FROM FORMER WELFARE RECIPIENT TO FRONTLINE WORKER: THE INFLUENCES OF DISCRETIONARY POWER AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

In 1996, President Clinton signed into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). The legislation was intended to limit the federal government's control over how individual states governed their poor people, aggressively end entitlements, create block grant funding for states, and create time-limited benefits and mandatory work requirements for recipients. While states gained discretion over the implementation of welfare policy, the largest increase in discretion under the new welfare policy occurred between case managers and recipients. Welfare reform also led to the streamlining of the case management profession and the hiring of less skilled case managers.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the discretionary power and personal experiences of case managers who are former welfare recipients influence their case load management. To facilitate the investigative nature of this study and achieve its purpose, I applied qualitative methodology using a conceptual framework to investigate the phenomenon. The finding revealed three major themes: a) learning, b) experiences and relationships, and c) case management practices. The findings indicated that the four stages of learning to become a case manager are informal and need to be redesigned using the principles of adult learning. The findings also revealed that participants rely on their personal experience and relationships to guide their case management practices, use of discretionary power, and decision-making process.

Although former welfare recipients were hired for these deskilled case manager positions, turnover was high. As a result, many of those hired as case managers have higher levels of education and household income. Thus, welfare policy needs to be redesigned holistically by policymakers so all recipients have access to higher education and job opportunities within the welfare system.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As welfare policies and programs continue to evolve to address the needs of welfare recipients, it is important to understand how the experiences of case managers empower, influence, and facilitate a recipient's move away from welfare. This chapter begins by exploring the evolution and devolution of welfare policy in the United States, starting from 1860s. After tracing the history of welfare policies and programs, this chapter continues with the problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, definitions of terms, and significance to the fields of adult education and human resource development, a section that also includes this study's contribution to the literature, practice, and policy of those two fields.

Welfare programs in the United States emerged in the early 1860s. Trattner (1984) noted the civil war aroused the charitable giving efforts of the American people. In 1862, Trattner (1984) noted, the North and South appropriated a large amount of funds as direct public aid. These funds were used to assist the sick, destitute, and wounded soldiers and their families, and widows. By the early 1900s, Leff (1973) noted these families became the object of public sympathy and the federal government stepped in to help lift the financial burden of caring for children.

The war between the North and South created many problems with the distribution of funds among the states. Trattner (1984) reported the methods for disturbing the fund and determining benefit eligibility varied in each state. However, the

determination of eligibility for the widow's pension rested with, in most states, Charity organizations, a state's department of public welfare, or the courts. This was the beginning of the mothers' pension movement in the United States.

One of the first documented statewide program was created in 1911 with the passing of the Mothers' Aid Law in Illinois (Allard, 2004; Davies & Derthick, 1997). This welfare program limited "eligibility *de facto* to widowed mothers with children under the school-leaving age who could prove both citizenship and three years of residence in the county in which they applied" (Nelson, 1990, p. 139). The driving force in the creation of this first welfare program was due to the belief that

> long-term public support for single mothers would help eradicate female poverty caused by the temporary or permanent loss of a male breadwinner, as well as ease the dual burden of mothering and working for low wages that many poor women face. (Machtinger, 1999, p. 107)

The sentiment of providing public support spread as the program evolved and spread to other states. Other states implementing the welfare policy expanded the guidelines to include women whose husbands had deserted their families, were incarcerated, or were disabled (Abramovitz, 1996).

States across the nation began to design and implement welfare programs to provide support and empower poor families. Each state had discretion to determine the design of policy, how the programs would be funded, and who oversaw implementing them. As Mettler (2000) explained, the variations in states' policies were characterized by the relationships poor women had with their state government with regards to their

social rights and the state's obligations. The federal government had concerns about how these variations in policies impacted those relationships, which eventually led to the creation of a centralized, national social service policy and program to aid the poor.

