender has not changed, there has been a shift of understanding:

> [My] definition of gender hasn't changed, but I find that I'm . . . aware that gender is changing and so I'm . . . listening to that a little bit because I'm . . . becoming more aware. [Additionally, my high school-age, biological child] is learning at school that gender is changing [and I am learning through this experience too].

Changing societal realities leads effective teachers to seek out ways to integrate new knowledge into their teaching practice. River still has many questions and is just

beginning to understand new concepts about gender, but exemplifies a strong desire to learn more:

> [Working] with families . . . [and] young children it's just important to be sensitive to the [evolving needs of children and families] . . . supporting single parents, traditional families . . . lesbian couples, gay couples, and. . . . Now for me that's a norm. . . . I don't even blink [when a lesbian parent approaches me]: "Who are you?" Oh, you're mom, you're momma. . . . I'm really not so worldly but . . . I've gone through this trend of things changing. . . . I don't want to be [offensive] and respond like [I am] uncomfortable . . . so I feel like I have to come to terms, some kind of my own terms because then that way I am able to meet that person as an equal and if I'm going to have their child in my class that's how I would want our relationship to be.

Numerous societal changes during River's career require shifts in thinking and teaching practices. River knows some aspects of gender are not reflected in her teaching practices, but still demonstrates a need to develop the awareness. Educators develop relationships with children and their families through understanding and responding to needs (Baum & Swick, 2008; Kim & Sheridan; 2015).

River: Modeling Varied Ways of Portraying Gender

Reading, acting out, and discussing books are influential ways for children to learn about and/or affirm their understanding of gender. River noted that the books used and preselected by their school do, in fact, promote stereotypical gender roles as well as the gender binary:

> [The children] have books at naptime so every story or circle that I bring I've memorized and we act it out or the stories I tell [the story] with puppets . . . most of my stories are about nature but sometimes there's a boy or girl that's in it . . . or [some other gendered character with corresponding roles such as a] grandmother who has a garden where . . . the apple tree's growing and the fairies [are] coming or something like that . . . sometimes it is that the farmer (in the storybook) will be a man . . .and so if we're pretending to be a farmer . . . I'll say Farmer Brown and *his* . . . [or we] went to *his* pumpkin patch . . . [the books] are pretty archetypical . . . if I'm doing something about a mother it will tend to be mother and child versus father and child . . . when we look at a story [through our school's curriculum], that each piece . . . is about a person every element of male/female, it's about each thing, each character is actually a part of the whole person so that's kind of how we're taught . . . I don't tell fairy tales to children, preschool's too young for that, but in kindergarten and first grade when they're telling the fairy tale and its archetype, you know, every, you know male roles the gender is all there but really . . . the story is all about the human being and each, each . . . piece of the story, each character is a piece of the personality or the archetype of what you're portraying in that story. So that's how we view it.

Although the children's books in River's classroom illustrate stereotypical embodiments of gender, the ways that River facilitates curricular activities extend and stretch children's understanding. By modeling, River shows children they can choose what interests them, rather than what is expected of their gender:

> . . . So say we're outside gardening, you know, I might refer to all of us as, "well, we're farming," and then I would be saying [it in a way so I am] intermixing boy/girl, male/female [to avoid promoting gender stereotypes] . . . "I'm the farmer today, would you like to come help me?" And so that is an actual doing of these activities because most of the time when . . . I bring a story or a circle . . . the child might not have any relationship to the movements we're acting out and I want to show them in the other part of our day, you know, the opportunity, so I'll be saying what we're doing but I'll be doing it, saying it, "I'm mending or I'm fixing something," so then I would refer to myself, I would refer to whatever that character was that was in my story or circle but refer to it as, well, "it's me and I'm female," then I would put it that way and then just use it as, so when I do a little game like there's a little circle game that I do and anytime the child is the mouse and I sing the song and it's Thomas, Tommy mouse, but if it's a girl I'll say Tommy, Thomasina mouse, so we're . . . in that sense I interchange . . . male/female, but I . . . make it to fit if that child's male or female.

Despite these efforts to provide a safe space for children to transgress stereotype roles, gender is still modeled as binary. The continual presence of this dualistic construct of gender as either male or female, boy or girl, provides freedom for children to explore individual likes and interests, but within an inflexible framework.

River: Need for Professional Development

Effective educators continually learn the needs of their students and adapt their practice in response to these shifts. Educators are also inherently learners and for those

who embrace their own development, learning students' needs is an opportunity for personal growth (Mezirow, 2000):

> [As] teachers in general there's going to be these things to start looking at because, um, gender identities and how people want to be referred to are changing. . . . So this is probably one of those things and it's not, and that not all teachers are going to be able to handle it on their own. I mean sometimes I even feel like, "wow," at my age I feel like some of it is just being an older adult trying to grapple with this new idea. And so I would think it would be important for us as teachers to look at this and see, "Okay, this is Emily she now wants to be referred to as a girl. . . . She's going to be going through these changes. . . ." That's [going to] start . . . our conversations so that all the teachers, all the faculty, all the people that work in the school are responding in the same way.

Just like the learners they support, teachers are also students and sometimes need others to scaffold their learning (Greytak, Kosciw, & Boese, 2013). River recognizes that there are things she and other early childhood educators need to learn about gender, so they views a professional development workshop as a good starting point:

> [There should be workshops on gender identity development] . . . evening talks or a lecture. . . . Teachers are always looking for [new information] and often it's what is the latest trend that's happening with children or families and so to see that you start to see it . . . I keep coming across some lectures, so I'm coming across a workshop and then if one person goes and they bring it back and . . . [the workshop] spark[ed] something in that person who went to the lecture, [they will

> likely share] I think this might be what's going on and that person then talks to that child's teacher and it expands and grows.

As with other participants in this study, River demonstrated an interest in the topic and a desire to learn more about gender identity development. A professional development workshop is one way that educators receive new information, and River said it would spark additional dialogue. When teachers learn new information they often share new content with their colleagues and this is one way changes to pedagogy are initiated, supported, and sustained.

Skyler

Skyler is a self-identified "straight," married 42-year-old early childhood educator who has been teaching young children for 12 years. Skyler has lived and worked in suburban areas for the majority of her life. Skyler currently serves as a teacher at a family cooperative in a northern California suburb. As well as being an educator, Skyler is a parent of a young child who "left first grade as a boy and started the second grade as a girl at the same school." The collected data revealed three themes relevant to Skyler: (a) dissonance between educator and parent knowledge, (b) the importance of being creating safe spaces for gender exploration, and (c) pedagogical change as a result of experience, dialogue, and reflection.

Skyler: Dissonance Between Educator and Parental Knowledge

There are a multitude of factors that might cause dissonance between an educator's experiential knowledge and belief systems and the views and expectations of children's parents. As a parent of a young child whose biological sex is different from

their gender identity, Skyler brings a great deal of insight to the classroom regarding gender identity development:

> I am the mother of a seven-year-old transgendered child . . . and I think about gender all the time right now. I define gender as a spectrum, and I think people . . . identify somewhere on that spectrum, and by and large, most people will identify on the side that coincides with . . . the gender that they were assigned at birth (biological sex). [There are] plenty of people who fall in different places along that spectrum. Once you have an awareness of [a more expansive definition of gender], it expands your acceptance of others. Speaking about children specifically, if you know you are teaching a biological boy who expresses in a very feminine, or socially feminine way, the child can still identify as a boy. We live in such a binary society [in terms of gender], and I think that [gender is] not well understood by the masses yet. There are so many different ways of expressing gender, and if you're looking at those three different areas of gender (biological sex, gender expression, and gender identity), you can better understand children.

Although Skyler is still learning how to support their own child, Skyler's understanding of gender identity development is distinctive and, arguably, more complex than the concepts shared by parents at their school. This discrepancy presents a challenge for Skyler as well as a certain level of fear, as mentioned in the following interview excerpt:

> I teach preschoolers, but it's at a co-op, so the program is also a parent education program, and I have parents [present in the classroom]. I'm constantly trying to

> model the language . . . where I'm not . . . putting kids sort of in gender boxes. [T]here is so much that you know, and some parents come in with very firm feelings about kids, [that] they need to learn how to read before they go to kindergarten and all these crazy ideas . . . so a lot of our education is helping parents learn what . . . [a] developmentally appropriate program looks like and what kids should be doing at different ages and stages. That's a huge hurdle right now . . . because [gender identity development] is a highly important and interesting topic to me, and I want to bring that into my parent education. I do fear that there'll be pushback [by parents] . . . and that makes me feel hesitant about even going there with them.

Families are their child's first teacher, and the family's cultural and philosophical points of view should be considered by classroom teachers. Effective educators must find affirmative ways to communicate new information to families, even when topics are difficult or may be met with disagreement. After all, true learning is often the result of conflict, and in this case, it is the divergence between older perspectives and newer information (Mezirow, 2000; Rokeach, 1968).