As a result, the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) Program was created in 1935 to support the widows of men and provided consistency in welfare policy across the nation. While policy did not explicitly state that the aid was intended only for White women, President Roosevelt wrote ADC policy to exclude domestic and agricultural workers (Johnson, 2008). Because of policy interpretation, Black women who worked in these two industries were not eligible for benefits and were forced to continue working in these positions despite their family circumstances (Johnson, 2008). However, Gerdes (1998) reported ADC was technically available to all poor women, and eligibility rules were written so that poor Black women who were divorced, deserted, or unmarried were not formally excluded from the program. The reality, though, was that based on President Roosevelt's ADC policy, most Black women, by virtue of their work roles, were excluded from participation in the program.

Roughly 30 years after the ADC program was introduced, policymakers began reforming the program and formally changed its name to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Blank and Blum (1997) suggested "family" was added to the policy name to quiet concerns that the program discouraged marriage. While the issue of marriage was seemingly the focus for reforming the previously touted race-neutral policy, the media began to concentrate on the recipient's race.

Gilens (2009) reported prior to and in the early 1960s, the media predominately portrayed White women as the deserving poor. However, after the program's name was changed and eligibility requirements became stricter, the media's portrayal of the deserving poor changed. As Gerdes (1998) suggested, under the new AFDC program, eligibility was determined by a measure of "deservingness," which was indirectly connected to the color of one's skin.

This measurement of deservingness was solidified by Daniel P. Moynihan's 1965 report on the case for national action and by policymakers' concerns over Black women receiving aid in lieu of working (Gerdes, 1998). Using their discretionary power, federal and state policymakers determined that, unlike White women, Black women were considered underserving of benefits (Onwuachi-Willig, 2005). Thus, Johnson (2008) noted that promoting the image of Black women as the undeserving face of welfare benefits enabled politicians to begin building their careers on negative stereotypical images of Black mothers.

In 1976, Ronald Reagan thrust the negative stereotype and the deservingness of Black women receiving welfare onto the national stage when he ran for the Republican presidential nomination. On February 15, 1976, *The New York Times* reported the Republican candidate as stating,

> There's a woman in Chicago. She has 80 names, 30 addresses, 15 telephone numbers to collect food stamps, Social Security, veterans' benefits for four nonexistent deceased veteran husbands. And she is collecting Social Security on her cards. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and is she is collecting

> welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income alone has been running $150,000 a year. (Welfare queen becomes issue in Reagan campaign, 1976, p. 51)

While Reagan's story focused the nation's attention on the woman's fraudulent activities, his speech also highlighted the inefficiencies in the welfare system and its policy. After Reagan's speech, the debate began over who was best suited to design and implement welfare policies. According to Mettler (2000), states argued they were the best suited to meet the needs of poor families residing in their states. Almost 20 years after President Reagan's speech, President Clinton signed into law a new act that would bring 60 years of entitlement for welfare recipients to an end.

Background of the Problem

In August of 1996, President Clinton signed into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). PRWORA replaced AFDC, which was seen by policymakers as inadequate, with the TANF program and limited the federal government's control over how individual states governed their poor populations. This new legislation, unlike its predecessor AFDC, aggressively ended entitlements, fixed funding to states, placed time limits on benefits, and imposed mandatory work requirements on participants (Lee, 2009; Mettler, 2000).

Federal Welfare Policy

PRWORA also returned limited control of and authority over designing and implementing welfare policy and programs to the states. While states had always decided the benefit amounts, they regained the authority to determine eligibility

guidelines, types of work incentives, and other requirements recipients would be mandated to follow (Mead, 2004). Although states regained discretion and authority over policymaking, they were required to redesign policies within federal guidelines. The federal guidelines were abstract and gave states the flexibility to choose which work-attachment strategies they would use in their own redesign of policy.

According to Lee (2009), these strategies were innovative policy choices designed to motivate recipients to find jobs and end their dependency on welfare. The strategies were divided into three categories—strict, moderate, or weak. States could mix and match strategies in the various levels of work requirements, sanctions, and the number of consecutive months of benefit eligibility, which culminated in equaling a lifetime limit of 60 months. Table 1 describes the three work-attachment strategies and their three categories.

Table 1

National Options for Work-Attachment Strategies

Strategies	Strict	Moderate	Weak
Work requirements	Immediate	Allowance of less than 24 months	Allowance of 24 months or longer
Sanctions	First—full termination of benefits Final—full termination of benefits	First—partial reduction of benefits Final—full termination of benefits	First—partial reduction of benefits Final—partial reduction of benefits
Lifetime limits on benefits	Less than 60 months	60 months	No time limit

Note. Adapted from Lee, 2009, p. 284-285.

Lee also noted that each state's decision on which category to choose rested on how to best meet the unique needs of their citizenry.

After selecting three of the categories of work-attachment strategies, states could devolve the policymaking and program implementation to the local levels in each state's government. The first order of devolution occurred when the federal government gave states the discretion and authority to design their own welfare policies (Kim & Fording, 2010; Lee, 2009). The second order of devolution occurred as each state's government further transferred the responsibility for and implementation of welfare policy to local level organizations (Nathan & Gais, 1999). By transferring power and discretion down to the lowest levels of state government, the second order of devolution provided the proponents and opponents of PRWORA contention for debate. Proponents argued decentralizing the policy would allow local organizations to effectively implement welfare programs to serve the poor, while opponents argued that decentralization would lead to inequality in how states' resources and benefits were distributed to the poor and their families (Berry, Fording, & Hanson, 2003; Gainsborough, 2003).

At the local level, PRWORA equips case managers with a flexible set of client management tools (Lee, 2009). These tools include cash or noncash diversions, personal responsibility agreements, sanctions, and various services. When individuals seeking welfare services apply for benefits, case managers may offer them either cash or noncash diversions. Cash diversions are one-time, lump-sum payments offered to participants in lieu of receiving a monthly benefit, while noncash diversions are simply considered

notifying a client of the program's work requirements prior to their approval for benefits (Nathan & Gais, 1999).

Personal responsibility agreements are contracts made between the case manager and participants. Typically, these contracts are no more than a standardized list of program requirements and benefits participants may receive if they agree to participate in the program (Nathan & Gais, 1999). Clients found in non-compliance of fulfilling the personal responsibility contract are sanctioned. Sanctions are a client management tool used to control client behavior and are most often imposed gradually, starting with a partial loss of benefits and moving to a full loss of benefits (Lee, 2009; Nathan & Gais, 1999). Partial sanctions only reduce the benefit amount by the adult's portion of the grant, while a full sanction removes the whole benefit amount intended for the family (Schram, Soss, Fording, & Houser, 2009). In addition, case managers use services as tools to encourage participants to actively participate in job searches. The most common services provided to participants include childcare and transportation assistance; however, organizations can also offer educational opportunities, counseling for drug abuse, family support, housing, domestic violence intervention, and mental health services (Alfred, 2007; Alfred & Martin, 2007).

While the devolution of welfare policy allowed states to have authority over redesigning their policies, it also gave case managers discretion and authority over the communication about and distribution of the state's welfare resources to participants at the street-level. To understand the amount of discretion and authority case managers possess in Texas, it is necessary to explore the state's decisions in the devolution of

policymaking and program implementation at the various levels in state government. It is also important to understand that Texas welfare reform was a series of policies enacted over time. As researchers have noted, this piecemeal approach to reform policymaking has contributed to confusion in needy families about the rules and made it difficult for staff to keep up with the continual changes in legislation (Lein, Schexnayder, Douglas, & Schroeder, 2009).

Texas and Welfare Policy

In 1995, one year prior to the signing of the PRWORA federal legislation, the state of Texas passed House Bill (HB) 1863 and changed the delivery system of welfare services in the state. The changes required in HB 1863 were to be implemented over 5 years and were in line with the "three overriding philosophies in Texas government: (a) local control; (b) smaller, more efficient government; and (c) an emphasis on work and individual responsibility" (Texas Workforce Commission, 2011). The state legislature's decisions on work-strategy attachments were made based on the context of HB 1863, which emphasized job readiness, job search activities, and job placement services for welfare recipients.