Skyler: On the Importance of Being Supportive

As Skyler continues to find ways to broach conversations about gender identity development with families, she has learned about the importance of creating safe spaces for gender exploration. Skyler suggested that to support children, whether they exemplify stereotypical gender expression or are more gender expansive, family members and educators should aim to follow their child rather than lead:

> Your home is going be your first place where you're either going to be accepted or rejected. Sometimes as young as three or two, the handwriting can be on the wall . . . you have a baby and . . . [the] first thing they do is put a little pink cap or a little blue cap on your baby, and then there's this story that you create in your head of what life's going to be. I would just love to impress on people that you never know. I realize that my personal situation is very uncommon. I would never presume or tell parents, "Hey this could be you." I have this extreme example [as the parent of a child who is gender expansive] . . . on the other extreme, you can have the girls that only want to wear princess clothes every day or the boys that only want to play superhero every day. But, the vast majority, I believe, fall somewhere in the middle, as a parent, as a teacher, to be able to . . . stay out of it as much as you can . . . when it shakes out gives children a gift of falling wherever they fall on that spectrum, rather than guiding them and pushing them to the end of the gender spectrum that's more comfortable for you. Let it, let it be, let the child decide.

Gender identity development, like other aspects of development, contains elements of both biology and socialization. Some children naturally fall on either end of the gender spectrum or somewhere in between. As a parent and teacher, Skyler cited the influential role parents have in guiding a child's gender identity development. Adults cannot dictate how a child identifies and wants to express their gender because it is an individual process. They can, however, determine the level of support and sense of safety that they provide to their own children or those they serve (Minter, 2012).

Skyler: Pedagogical Change as a Result of Experience, Dialogue, and Reflection

Most participants in this study identified the desire to understand gender identity development, but they were not quite certain how to put this knowledge into practice. Given that Skyler has already been actively learning ways to support their own transgender child, the demonstrated challenge is learning how to incorporate these insights into pedagogical changes. Although Skyler was observed using some strategies that promote the gender binary, she is beginning to identify what restricts gender fluidity in her own practice. This transforming perspective is a result of Skyler's experiences as a parent and their participation in this study:

> I had mentioned to you that my child went through a transition over the summer . . . because of working with you and because of my experience in my family, I feel like I am starting this school year with a broader definition in my mind of what gender is. [I have become] more deliberate about thinking outside of the gender binary in relation to my work with kids and in the way I relate to kids and their parents. [I am trying to make] sure that the language I'm using does not just perpetuate this sort of a gender binary and the stereotypes . . . in past years if I observed stereotypical rough and tumble boy play [I would have made comments to parents such as], "Oh your son, you know, he's all boy," and those kinds of things. Now, I am so hyper-aware [sic] and sensitive about labeling kids and putting them in categories or boxes. I'm now looking at who kids [are showing themselves to be] rather than putting them into those boxes based on their gender that was assigned at birth.

Unlike other educators in this study, Skyler has a unique perspective on the topic from raising a transgender child. A thematic thread found in this study, especially with Skyler, is the way that dialogue can affect another's way of thinking and doing. By participating in this study, Skyler now understands the complexities of gender better. This shift in thinking seems to have implications for how Skyler will teach as well as parent.

Summary

This research project, using a case study research methodology, explored how early childhood educators promote or hinder gender exploration. Four preschool educators served as study participants, and data were collected from each participant through two interviews, classroom observations, and a children's book analyses informing the final interview. A considerable portion of the data collection process was developing a rapport with participants to reveal depth and authenticity. Given the dearth of research on this topic, the importance of study trustworthiness is even greater because it promotes continued future research.

To ensure validity and transferability, this study utilized triangulated methods and data, member checks, and an external review. Potential ethical issues and participant rights were considered and protected through formal review by Walden University's Internal Review Board and by collecting each participant's informed consent. Confidentiality was protected by assigning each participant a pseudonym and storing all study data in a locked safe.

This study was informed by three overarching research questions relating to teacher self-awareness, perceived practices, and the barriers and biases informing both:

(a) How do preschool educators perceive their own curricular strategies as influencing gender identity development and expression in the early childhood classroom?; (b) What practices might be present in preschool classrooms that foster the inclusion of gender nonconforming students?; and (c) What possible barriers or biases might be present in preschool classrooms that hinder the inclusion of gender nonconforming students? Twelve themes emerged from the data collected from Ash, Erin, River, and Skyler answering these three questions that largely revolved around the participant's belief systems (see Figure 1). As indicated by Rokeach's (1968) belief systems theory, the strength of a belief depends on four factors: personal relevance, social consensus, the individual's firsthand experience related to the belief, and the belief's arbitrary nature.

Data collected from Ash revealed a traditional view, discomfort with expanded definitions of gender, and the role that religion can have in influencing pedagogy related to gender. Erin's data illustrated the importance of male early childhood educators disrupting the role of tokenism in promoting gender roles and highlighted some of the ways families socialize their children to learn the gender binary. Data collected from River exemplified the ways some teachers conflate concepts and words associated with sexuality and gender identity, show a genuine interest in learning more about gender, and model varied ways of performing gender in the classroom. Skyler's data demonstrated dissonance between what a teacher knows about gender and what they feel comfortable introducing in the classroom, the importance of creating safe spaces for gender exploration, and insights into how experience, dialogue, and reflection can promote pedagogical changes.

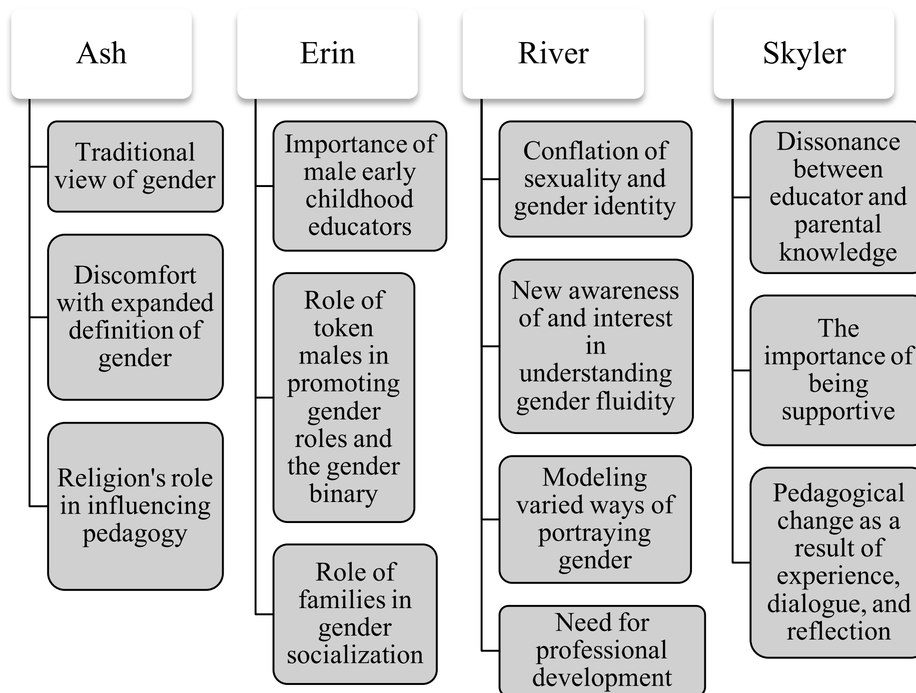

Figure 1. Participant-specific themes.

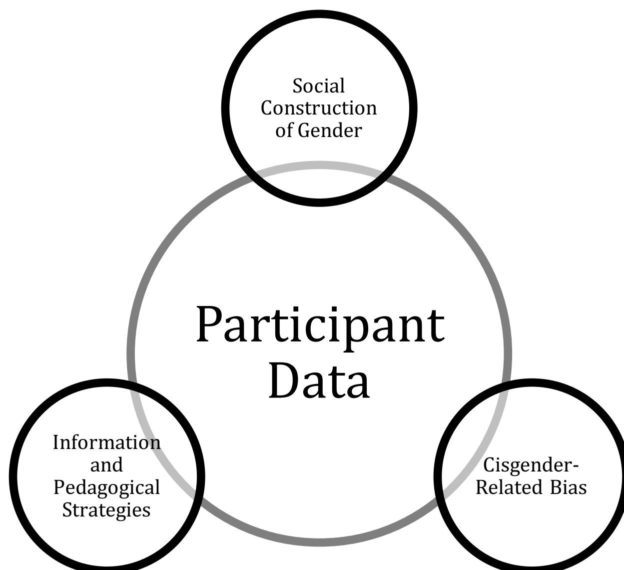

Figure 2. Common themes.

As illustrated in Figure 2, although there were varied levels of difference between participants, there were three intersecting themes related to gender, professional development, and bias that emerged from their collective data. Social expectations and rules related to the social construction of gender influence teachers as individuals and professionals in myriad ways. Data collected from Ash highlighted how a traditional view of gender might relate to a feeling of discomfort toward a more expansive definition of gender. Erin's data showed that an individual can simultaneously embrace the developmental importance of allowing young children to explore gender yet still promote stereotypical gender roles and behavior. Data collected from all four participants illustrated some level of cisgender-related bias, ranging from overt comments made by Ash to less obvious forms. As a parent, Skyler has been deconstructing the concept of the gender binary while at home, but she, despite her insights, promotes cisgenderism as an educator. This contradiction highlights the third common theme that all educators exemplified: a need to gather more information about gender identity development and related pedagogical strategies to promote affirmative classrooms.