Texas' selection of work-attachment strategies is a mix of the categories presented by the federal government policy choices (Capps, Pindus, Snyder, & Leos-Urbel, 2001; Lee, 2009). The state's leaders chose a strict work requirement, a moderate sanctioning strategy, and a moderate lifetime limit on benefits. Table 2 provides a brief explanation of the strength chosen for each strategy by the state.

Table 2

Texas' Selection of Work-Attachment Strategies

Strategy	Restriction Level	Specific Restrictions
Work requirements	Strict	Immediate, as participants are placed in job search activities
Sanctions	Moderate	Partial deduction—removes the caretaker's portion of the grant imposed for a minimum of one month the first time; three months the second time; and six months the third time
Lifetime limits on benefits	Moderate	12-, 24-, and 36-month limits on eligibility, depending on education and work experience; these limits count toward the federal lifetime limit of 60 months

Note. Adapted from Capps et al., 2001.

The table shows that Texas adopted a strict level of work requirements. This strict requirement necessitates once a client is certified for TANF by Texas Health and Human Services (HHSC), the client must begin searching for a job immediately. Clients are directed to a Workforce center to participate in mandatory job search activities. These two agencies work together to implement welfare reform policy in Texas.

The legislature determined the responsibility for client services and eligibility should be divided between two state agencies. The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) would implement the TANF Employment and Training program, while determining client eligibility would remain the duty of the Texas HHSC (Texas Workforce Commission, 2011). Mead (2004) noted, "In Texas, welfare reform was a lower priority to administrators than rebuilding non-welfare employment programs and other initiatives" (p. 283). This philosophy is evident in how the state legislature

devolved welfare reform policy and divided the responsibilities between the two state agencies. TWC, in charge of rebuilding employment programs, created the Texas Workforce System, which would further devolve the implementation of welfare reform policy.

The Texas Workforce System constitutes 28 regional workforce boards and eight state partner agencies. The partnership between the boards and partner agencies have created "over two-hundred and thirty (230) One-Stop centers and satellites; development of an awarding-winning client information, eligibility and performance measurement system; and, outstanding program performance" (Texas Workforce Advancement Council, n.d., p. 1).

However, devolution to the local 28 regional workforce boards means that in addition to providing workforce development, regional workforce boards are also responsible for providing case management and employment services to welfare recipients. Gainsborough (2003) referred to this as a welfare-workforce combo, where the emphasis is on linking the welfare function with workforce developments around the state. The devolution of welfare policy, in this sense, means welfare is seen as a part of workforce development and not a separate function.

The 28 regional workforce boards are responsible for planning and implementing the TANF Employment and Training Programs (called *Choices*) across the state. Each board has members from local businesses, economic development organizations, community-based organizations, educational institutions, and public assistance organizations (Texas Workforce Commission, 2013). The workforce boards contract

with local non-profit or for-profit agencies to implement the Choices Programs. For example, the Brazos Valley Workforce Development Board oversees Workforce Solutions Brazos Valley. Workforce Solutions Brazos Valley (2017) manages one-stop centers located in seven counties. The office is in Brazos County and works with the local HHSC office to move welfare recipients off assistance and into work.

Lein et al. (2009) noted in 1997, the Texas Department of Human Services, now referred to as HHSC, and the TWC created *Texas Works* and the Work First Program named *Choices*. Both programs emphasize work, and the Choices program provides employment and training services to applicants deemed eligible and certified by HHSC to receive TANF.

Newly certified welfare recipients are required to report to their local Workforce center to begin participation in mandatory employment activities and must comply with work requirements. Non-compliance for meeting mandatory work requirements can result in a participant being sanctioned. When sanctions are deemed appropriate, requests are sent from the Workforce center to HHSC, who then administers the sanction and reduces the client's benefit. This program is administered by and recipients report to the Workforce Solutions offices around Texas.

The local control of implementation in the Choices program resides with the Workforce Solutions offices; TWC's Workforce Development Division (WDD) oversees Choices policy and its administration. Because Choices' rules continually change, the WDD issues policy changes along with guidance on how to implement the new rules to each of the local workforce development boards.

Local workforce development boards make the necessary changes in the Choices Programs to comply with the new rules or regulations handed down by the WDD. For example, in the Brazos Valley, the board incorporates the changes into their policy governing the Choices program and then passes this new information on to the independent contractor managing all seven county offices. Case managers working in the Workforce Solutions office then make the necessary changes to their office procedures to comply with the new rules and communicate policy changes to welfare participants.

Welfare Case Managers

Nathan and Gais (1999) noted:

> The biggest increase in discretion under the new regime for welfare policy, capped as it is by the Personal Responsibility Act of 1996, occurs at the point of contact between local workers in welfare systems and the individual applicant or recipient. (p. 36)

This means case managers have an increased amount of discretion in the initial contact with participants. However, some scholars have argued that long before the devolution of welfare reform policy, welfare workers possessed and used discretion to disperse benefits in accordance with their own biased opinions of worthiness (Brodkin, 1997; Gerdes, 1998; Gilens, 2009; Nelson, 1990).

Workforce Solutions case managers, also referred to as frontline workers or welfare workers, have some discretion on how federal and state welfare policies are implemented at the local level; thus, these case managers were transformed by the

devolution of policy into street-level bureaucrats ([SLBs]; Pearson, 2007). SLBs are defined as individuals employed in public service positions by federal, state, or local government agencies (Lipsky, 1981). Consequently, SLBs can employ vast discretion of their authority while interacting with citizens during the daily pursuit of doing their jobs.

This notion of discretion is embedded in welfare service delivery, and how case managers use their discretion depends on their professional capacity, agency incentives and resources, and the demands of their casework (Brodkin, 1997). Case managers preside over the dissemination of complex policy and program information to participants. By determining how and what to communicate to participants, case managers control the information needed by participants to successfully navigate complex welfare programs and quite possibly influence a participant's choices about education and work (Meyers, Glaser, & Donald, 1998).

Problem Statement

Many scholars have studied the effects of policy on welfare programs (Card & Hyslop, 2005), how a welfare participant's race affects welfare programs (Gooden, 2000), and how case management tools impact and influence the discretionary actions of workers (Benish, 2010). Other scholars have focused on how welfare workers enforce policy under the stress of working in a field plagued by a shortage of resources, challenges to their authority by welfare participants, and contradictory or ambiguous job expectations (Lipsky, 1971, 1981, 2010). Delving deeper into the complex discretionary actions of case managers, or case workers, Pearson (2007) and Watkins-Hayes (2009a, 2011) provided some evidence of how a case worker's personal history may or may not

directly impact their interactions with participants. For example, a case worker's personal history may include instances of poverty and time spent as a welfare recipient as well. However, Watkins-Hayes (2011) implied most often a case worker's personal history only informs how he or she communicates with participants.

By retaining substantial discretion over the communication of policy, case managers can empower and influence a recipient's choices about education, welfare, and work. More specifically, "welfare workers control large amounts of information needed by clients whose economic survival may depend on their ability to successfully navigate a complex system of welfare programs" (Meyers et al., 1998, p. 9). Thus, although there are various communication styles, policy factors, and work-attachment strategies that shape the interactions between case managers and welfare participants, they alone may not be able to fully explain how discretionary actions and personal experiences of case managers who are former welfare recipients influence their decisions about caseload management.

Purpose of the Study

For the last 80 years, scholars have engaged in an active dialogue on the topics of welfare policy, case managers, and welfare recipients. However, the literature reveals very little about how case managers learn the boundaries of worker discretion or about how their personal experiences intersect to influence their discretionary actions when deciding how to manage their caseloads. The purpose of this study was to investigate how the discretionary power and personal experiences of case managers, who are former welfare recipients, influenced their case load management.

Conceptual Framework

This study primarily drew upon a small segment of the vast body of literature, spanning multiple academic disciplines, that focuses on welfare. The smaller segment of this larger body of literature included welfare policy and welfare workers. The conceptual framework is influenced by the literature on welfare as well as well as by the concepts of (a) SLBs (Lipsky, 1981; Watkins-Hayes, 2009a, 2011), (b) observational learning (Bandura, 1986; Olson & Hergenhahn, 2009), and (c) the insider-outsider perspective.