A professional development series emerged from the results of this study that promotes a facilitated reflection of beliefs, a review of terms and concepts related to gender, and the opportunity to reframe pedagogical strategies. The project, which is defined in detail in Section 3, will create a professional development series that supports early childhood educators in the greater Sacramento region to create affirmative spaces to explore gender. The scarcity of related research also parallels the lack of any locatable

professional development curricula, workshops, or learning opportunities on gender identity development in early childhood education.

Section 3: The Project

This qualitative study explored preschool educators' curricular strategies for influencing gender identity development and expression as well as the barriers and biases that might hinder the same. The study involved an analysis of interviews with and observations of preschool teachers to understand how teachers might influence young children's discourses of gender through the promotion or hindrance of gender explorations in classrooms. Data collected from River and Skyler indicated that some teachers benefit from and largely desire professional development that supports them in understanding gender, reflecting on their own views, teaching families, and changing pedagogical practice as it relates to gender identity development and more expansive views of gender. The proposed project is a three-part day-long professional development series (see Appendix A) that provides early childhood educators a safe and supportive space in which to reflect on their own perspectives on gender, the opportunity to learn a more expansive definition of gender, the guidance to develop a curriculum to support young children in exploring gender issues, and the confidence to speak with colleagues and families on gender identity development.

Description and Goals

As mentioned in Section 1, given that preschool-aged children are already forming their views on biological sex, gender binary, gender identity, and gender expression, early childhood educators have a distinctly influential role in their development. The problem addressed in this study is how preschool teachers influence gender identity development and the ways in which their gender-related biases and

perspectives might influence their pedagogical decisions. Qualitative interviews with and classroom observations of four preschool teachers revealed myriad themes related to perspectives and biases having implications for pedagogical practice and discussions among teachers and families. The diverse range of gender-related beliefs, biases, experiences, and knowledge represented by the teachers in this study demonstrates a need for professional development. Given the general complexity of bias, and the depth to which it shapes an individual's worldview, anti-bias education scholars have indirectly highlighted and previously emphasized the importance of a facilitated and supportive approach to adult education (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010).

Three central goals informed the development of this professional development plan. The first goal was to develop an educational series for local early childhood education-related agencies and employers to access professional development training in early childhood gender identity development. The second goal was for professional development participants to gain self-awareness (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010) and pedagogical knowledge to implement affirmative gender exploration in the preschool classroom. The third goal was for professional development participants to gain the self-confidence to speak with colleagues and families about the developmental significance of gender identity development.

Rationale

Data from this study collected from the interviews, classroom observations, and children's book analyses revealed that teachers demonstrated a need and a desire for professional development. All four participants indicated that their formal college

training did not include gender identity development, with three of them expressing an interest in learning more, but indicated uncertainty concerning where to access additional information. One participant specifically identified professional development as essential in supporting educators in developing more affirmative places for gender exploration. Given the existing dearth of topical research, it was not surprising that participants cited a lack of teaching or instruction about early childhood gender identity development in college programs or in professional development training. The one participant, Skyler, who had received additional training had sought it out to better understand how to be a more supportive parent.

Review of the Literature

As indicated by the findings discussed in Section 2, preschool teachers unintentionally and intentionally model, teach, and discuss gender with young children and adults primarily from a cisgenderistic point of view. These data also highlight the many personal and administrative challenges teachers face in accessing information about or implementing a more expansive view of gender and gender identity development. This professional development series incorporated both data collected in this study and current theory and practice identified in a literature review. A search of literature was completed using the following terms—*early childhood education*, *early childhood educators*, or *preschool teacher*—along with *professional development*, *implementing anti-bias education*, *teaching anti-bias education*, *transformative learning*, and *training early childhood educators*. As with previous literature review searches conducted for this study, Walden University Discover Service, Thoreau, was used to search

simultaneously in a variety of academic databases.

Given the study's themes related to bias and belief systems and the role of education, including professional development, in promoting personal transformation, this literature review covers a range of direct and indirect resources. The role of critical self-reflection, community discourse and support, personal transformation, and components of effective professional development were all subject to review. Combined, these components served as a literature review and the foundation for this project.

Anti-Bias Education

Anti-bias education (ABE), a curricular approach in the field of early childhood education, highlights the need for teachers to challenge discrimination in the classroom. Derman-Sparks (1989) explained the underlying social change element of ABE in this way:

> In a society in which institutional structures create and maintain sexism . . . it is not sufficient to be non-biased (and also highly unlikely), nor is it sufficient to be an observer. It is necessary for each individual to actively intervene, to challenge and counter the personal and institutional behaviors that perpetuate oppression. (p. 3)

Critical reflection. Teachers of young children, like all members of society, have been socialized to believe a set of prescribed socially constructed attitudes about gender, including those related to the gender binary, biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression. These social constructs are taught and maintained by the ways in which gender is modeled, discussed, and framed by families, society, local communities, media,

and early childhood classrooms and preschool teachers (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). Given the extent to which gender-related values and beliefs are entrenched in society, an important first step for teachers who wish to actively intervene, challenge, and counter biases is to critically reflect upon their own perspectives (Lin, Lake, & Rice, 2008). Through this type of self-analysis, teachers should be able to identify, assess, and possibly reformulate their views, assumptions, and biases (Dirkx, 1998), specifically those regarding gender (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010).

In the current study, the participants had reached very different points in understanding gender more broadly, a prerequisite to promoting affirmative gender exploration in the classroom. Erin voiced appreciation for gender fluidity while promoting the gender binary and stereotypical gender roles, whereas Ash voiced considerable repudiation in viewing or discussing gender in any way other than through these social constructs. River appeared to begin to explore gender more broadly but was hesitant to make any pedagogical changes, despite recognizing the importance and timely relevance. Of the participants, Skyler seemed to have a more considerable understanding of gender—the result of raising a transgender child—but was also hesitant to apply or discuss this knowledge at work. These varied perspectives and varying levels of comfort demonstrate how deeply gender is entrenched in the lives of teachers. It also begins to highlight how personally challenging it can be to redefine gender and adjust one's teaching practices (Shai, 2010) without guidance from thoughtful mentors.

Guidance, support, and community. Critically self-reflecting about one's own perspectives or biases about gender can unearth a range of questions, thoughts, feelings,

and discomfort (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). To more effectively move through these disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 2000), individuals need to be able to discuss their thoughts with others (Scott, 1992) and receive support from colleagues (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). In socially safe learning settings (Habermas, 1978) that promote candid and meaningful discussion (Raphael, Vasquez, Fortune, Gavelez, & Au, 2014), learners are able to support and challenge each other's gender-related assumptions and beliefs. Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) recommended that an educator seeking to become an anti-bias teacher locate and meet regularly with a colleague inside or outside the workplace to develop mutual support in examining issues, feelings, and attitudes that emerge.

Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010), through ABE, challenged the field of early childhood education in general, and teachers of young children more specifically, to confront biases and to take steps against undue oppression. A prerequisite for undergoing these steps of social action is for teachers to reflect upon and hold themselves accountable for their own perspectives, to change thinking, and ultimately to change teaching strategies informed by prejudice. To process what they uncover in this self-examination, teachers need supportive guides as well as a community in place for open dialogue and the safe sharing of thoughts and ideas. Whereas ABE serves as a call to action and a rationale for promoting equity in the early childhood classroom, as well as for supporting critical reflection regarding prejudicial thinking and related personal change, it does not directly explain the process of personal transformation. To develop a professional development series that encourages teachers to teach in new ways in light of

differing understandings of gender (Stein, 2012; Wohlwend, 2012), it is also important to understand the underlying process of personal transformation. The varied perspectives and levels of comfort articulated by the four participants in this study illustrate the distinctiveness of their areas of needed development. While some participants might need support in understanding more rudimentary concepts of bias and privilege, others require more specific teaching strategies to put into place what they already understand. This highlights the importance of supportive mentors and learning communities, as well as the need to undergird professional development with learning theory.

Transformative Learning Theory

Informed by four distinct areas of examination (Boyd, 1991; Daloz, 1986; Freire, 1986; Mezirow, 2000), the study of transformative learning has revealed a more expansive understanding of how adults learn and are changed by their learning processes (Dirkx, 1998). Transformative learning, in general, is a learning experience that shifts one's thinking or perspective, often associated with influential life events but also with classroom activities (Clark, 1993). Mezirow's (2000) focus within the field of transformative learning, which he later referred to as *perspective transformation*, was the way in which adults extrapolate meaning from their experiences. Much like aspects of Rokeach's belief systems theory (1986), Mezirow claimed that an individual's perspective determines the way in which they view and experience the world. Mezirow went on to explain that individuals were able to shift their views after a process referred to as a *disorienting dilemma*, the experience that occurs upon learning new information that counters a current belief system, compelling individuals to change perspective.