Street-Level Bureaucrats

In 1981, Michael Lipsky provided the public a glimpse into the practices of SLBs and the role they play in government bureaucracies. Lipsky (1981) wrote, "Public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work are called *street-level bureaucrats*" (p. 3). In his list of those who are typically considered SLBs, Lipsky listed social workers. He provided numerous examples of how SLBs or social workers execute high levels of discretion over policy implementation and resource allocation as they interact with welfare recipients.

According to Lipsky (2010), SLBs are not free from the restraints of policy; however, they are free to exercise discretionary judgment in their work. Lipsky (1981) stated, "Clerks in welfare and public housing agencies, for example, may exercise discretion in determining client access to benefits, even though their discretion is formally circumscribed by rules and relatively close supervision" (p. 14). For example,

case managers have a formal set of rules to follow when determining participant eligibility; however, they exercise discretion when offering cash or noncash diversions to participants when they apply for benefits. In addition, Lipsky (2010) noted that in the course of client management, SLBs participate in and have discretion over their patterns of practice aimed at rationing services, resource allocation, controlling clients, and managing workloads.

In 2009, Watkins-Hayes's *The New Welfare Bureaucrats: Entanglements of Race, Class and Policy Reform* revealed the findings from two empirical studies on two separate welfare offices in Massachusetts. The findings revealed how an SLB approaches his or her job as a case manager in a welfare office. In addition to revealing SLBs' practices and approaches, these studies created the framework for a situated street-level bureaucrat.

Watkins-Hayes (2009a) combined Lipsky's (1981) concept of SLBs and Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) notion of situated subjectivity to advance the notion of situated bureaucrats. Brubaker and Cooper defined situated subjectivity as "one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act" (p. 17). Thus, situated subjectivity, according to Watkins-Hayes (2009a), provides an explanation for how an SLB approaches client management and resource allocation in the welfare system.

When combined, these two frameworks provide the general framework for a situated bureaucrat working as a welfare case manager. Watkins-Hayes' (2009a) study revealed a

> bureaucrat's discretionary acts are in fact far from a set of random, independent, unrelated of-the-moment decisions prompted by organizational events but instead represent the products of a worker's complex but systematic professional identity (that is partly malleable to organizational dynamics but also largely constituted through individual and group-based social experiences). (p. 13)

Lipsky (1981) and Watkins-Hayes' (2009a) studies revealed a case manager's discretionary acts are constrained by policy but both acknowledged the role of individual and group-based social experiences play in a case manager's decisions about client and caseload management. While case managers and welfare recipients may in fact share a personal history of poverty, Watkins-Hayes did not fully explore how this shared history may influence how a case manager uses his or her discretionary power.

This study investigated how case managers' discretionary power influences their caseload management and how their personal experiences receiving welfare influence their caseload management when those case managers are former welfare recipients themselves. Thus, Bandura's (1986) theory of observational learning provides insight into how those case managers who are former welfare recipients learn from observations made from having been on both sides of the desk.

Observational Learning

Bandura (1986) stated "learning is largely an information-processing activity" in which an individual learns how to act and behave through observing others (p. 51). Thus, observational learning can be defined as learning that occurs when one observes the performance or actions of others. However, Bandura noted observational leaning is more

than simple imitation or mimicry. A person learns information from observing a model, and the information is processed and acted on in a way that is beneficial for the learner. Through the information-processing activity, learners gain new patterns of behavior and judgments that govern their own actions or behavior.

According to Olson and Hergenhahn (2009), it is through observation that one forms the rules that govern his or her current and future behavior. Bandura (1986) accounted for the influence of observational learning on future behavior as being a result of delayed modeling. Delayed modeling occurs when "an observer exhibits learning that occurred from observations made at a much earlier time" (Olson & Hergenhahn, 2009, p. 331). Whether observational learning occurs by modeling or delayed modeling influences current or future behavior, it does not rely upon reinforcement. In this information-processing activity, "reinforcement is a performance variable and not a learning variable" (Olson & Hergenhahn, 2009, p. 331).