The overall objectives of this study were to understand how preschool educators perceived their own curricular strategies, classroom practices, and barriers and biases related to promoting safe spaces for gender exploration. One thematic thread interwoven throughout these objectives is the role of reflection in changing one's own thinking and pedagogical practice. Among the study participants, Skyler's shifting viewpoint, in light of Skyler's own child being transgender, typifies a disorienting dilemma and potential for change. Dirkx (1998) cautioned that not all adult learners, such as those attending professional development workshops, will be transformed by what they learn as educators, and thus training cannot necessarily ensure change for all learners. Students such as Ash, with strongly held views regarding gender, may not be ready to critically assess their assumptions or accept more expansive views of gender (Mezirow, 1986) and may leave a training session without a shift in thinking. Nonetheless, the theory, juxtaposed with ABE, provides a solid foundation on which to build a professional development workshop series on gender. As with other effective teaching practices, this combination of theories underscores the importance of identifying and capitalizing on teachable moments in safe and supportive learning communities to promote growth and development.

Components of Effective Professional Development

Safety and support of learning environment. Like early childhood classrooms, professional development training sessions should be supportive spaces for teachers to explore and take risks (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Zeichner, 2003). Professional development workshops for early childhood educators should be emotionally,

psychologically, and physically safe places for teachers to ask questions, be vulnerable, and receive support (Scott, 2002). One way that a facilitator of professional development can promote a sense of safety (Benson, Smith, & Fianagan, 2014) is by guiding participants in collectively developing community guidelines for the learning community. Safety and support can also be fostered in other more managerial ways. Mraz and Kissel (2014) posited that two ways to accomplish this goal are to ensure collegiality among those involved in professional development planning and facilitation and to indicate implicit support from administrators for the training itself. As with all learners—but especially adult learners asked to examine their belief systems—safety and support help to create an important foundation for growth and learning. A sense of safety and support allows learners to feel more confident in exploring new concepts and pushing their learning edges or comfort zones.

Relevancy of curriculum and learner voice. Two interrelated prerequisites for educational programs directed at adult learners are the relevancy of curriculum and learner agency (Raphael et al., 2014). To promote genuine learning opportunities where teachers will acquire new knowledge, implement newly acquired knowledge, and potentially be transformed as a result, content must be relevant, and teachers must have a voice in the process of their learning. Professional development for many years has embraced the banking approach (Freire, 1986) or one-way delivery of content (Mraz & Kissel, 2014), not cooperative conversation. Rather than what Freire referred to as making deposits to learners, professional development should be designed to address meaningful questions (Raphael et al., 2014), be based on mutual goals (Mraz & Kissel,

2014), and promote dialogue among participants (Griffith, Ruan, Stepp, & Kimmel, 2014). The field of early childhood has been influenced by social constructivism so much that quality teaching practice is partially defined by the use of open-ended questions, extending thoughts, and dialogue. Not only are these constructivist strategies supported by professional development researchers, but they are also reflected in early childhood pedagogy.

Classroom environment and group design. The way in which the professional development classroom is designed and content is taught has implications for safety, support, relevancy, and learner voice. Pedagogy through this lens is both a reflection of these prerequisite elements of professional development and a mirror. Given the multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2006) of teachers and their varied learning styles, one noted principle of professional development relates to how groups are organized (Raphael et al., 2014). Any given day of training should include small dyadic conversations, small-group discussions, and a range of large-group events. These changing sizes of learning group provide a range of opportunities through which to engage diverse learners in different ways and lay the groundwork for a learner-centered classroom (Weimer, 2013). Along with changing the group size and configuration, learning activities should provide opportunities to discuss new content and relate it to real-world applications (Tshannen-Moran & Chen, 2014) and personal experience (Weimer, 2013). Teachers should be able to integrate the content of a professional development series; otherwise, its utility is questionable. Some teachers might need the one-on-one guidance of a colleague to make these curricular connections, whereas others will gain better insight from a small-group

discussion or a large-group activity. When all of these learner-centered elements are combined, along with a safe and supportive learning community relevant to and promoting the learner voice, early childhood educators will be encouraged to learn and apply their newfound knowledge (Cullen, Harris, & Hill, 2012).

Implementation

With the approval of the project study from Walden University (04-27-15-0276963), the professional development series will first be submitted to the Board of Directors (BOD) at the Sacramento LGBT Community Center (Center), as part of the organization's established Training and Outreach program. If approved by the BOD, the professional development workshop series could be implemented at family child care and center–based early childhood education sites throughout the greater Sacramento region. Information on potential resources and existing supports, potential barriers, the proposal for implementation and timetable, and roles and responsibilities of students and key stakeholders is included below.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

Much like other new educational programs or initiatives, and projects in general, professional development workshops require both stakeholder and financial support. The Center is an established nucleus of LGBTQIA programming in the greater Sacramento region, and the affiliation would promote the success of the workshop series in several ways. This collaboration would also allow the series to benefit from and capitalize on the Center's existing stakeholder base, community relationships, and coordinated communication strategies. Another benefit of constructing the workshop as a formal

program of the Center is that it provides several potential sources of financial support. The program could be offered as a paid service to for-profit early childhood agencies, or it could be funded by existing or future community education grants or through charitable contributions to the Center.

Potential Barriers

The most significant barrier to the implementation of this professional development series will be the recruitment of family child care centers and early childhood education centers unaffiliated with the public school system, especially those affiliated with churches or located in conservative areas. Public schools in the state of California are mandated to include LGBTQIA-related topics in their K–12 curricula and are more likely to pursue topical professional development for preschool educators.

Another potential barrier relates to teachers being able to attend three-day-long professional training sessions. Early childhood sites might find it financially burdensome or difficult to maintain teacher-child ratio mandates when providing teachers three days of leave. Though an alternative could be weekend offerings, this might prove difficult for teachers who are also parents or primary caregivers.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

Upon approval of the project study by Walden University, the first step in implementation would require obtaining approvals from the Center BOD and the executive director. Next, as early as March 2016, training materials would be designed by the Center's graphic design team to include Center branding, and the materials ultimately would be approved by myself and Center leadership. Throughout spring 2016,

a significant outreach campaign to early childhood centers would commence meeting with early childhood education leaders and would schedule professional development workshops beginning as early as fall 2016.

Roles and Responsibilities of Students and Others

My role will be to develop a professional development series based on the demonstrated needs of preschool teachers in the greater Sacramento region. Upon approval by the university, I will assume my role as a lead workshop facilitator, subject matter expert, trainer, and mentor. I will also ensure that the curriculum and instruction remain current by reviewing the content regularly. This review will also include workshop evaluation results to determine potential areas for improvement.

The role of Center leadership is to review and approve the professional developmental series and associated materials. Successful implementation will also require coordinated communication and outreach to early childhood education sites. This will be a collaborative effort shared by Center staff, including vendors providing public relations and social media consultation.

The role of early childhood education site administrators, whether from a family home child care location or center-based early childhood education site, is to evaluate and approve the professional development series. Upon approval, the administrator would need to provide support for communicating the dates and times of the professional development series or provide a contact list for scheduling purposes.

The role of teacher participants is threefold: (a) to attend all three sessions, (b) to participate in discussions, and (c) to thoughtfully consider how to apply the new learning in their learning community.

Project Evaluation

The outcome of this project study is a professional development series on early childhood gender identity development for preschool educators in the greater Sacramento region. The three overarching objectives of this project are: (a) to develop an educational series for early childhood education–related agencies and employers to access professional development training in early childhood gender identity development, (b) for participants to gain the self-awareness and pedagogical knowledge to implement affirmative gender exploration in the preschool classroom, and, ultimately, (c) for participants to develop self-confidence to speak with colleagues and families about the developmental significance of gender identity development.

To ascertain the ongoing and overall effectiveness of this program development series, eight formative and two summative assessment strategies have been embedded in the program's design. Formative assessments will occur throughout all three days of the professional workshop series. During the first day, formative assessment will be a part of the Art Activity, Gallery, and Discussion; Review of Key Concepts; and Reflection of Learning (see Appendix A). On the second day, it will occur as part of the Children's Book Analyses; Body Sculpting; and Reflection of Learning (see Appendix A). On the third and final day, formative assessment will take place during the Text Kit Presentations and Children's Book Analyses (see Appendix A). Summative evaluation

will be held on the last day as a post-test and then again 90 days after completion an ex-post test.

Know, Want to Know, and Learned

In various forms, this professional development series will integrate versions of the pedagogical strategy referred to as Know, Want to Know, and Learned (KWL), which ensures the relevancy of course content. One way this strategy will be used is by asking participants at the beginning of the training to discuss and share what they know about gender and what they would like to learn (Humada-Ludeke, 2013). Depending on the size of the training session, this will likely begin as a large group activity, but it will also be followed up with an individual activity in which participants share their own individual learning goals. The KWL strategy not only helps evaluate participants but also supports the facilitator in assessing their own effectiveness as a teacher and the appropriateness of the curriculum. There is a maxim that will guide this training: If a participant doesn't learn the way you teach, maybe you should teach the way a participant learns. Evaluation, from this perspective, becomes a measure of participant learning and a feedback loop for the facilitator. By using the KWL strategy, the facilitator will learn about their participants and continually use this knowledge in guiding the learning.

Curriculum and Instruction as the Basis of Formative Evaluation

Emergent curriculum (curriculum and instruction that grows and develops organically in response to participants in the classroom) has significant power in both the early childhood and professional training environments. All participants, irrespective of

age, have varying ways of learning and communicating. As a result, they bring their authentic selves, curiosities, and questions into the classroom. By meeting participants where they are in terms of what they know and respecting who they are in terms of their multiple cultural identities, facilitators are able to guide their learning more effectively. By approaching the learning process in an organic way, workshop facilitators are able to tune in with their participants and evaluate their learning more authentically. Viewed through this lens, the activities themselves, though certainly curricular and instructional in nature, are the ways in which participants will be assessed throughout the training.

This professional development series will emphasize the importance of a supportive space and opportunities for *personal storytelling*. Providing participants with opportunities to share personal stories connected to workshop content will help them feel validated. In terms of the learning process, the context of several stories help participants link content with experience, and the facilitator's more intentionally aligned personal stories help participants grasp the connections between theory and practice.

Role-playing, another strategy that will be used in this training to both teach and assess learning, is especially important for ensuring that workshop content is relevant to participants' personal and professional lives. Although not all of the participants will necessarily be current preschool teachers working with children and families, they will at least be able to apply some aspects of what they learn in this class to life outside the classroom. To accomplish this, curriculum and classroom discussions should inform how they view and interact with others. Role-playing is one way this training will incorporate

real-life contexts to support participant learning in the professional development series and relate concepts to the world outside the classroom.

Role-playing helps develop context, but *context-rich stories* and *case studies* are two other strategies that will be used in the training. Context is an essential element of this professional development series and is arguably vital in teaching about child development–related topics. One cannot discuss development, child or lifespan development, without also considering the life details that influence it. Therefore, all professional development–related assignments and discussions will center on context-rich stories, scenarios, case studies, and situations. At times, the facilitator will provide these contexts; on other occasions, the facilitator might ask participants to observe, collect, and develop them between sessions or during a break.

To promote an affirmative learning community and embed social support in the professional development series, *learning circles*, self-selecting groups of six to eight participants, will be developed. Learning-circle members become a support network over the duration of the professional development series and are encouraged to remain in contact after completing the training. At times, learning circles will be asked to analyze in-class problems such as case studies, articles, and news stories. At other times, members might teach content back to one another, discuss it as a group and teach it back to the entire learning community, or provide feedback to one another on individual in-class assignments. As learning circles work together, the facilitator will visit each group to challenge opinions and encourage deeper discussions, extend thinking, rephrase questions, and redirect or assess their learning to inform future activities.

A hallmark of early childhood classrooms is art centers; art-making in the training workshops, in a variety of forms, can be a powerful way for participants to express their understanding of new concepts. One activity that will use art is referred to as an *artwork gallery and discussion*. Participants will be asked to develop art in response to a question, and the learning community will conduct an in-class gallery discussion. To facilitate participant art shows and discussions, the facilitator will display the participants' art as if it were in a gallery and ask them to discuss the art as if they were visiting a museum. By listening to various perspectives on the meaning of participant-created artworks, participants will expand their understandings of the content the art represents.

Much like making art, using body movement or the body itself to illustrate a concept can be a fun and powerful form of learning. This is called *body sculpting*, which is using your body to create a meaning-laden sculpture. An example of this is assigning a group of participants the task of using their bodies to create a sculpture that shows the impact of cisgenderism on the development of a young child. When assigning these body sculptures, the facilitator will ask participants to create the sculptures and then hold their positions as the rest of the learning community members walk around them to notice all the details. As a large or small group, participants can discuss what they saw and what the group intended to communicate. All the meanings revealed through viewing or analyzing these sculptures will vary from class to class and offer insights for the entire learning community.

Pre-, Post-, and Ex-Post-Test Evaluation

At the beginning of the first day of the workshop series, at the end of the final day of the workshop series, and at 90 days after the completion of the workshop series, participants will be required to complete pre, post-, and ex-post-test questionnaires, respectively, that are made up of close- and open-ended questions. This evaluation tool will measure participant's understanding of key concepts related to gender, personal level of comfort around gender identity and expression, and confidence in implementing related curricular and instructional strategies. To promote candor and safety, each participant's questionnaire will be confidential through the use of an assigned key code. Only the workshop facilitation team will have access to the identifying information, and it will not be shared with site administrators or other Center staff.

Summative Text Kit Display Project

To provide participants with authentic and fun ways to demonstrate their cumulative learning, they will design and present a text kit display project. These small group projects are visual displays that exemplify key concepts and respond to questions related to gender. Participant learning occurs not only in the final presentation, but also in the discussion and design that precede it. Though the facilitator will provide some guidelines, these projects will encourage creativity—with the caveat that the completed project must answer the question posed.

Implications, Including Social Change

Local Community

This project study explored the ways that preschool teachers promote or hinder gender exploration in their classrooms. The outcome of this analysis is a professional development series on early childhood gender identity development for preschool educators in the greater Sacramento region. This professional development series will assist in filling a considerable gap in access to knowledge related to early childhood gender identity development. The content of the curriculum and instructional strategies identified to support learning were informed by the data collected and a related literature review. The professional development series will be affiliated with the Sacramento LGBT Community Center, which will provide access to existing stakeholder groups and established communication strategies. Another benefit of developing the series as a program of the Center is that training offerings can be funded in a number of ways.

The preschool educators who participate in this workshop series will increase their knowledge of gender-related concepts and terms, acquire the skills needed to implement their learning in the classroom, and gain self-confidence to speak with families and other teachers.

Far-Reaching Implications

Though young children are already forming their views of gender, gender identity, and gender expression by preschool age, few studies have been done on this subject. Given the dearth of research, state-level early childhood policies, and

professional training related to early childhood gender identity development, the greater Sacramento region, as well as the state and the nation, can benefit from this project.

Regarding academic research, this groundbreaking study will extend lines of theoretical research. The project, in the form of a professional development series, serves to extend the reach of this research by directly influencing teaching practice and promoting conversations about gender identity development. The curriculum plan developed as part of this project also presents a framework that others, both in and outside the state, can use to inform curricular, instructional, and policy-related decisions. Whether applied in policy making or by those working directly with young children or the teachers who serve them, this plan can easily be used to inform a similar or more individualized teaching plan. This plan could also be developed into and disseminated as a teaching guide shared with early childhood education college programs and early learning sites.

Conclusion

Developed in response to and informed by participant data collected from preschool educators, this professional development series on early childhood gender identity development will help to bridge early childhood educational research with practice. This project will help provide preschool educators the information and support they need to promote affirmative gender exploration in the preschool classroom and self-confidence to speak with colleagues and families about the developmental significance of gender identity development. An important feature of this training series will be interactive activities intended to support collaborative learning, genuine opportunities for

reflection, and discourse. Both formative and summative evaluation strategies will assist facilitators in guiding learning and measuring the overall effectiveness of related curriculum and instruction.

This plan, designed in response to four preschool educators in the greater Sacramento region, can be used to promote additional plans both in and outside of the local area. Given that this project was created from data gleaned from research participants, the plan and the process of inquiry that informed it can provide additional insight into scholarship through critical reflection and critique.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The acquisition of knowledge can be and often is measured by an end product, such as a project, that serves to assess student learning. What assessment does not always capture effectively is the process or journey of learning and development. Not isolating these insights is a lost opportunity in that the journey often contains understandings of how to promote deeper thinking and growth in the future. Critical self-reflection is a strategy that can be used to improve one's own pedagogical practice and personal growth and development. Written with the primary aim of learning from my thinking, the following reflection provides insight into my learning process as well as specific ways of extending this body of work.

Project Strengths

The five key strengths of this project are that it is (a) empirically sound, (b) informed by a collection of context-rich participant data, (c) designed to promote participant development, (d) saturated with a range of evaluative strategies, and (e) being implemented in collaboration with a regionally recognized leader of LGBTQIA programming. This study is theoretically grounded in Rokeach's belief systems theory (BST), which provides insight into how teacher perspectives are influenced and fostered and, as a result, sheds light onto how they might be changed. Due to its focus on early childhood education and its familiarity with anti-bias education, this study is both theoretically sound and relevant to preschool educators. Collecting data from four preschool educators through interviews, book analyses, and observations helped to provide context-rich detail for the professional development series. Given the insights

gleaned from these details, the curriculum was developed and the instructional strategies were designed to promote learning and personal transformation in a safe learning community. Learning and personal development were measured by a range of embedded, activity-based, formative assessments and summative evaluations, including pre- and posttests and an ex-post-test intended to evaluate long-term changes in attitudes and practice. The professional development workshop was designed as a three-day series and program offered by The Center, a recognized regional leader of LGBTQIA programming; the training is accessible and widely advertised.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

A limitation of this study, as with all qualitative studies, is that the results may not be generalizable to the entire population, which in this case includes preschool educators. The results, instead, provide a deep understanding of the experiences and perspectives of four preschool teachers. Future researchers should consider developing a quantitative or mixed methods study informed by the results of the present study to determine generalizability.

Another limitation of this study is that the majority of participants were culturally similar in terms of ethnicity, race, language, country of origin, and sexual orientation, and thus shared common perceptions of gender and gender roles. Diverse cultural identities, including race, ethnicity, religion, language, country of origin, and sexual orientation, all have wide-ranging implications for how gender is defined and expressed. Future research should include a more diverse pool of participants or specifically focus on the

influences of teachers' cultural identities on pedagogical practice around gender exploration.

A limitation of the project-development-workshop series relates to understanding (i.e., how to go about changing pedagogical practice). A result of there being such a scarcity of research is that there is very little curriculum available to those who want to change their practice (Nixon, 2009). Future research and related projects should focus on developing a set of specific teaching strategies that teachers could implement. The research could include an analysis of factors that promote success or failure—whether personal, interpersonal, or administrative—in executing these strategies.

Scholarship

Eight years ago, when I initially began my doctoral journey, I read a short essay in which identifying one's area of research inquiry was compared to attending a cocktail party, in that one is surrounded by several tables of distinct conversations. Each of these established conversations was characterized as symbolizing current lines of research and, presumably, which areas of discussion one could join. This description helped me—initially, anyway—to cognitively—or certainly psychologically—accept the complexity of selecting a research topic. After all, a topic is not just the area of research one will be deeply exploring for many months with depth and rigor; ideally, it will also lead one to future similar projects. Scholarship undoubtedly necessitates the visiting of tables—the sampling of academic conversations, dialogues, and debates—but given my social justice bent, this is not where I began or wanted to begin my investigation. As a change agent, I seek not just to confirm already answered questions or to ask them differently to reveal

new understanding, but also to begin new conversations. Past and (arguably) present social-political struggles are replete, quite vividly, with examples of how groups with the greatest access to power and influence define priorities. Further, to extend the cocktail party analogy, social events attended by powerful leaders and institutions (i.e., the broader field of research) are complexly influenced by these lenses. As such, areas that require academic exploration to promote social change are not always viewed as imperative and thus receive very little attention or urgency. This consideration is both the most fundamental lesson of scholarship that I learned and one that will continue to direct my ongoing interest in beginning new scholarly conversations.

Project Development and Evaluation

This project, a professional-development-workshop series on early-childhood gender identity development, was born out of a review of the relevant literature that identified a considerable gap in research as well as anecdotal interviews highlighting a gap in practice. Developing pedagogical and evaluation strategies is both a learned skill and a type of applied art. Teaching mastery requires an understanding of how curriculum and instruction lead and inform learning, and of the pivotal role that formative and summative evaluation serves in continually informing teaching and learning. These aspects of educational-project development serve as its foundational structure, but in some respects, they are just that—ground level. What provides complexity and significance to this project are the experiences, perspectives, and demonstrated needs of the teachers who participated in this study. It is their diverse sets of autobiographical

narratives that give life to this project and help to make it meaningful and pertinent to other preschool educators.

Leadership and Change

The terms *leaders* and *change* are often coupled as if they are intrinsically linked (Fullan, 2015). Do all leaders promote change, and is all change imparted by leaders? The argument could be made that to promote genuine change in society one must lead, though not necessarily be in a formal leadership position. However, an important caveat to the leadership role is that one serving in a formal management position might impart very little affirmative change. This calls into question the word *change*, or at least how the field of education uses it when linking it to leadership. When the term *change* is used in collaboration with *leadership*—and certainly *educational leadership*—authors ought to use the clarifier *affirmative* to highlight the kind of change that should be the goal. Educators and members of society at large want leaders, whether administrators or teacher-leaders, to effect transformations, not just modify the status quo. Scholarship is one incredibly effective way to shape pedagogical practice, discussions, and the philosophical underpinnings informing them. Becoming practitioner-scholars is an influential step that lets teachers promote change among themselves along the way to imparting affirmative changes in the field of education.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

Advocating for; teaching about; and considering the experiences, needs, and problems of young children and families serve as the foundation of my pedagogy. I teach through my own experiences and multiple cultural perspectives, as well as by considering

the contexts and cultural identities of those I serve. I began my doctoral education with these insights and was able to build upon them in depth and richness during the process. Being an effective practitioner, much like a learner, never has an end point one reaches, but rather involves continual growth and transformation. I understand this at an even more profound level than I did when I began the doctoral journey. After many years of fostering personal transformations in my students and pushing the edges of their learning, I have found that working toward and becoming a practitioner-scholar have promoted my own development in multilayered ways that I am just now understanding. In the midst of personal discovery and development, it is natural to view the progression and related activities through the lenses of one's own past perspectives. It has taken thoughtful self-reflection to finally be able to look back and genuinely see, through transformed insights, both where I am now and where I began.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

My experience in designing and implementing programs and projects has included large-scale evaluation systems, the development of curricula for online degree programs, and several complex technology projects. The related skill sets gained from these professional experiences served me well in designing a professional development series informed by the relevant literature and the shared perspectives of preschool educators. A key aspect of successful project design is ensuring that the voices and experiences of stakeholders both inform and are reflected in the final product. The workshop series, in a sense, had three unique sets of stakeholders whose voices I wanted to ensure were preserved and infused into the curriculum: (a) young children, (b) research

participants, and (c) future workshop participants. Though the overall focus of this project is on preschool teacher development, the needs of young children are a thread that is woven throughout the entire project. It was my concern for young children that created the initial path of discovery that began this line of inquiry. Four research participants with diverging views and experiences contributed their time and attention to this project, and it was paramount that their stories frame the ensuing professional development series. It is difficult to anticipate the unique experiences, perspectives, and needs of the workshop participants. Given these unknowns, the curricular, instructional, and evaluative strategies were developed in a way to allow for a diverse set of participants. All things considered, my past experiences and the academic skills I acquired throughout the process of the doctoral degree program worked in tandem to allow me to develop a comprehensive project.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

More development occurs during the first 5 years of life than any other time outside of the womb. Research that focuses directly or indirectly on early childhood development or early childhood education, such as the present study, can promote healthy growth and development in young children. Young children are forming their understanding of what gender means for themselves and others, and this study helps to support that process. Young children's gender identity development is a dynamic process shaped in part by what influential people reflect back to them. The data collected in this groundbreaking study revealed that preschool teachers demonstrate a range of perspectives about gender and that professional development needs to be able to create

affirmative environments for children. The data from this study also illustrated that preschool educators have a strong interest in learning more about gender and how to change their pedagogical strategies but need support in doing so. Informed by two literature reviews and data collected from four preschool teachers, this project resulted in a professional development series. With the embedded formative and summative forms of evaluation, this professional development will continually evolve and become increasingly effective. With the future publication of this study in the public domain, administrators, practitioners, and researchers will have additional information and precedents with which to guide, teach, and extend research or curricula.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Given the scarcity of research on how preschool teachers can promote affirmative spaces for gender exploration in the early-childhood classroom, this groundbreaking study starts a new line of research. Within this new topic of academic inquiry, there are future directions researchers might consider exploring. The data from this study illustrate that preschool educators are influenced by cisgenderism in a number of ways and at different levels. For some teachers, access to new information and open dialogue will likely be effective in promoting shifts in their thinking and practice. Other teachers might need a higher level of support to undo deeply entrenched views about gender. Exploring how to support teachers who hold more conservative beliefs about gender would help to inform professional development strategies. The present study included preschool teachers living in a state that already has some LGBTQIA-affirmative policies in place within the K–12 public education system. A suggestion for future research is to conduct a

similar study and include teachers in states without similar policies. Additional research, in states with similar policies such as California, could use action research to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development in changing teacher practices or perspectives. Culture, used broadly, includes a range of factors such as ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, and country of origin, all of which impact an individual's definitions of and around gender. Understanding how preschool teachers with varying, multiple cultural identities respond to a more expansive definition of gender would further inform both research and professional development.

Conclusion

Through the critical analysis of my doctoral journey, I have revealed numerous areas of personal transformation. This critical reflection has also identified ways in which this project has contributed to the field of early childhood education and how it could be extended and implemented. The professional-development-workshop series and the participant data that informed it provide a framework to connect theory to practice. This project, ultimately, could have an impactful role supporting the professional growth of early childhood educators and the children they serve.

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Appendix A: Professional Development Workshop Series

Professional Development Series: Supporting Healthy Gender Exploration in Early Childhood: Your Role as an Early Childhood Educator

Participants: Family home child care or center-based early childhood education providers serving preschool age children

Length: 3 days

Time: 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Continuing Education Credits: 2.1(21 hours)

Continuing Education Course Description: There is a dearth of research focused on understanding how preschool teachers affect the gender identity development of young children. While gender studies research has found that preschool-age children are already forming their views of gender, there is little understanding of how teachers influence affirmative gender identity development and how bias might influence their decisions. To authentically promote access, equity, and lead effective activism in education, teacher-leaders must be fully informed. Activism, after all, is about connecting theory to practice. Gender identity development begins during early childhood, but much of the conversations and advocacy related to transgender, gender nonconforming, and gender fluid children have been focused on K-12. This dynamic and highly interactive workshop will provide opportunities for participants to critically analyze societal social constructs of gender, understand how preschool-age children develop their gender identities, and co-develop pedagogical strategies to implement in the classroom with young children.

Professional Development Workshop Learning Objectives:
1. To create a learning community built on shared community guidelines.
2. To familiarize participants with key terms and concepts related to gender.
3. To familiarize participants with how children are socialized to understand gender.
4. To summarize complex concepts related to gender and gender socialization.
5. To identify curricular, instructional, and environmental strategies, in one’s own classroom, that promote and hinder young children to explore gender.
6. Using a gender-affirmative children’s book, demonstrate the application of pedagogical modifications to create safe learning environments for gender exploration.
7. To illustrate key concepts about gender and some of the pedagogical strategies teachers can employ in the early childhood classroom to promote gender exploration.

Participant Learning Outcomes:
1. Functioning as a member of a learning community, participants will be able to analyze their role in following community guidelines.

2. In discussion with others and using artwork as a medium, participants will be able to analyze the difference between gender binary, biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.
3. Participants will be able to analyze a children's book for cisgenderism.
4. Participants will be able to visually and verbally describe the complex ways children receive messages about gender.
5. Participants will be able to analyze their pedagogy and classrooms for the ways they promote and hinder young children's ability to safely explore gender.
6. Participants will be able to develop gender expansive curricular plans.
7. Functioning as a member of a team, participants will be able to design and present a visual display that describes key concepts and pedagogical strategies related to the gender binary, biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression.

Day 1: *Defining Gender*

Professional Development Workshop Learning Objectives:

- To create a learning community built on shared community guidelines.
- To familiarize participants with key terms and concepts related to gender.

Participant Learning Outcomes:

- Functioning as a member of a learning community, participants will be able to analyze their role in following community guidelines.
- In discussion with others and using artwork as a medium, participants will be able to analyze the difference between gender binary, biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

Resources and Supplies:

- Pre-Test
- Art supplies

Agenda for Day 1:

Large Group	• Administration of Pre-Test on Key Concepts • Development of Community Guidelines • Learning Circle Assignment

Dyad	• Sharing Your Stories About Gender o How do you personally define gender? o In some circles, one's gender is viewed as having three components: biological sex (one's genes, chromosomes, and sex organs), gender identity (how one views their own gender), and expression (how one expresses their own gender based on behaviors, clothing, hair style, etc). What are your thoughts on this expanded definition of gender? o How do biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression play out in the lives of young children in general and in early childhood learning sites? o How do you think stereotypes, gender roles, and societal gender expectations relate to the components of gender?
B R E A K	
Learning Circle Large Group	• *Learning Circle:* Development of Learning Community Questions o As a Learning Circle, share your individual questions and create one comprehensive list of your questions related to gender and early childhood gender identity development. • *Large Group:* Sharing of Learning Community Questions
B R E A K	
Large Group	• Presentation and Discussion of Key Terms and Concepts
Learning Circle	• Art Activity: What is Gender? o Create a piece of artwork that visually represents the three components of gender. • Art Gallery & Discussion: What is Gender?
	B R E A K
Large Group	• Review of Key Concepts • Reflection of Learning • What Worked – What Didn't • Homework Assignment: Bring a randomly selected children's book from your classroom or home library to our next class.

Day 2: ***Learning, Teaching, and "Doing" Gender***

Professional Development Workshop Learning Objectives:
- To familiarize participants with how children are socialized to understand gender.
- To summarize complex concepts related to gender and gender socialization.

Participant Learning Outcomes:
- Participants will be able to analyze a children's book for cisgenderism.
- Participants will be able to visually and verbally describe the complex ways children receive messages about gender.

Resources:
- Children's Book Analysis (see Appendix C)
- Classroom Observation Protocol (see Appendix G)

Agenda for Day 2:

<table>
<tr><td>Large Group</td><td>• Review of Community Guidelines
• Review of Learning Community Questions
• Review of A-Ha Moments or Insights</td></tr>
<tr><td>Learning Circle
Large Group</td><td>• Learning Circle: Evaluation of Gender Roles, Expectations, and Stereotypes
o As a Learning Circle, discuss and create a list of roles, stereotypes, and expectations related to gender for males and females.
o What factors do you feel shape a young child's gender identity and gender expression?
o What do gender identity development and expression mean to you personally and how might your perspectives or biases inform the curricular and instructional decisions you make in your classroom?
o What experiences have you had teaching children who are perceived to be or self-identified as gender-expansive or transgender?
• Large Group Discussion:
o How are young children socialized and what do they learn regarding gender? How do you as educators and individuals with your set of biases shape this learning?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center">B R E A K</td></tr>
</table>

Small Group	• Children's Book Analysis
	  o Select and read out loud one of the children's book you brought.
	  o Using the provided analysis form (see Appendix C), review and discuss the book you selected for messages about gender.

B R E A K	
Learning Circle	• Body Sculpting o As a Learning Circle, design a sculpture using all members of your group that illustrates the ways children are shaped to understand gender and the impacts of these messages.
Large Group	• Body Sculpting Sharing and Discussion
B R E A K	
Large Group	• Review of Key Concepts • Reflection of Learning • Homework Assignment: Using the provided Classroom Observation Protocol (see Appendix G), take a step out of your teaching role and observe your classroom through a different perspective. • What Worked – What Didn't

Day 3: ***Putting Learning Into Action***

Professional Development Workshop Learning Objectives:

- To identify curricular, instructional, and environmental strategies, in one's own classroom, that promote and hinder young children to explore gender.
- Using a gender-affirmative children's book, demonstrate the application of pedagogical modifications to create safe learning environments for gender exploration.
- To illustrate key concepts about gender and some of the pedagogical strategies teachers can employ in the early childhood classroom to promote gender exploration.

Participant Learning Outcomes:

- Participants will be able to analyze their pedagogy and classrooms for the ways they promote and hinder young children's ability to safely explore gender.
- Participants will be able to develop gender-expansive curricular plans.
- Functioning as a member of a team, participants will be able to design and present a visual display that describes key concepts and pedagogical strategies related to the gender binary, biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression.

Resources:

- Hoffman, I., & Hoffman, S. (2014). *Jacob's new dress.* Park Ridge, IL: Albert Whitman & Company.

Agenda for Day 3:

Large Group	• Review of Community Guidelines • Review of Learning Community Questions • Review of A-Ha Moments or Insights

Learning Circle Large Group	• *Learning Circle:* As a Learning Circle, using your classroom observation as a foundation, discuss the following: o In what ways do the activities or curriculum you plan support or hinder healthy gender identity development and expression of all children in your classroom? What changes can be made to create more affirmative learning environments? o Reading books and singing songs in circle time is a place where we as educators can scaffold learning and teach lessons. In what ways have the books you have chosen or the activities you have done in circle time supported young children in understanding gender, gender roles, or other expectations of gender? What changes can be made to create more affirmative learning environments? o What activity areas in your classroom do you seem to find children in safely exploring gender and gender role-playing? Why do you think this area promotes this? o What other elements about your classroom did you learn that promote or hinder gender exploration? What types of changes could you make to remedy these? o What barriers might you place to make changes and what solutions can you determine? • *Large Group:* Synthesis of Findings
B R E A K	
Small Group Large Group	• *Small Group:* Children's Book Analysis o Read out loud the provided book *Jacob's new dress* by Hoffman & Hoffman. o Then, as a group share the types of curricular, instructional, and environmental activities you could implement (before and after reading this book to children), to support their learning. • *Large Group:* Sharing of curriculum planning
B R E A K	
Learning Circle	• Using the provided supplies, develop a visual display that illustrates your key learning from this workshop.
Large Group	• Test Kit Presentations.
B R E A K	

Large Group	• Administration of Post-Test on Key Concepts

Appendix B: Interview Protocol (Initial Participant Interview)

1. How do you define gender?
2. In some circles, one's gender is viewed as having three components: biological sex (one's genes, chromosomes, and sex organs), gender identity (how one views their own gender), and expression (how one expresses their own gender based on behaviors, clothing, hair style, etc). What are your thoughts on this expanded definition of gender?
3. What factors do you feel shape a young child's gender identity and gender expression?
4. What do gender identity development and expression mean to you personally and how might your perspective inform the curricular and instructional decisions you make in your classroom?
5. What experiences have you had teaching children who are perceived to be or self-identified as gender nonconforming or transgender? What concrete ways did you support these students? (If you have not had any experiences, what are some specific thing you would do to support them?)
6. In what ways do the activities or curriculum you plan support healthy gender identity development and expression of all children in your classroom?
7. Reading books and singing songs in circle time is a place where we as educators can scaffold learning and teach lessons. In what ways have the books you have chosen or the activities you have done in circle time supported your students in understanding gender, gender roles, or other expectations of gender?

8. What activity areas in your classroom do you seem find children in safely exploring gender and gender role-playing? Why do you think this area promotes this?
9. What activity in your classroom do you seem to find children engaging in more stereotypic behavior related to gender?
10. Some teachers, at times, group children by gender, such as when they line up to go outside. Do you ever arrange or call out children by gender and if so what are your reasons for doing so?
11. In thinking about your formal education or professional training classes, have any of your coursework specifically covered gender nonconforming or transgender children or how to support them? (If you haven't had any training, how do you determine the best ways to support this group of children or cover these types of topics in your classroom?)
12. What are some of the challenges or hurdles that might prevent you in including gender nonconforming students or teaching related topics?
13. What would you do if a parent informed you that their boy, who had been at your center for several months, now wanted to be a girl? How would you respond? What types of challenges or concerns would you anticipate? How might you change your curricular or instructional decisions in response to this discovery?

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Appendix C: Children's Book Analysis

1. Considering what you have read and learned from this book, is gender depicted as binary (male or female)? Or, does the book seem to support gender as a spectrum beyond only male or female?
2. Is the gender of each character in this book implied by their name, hairstyle, and clothing or is their gender explicitly defined? For example, are they introduced or referred to as he, she, him, or her?
3. Do the *hairstyles* of characters in this book seem stereotypical in terms of how gender is typically viewed in American society?
4. Does the *clothing* of characters in this book seem stereotypical in terms of how gender is usually viewed in American society?
5. If a preschool age child whose biological sex was female, who expressed gender as "masculine" read this book; what messages might that individual child receive about their own gender expression?
6. If a preschool age child whose biological sex was male, who expressed gender as "feminine" read this book; what messages might that individual child receive about their own gender expression?
7. If a preschool age child who was gender nonconforming read this book, would they see their unique way of expressing gender within this book?
8. If this book depicts children playing or interacting with one another, are they segregated by gender? For example, are boys playing with boys and girls playing with girls?

9. What seems to be the *author's* attitude or assumptions towards gender? Does the author appear to support that gender is defined by male or female (boy or girl)?
10. What appears to be the *illustrator's* attitude or assumptions towards gender? Does the author appear to support that gender is defined by male or female (boy or girl)?

References

Daitsman, J. (2011). Exploring gender identity in early childhood through story dictation and dramatization. *Voices of Practitioners, 14*, 1-12.

Derman-Sparks, L., & Olsen Edwards, J. (2010). *Anti-bias education for young children and ourselves.* Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Varga-Dobai, K. (2013). Gender issues in multicultural children's literature – black and third-world feminist critiques of appropriation, essentialism, and us/other binary oppositions. *Multicultural Perspectives, 15*(3), 141-147.

Appendix D: Interview Protocol (Follow-Up Participant Interview)

1. In what ways, if any, has your definition of? gender changed since our first interview?
2. In what ways, if any, have your views of gender, gender identity, and/or gender expression changed since our first interview?
3. During our first interview, we discussed the factors that shape a young child's gender identity and gender expression. Have you had any additional insights regarding these factors that you didn't share at that time or hadn't occurred to you?
4. What do gender identity development and expression mean to you now?
5. How does your understanding of gender identity development and expression inform the curricular and instructional decisions you make in your classroom as well as your interactions with individual children?
6. In what ways do the activities or curriculum you plan promote healthy gender identity development and expression of every child in your classroom?
7. Reading books and singing songs in circle time is a place where we as educators can scaffold learning. Now that you have had a chance to analyze a few books, how might the books you have used in circle time supported or inhibited your students in understanding gender or gender roles?
8. What activity areas in your classroom seem to support children in safely exploring gender and gender role-playing? What areas seem to promote stereotypic behavior or gender role-playing? Are there any areas that might hinder gender role-playing? If so, are there any changes you are now considering making?

9. As we discussed in our first interview, at times, some teachers group children by gender, such as when they line up to go outside. Did you recognize any other ways you arrange or call out children by gender that you didn't cite previously?
10. Since our first interview, have you identified any other challenges or hurdles that might prevent you in including gender nonconforming students or teaching related topics?
11. What insights or questions about gender, gender identity, and/or gender expression have emerged from our first interview? What do you think have promoted these ideas or questions?

Appendix E: Letter of Consent

You are invited to take part in a research study of gender identity development within early childhood. The researcher is inviting preschool educators throughout the greater Sacramento region who are actively working with preschool age children. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

A researcher named Shaun-Adrian Choflá, who is a doctoral student at Walden University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to explore how preschool educators promote or hinder gender identity development in the early childhood classroom with preschool age children.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
1. Complete a 7-question pre-qualification questionnaire
2. Participate in an initial 45-60 minute audio-recorded initial interview
3. Evaluate 1-2 randomly selected children books in your classroom using a researcher-provided instrument (30-45 minutes per book)
4. Provide consent to allow researcher to conduct one 1-3-hour long classroom observation and photograph or photocopy your curriculum plans
5. Participate in a 45-60 minute audio-recorded follow up interview
6. Provide feedback to the transcripts of both of your two interviews to affirm and clarify the accuracy of data

Here are some sample questions:
- What are your views on the importance of promoting healthy gender identity development in preschool age children?
- How would you respond (or have you responded) if one of the children in your classroom wanted to be referred to a gender other than their biological sex?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

- **Risk:** Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomfort similar to what can be encountered in daily life, such as: fatigue, stress, or the potential for strong emotional responses such as sadness, anger, or frustration. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

- **Benefit**: This is a groundbreaking study and will open a new line of research to be explored by other researchers interested in exploring topics related to early childhood gender identity, gender expression, and the teaching practiced related to supporting children regarding these areas of development. The findings of this project will also help inform future early childhood professional development workshops, college curricula, and textbooks related to creating safe and empowering early childhood learning environments for gender exploration.

Payment:
Upon the completion of your participation, you will receive a $15 gift card via email within 5 business days.

Privacy:
Any information you provide or that is collected, as part of this study will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you or your school in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by storing all handwritten records in a double-locked cabinet and electronic data with encrypted passwords. Data will be kept in a safety deposit box for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Mandated Reporter:
The researcher is an educator and thus is a mandated reporter in the state of California. Per state law, "Mandated reporters are individuals who are mandated by law to report known or suspected child maltreatment. They are primarily people who have contact with children through their employment. Mandated reporters are required by the state of California to report any known or suspected instances of child abuse or neglect to the county child welfare department or to a local law enforcement agency (local police/sheriff's department)."

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via 916-455-1835 or shaun-adrian.chofla@walden.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **04-27-15-0276963** and it expires on **April 26, 2016.**

The researcher will provide you with a hard copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below or replying to this email with the words, “I consent”, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

______________________________	______________________________	______________
Signature	Name	Date

Appendix F: Confidentiality Agreement

I, [**Name of Signer**], agree with the following statements:

During the course of my activity in transcribing data for this research: “Preschool Educators’ Roles in Creating Supportive Spaces for Gender Exploration and Expression” I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant’s name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I’m officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

____

(Name)

____

(Signature)

Dated this **X** day of **XXX** 2015.

Appendix G: Classroom Observation Protocol

Interactions with Children:

1. How does the teacher address children in the classroom? Are children addressed by their names or using gendered terms such as boys, girls, etc?
2. What is the teacher doing, if anything, to deepen or expand children's understanding of gender?
3. Does the teacher appear to group children by gender or promote gender segregation?
4. What types of comments about gender does the teacher make?
5. Does the teacher promote gender roles or stereotypes?
6. What is the teacher doing to recognize and acknowledge adherence or lack of adherence to gender roles?
7. What is the teacher doing to communicate, model, or teach the four goals of anti-bias education?

Physical Environment:

1. Does the classroom have any of the anti-bias education gender-related books recommended in Julie Olsen Edward's Peace library (http://www.childpeacebooks.org/cpb/Protect/antiBias.php#gender)?
2. How does the artwork or photos posted throughout the classroom depict gender? Do these images promote gender as a binary or gender fluidity?
3. Are the bathrooms or other parts of the classroom labeled by gender?
4. Does the dramatic play area have an assortment of outfits, costumes, and items?

5. Does the ways various activity areas are colored, labeled, decorated, or where they are located in the classroom promote gender segregation?

References

Derman-Sparks, L., & Olsen Edwards, J. (2010). *Anti-bias education for young children and ourselves.* Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Appendix H: Letter of Cooperation From a Research Partner

Community Research Partner Name
Contact Information

Date

Dear Shaun-Adrian Choflá,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *Preschool Educators' Roles in Creating Supportive Spaces for Gender Exploration and Expression* within the [**Community Partner will be entered here**]. As part of this study, I authorize you to, conduct interviews, conduct observations, provide children's book analysis forms to participants, photocopy or photograph lesson plans, and conduct member checks. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include providing approval to researcher to interview and observe preschool teachers, and provide access to the lesson plans. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,
Authorization Official
Contact Information