Observational learning is governed by four processes:

- *Attentional processes* are defined as "the variables that determine what is attended to during observational learning" (Olson & Hergenhahn, 2009, p. 446). Individuals learn information and they selectively attend to certain behaviors being modeled and may reproduce this behavior in subsequent situations.
- *Retentional processes* are those in which the observer retains the information learned, and the modeled behaviors must be remembered by the observer. Bandura (1986) believed information is retained as either mental pictures or captured in words that are retrieved and acted upon.

- *Production processes* are related to how we translate what is learned into our behavior or performance. This process determines the extent to which the learner translates the retained information into action or performance (Olson & Hergenhahn, 2009). In addition, the retained information serves as a behavior template in which the learner may use or reproduce performance, actions, or behaviors (Olson & Hergenhahn, 2009).
- *Motivational processes* are the incentives which provide reinforcement for translating what was learned into a performance or a certain behavior.

Ultimately, for observational learning to occur, the observer must decide what behavior to give attention to and retain, and then the observer uses the learned behavior as a motivation to gain incentives. However, Olson and Hergenhahn (2009) noted if the observer does not observe a relevant behavior, does not retain a behavior, is unable to reproduce the behavior, or finds no incentive for reproducing the behavior, then observational learning has failed.

Observational learning may provide insight into how former welfare recipients process information and rely on observations and personal experiences when learning to become case managers. As Watkins-Hayes (2009a) argued, "Welfare officials have not invested enough in the professional development of their workers," and even though welfare services are highly standardized, case managers develop their own techniques for interacting with clients (p. 85). The development of their own techniques may provide case managers with the opportunity to exercise discretionary power and the

personal agency to govern their actions and behaviors in making case management decisions.

In addition to using the bodies of literature encompassing welfare, SLBs, and observational learning, I also relied on literature based on the insider-outsider perspective. Because I am a former case manager and a former welfare recipient, the insider-outsider perspective provided the context for the lens of my own positionality within the study as the researcher. It also provided an opportunity to explore the participants' experiences as both former welfare recipients and case managers.

The Insider-Outsider Perspective

Dwyer and Buckle (2009) noted by sharing a role, by common experience, or by being on the outside of the shared experiences of study participants, the researcher's insider-outsider status in the study is essential and ever-present throughout the investigation. As the researcher and as both a former case manager and former welfare recipient, my presence in this investigation presented opportunities for me to ask questions based on my personal experience and knowledge surrounding both case management and welfare receipt (Deutsch, 2004).

In Edmonds-Cady's (2012) study of the welfare rights movements, she was able to situate herself within her research process to formulate questions designed to investigate her participants' experiences as welfare activists and former welfare recipients. The participants in her study were all welfare activists, and only five of the 12 were former welfare recipients. The remaining seven were considered "friends." Edmonds-Cady acknowledged her status with the recipients; she wrote, "As a white,

middle-class researcher, and former social worker, I was viewed as an outsider by the recipients, while simultaneously occupying an insider status based on my past experiences as a poor single mother" (p. 181). However, Edmonds-Cady noted the friends viewed her as an insider based on their shared gender, race, and class statuses while also simultaneously seeing her as occupying an outsider status since she did not grow up in or live her life on the same privileged class level as the friends. Edmonds-Cady experienced a shifting status of insider/outsider within her study.

My status within this study also shifted between being an insider and outsider with my participants, yet it did not mimic the shifting status which Edmonds-Cady (2012) experienced in her study. As Naples (2003) noted, "Outsiderness and insiderness are not fixed or static positions. Rather, they are ever-shifting and permeable social locations that are differentially experienced and expressed by community members" (p. 49). While the insider-outsider perspective is typically a lens through which the role of the researcher is examined, it is a concept which may be applied to the participants in this study. The participants have experienced both the insider and outsider status in their roles as case managers. They also brought intimate knowledge of the unique experiences of being a welfare recipient into their case management positions.

This framework provided an opportunity to investigate what triggers the participants' insider/outsider statuses to shift, thereby either enhancing or inhibiting the use of discretionary tools when making case management decisions. In addition, this concept also provided insight into how case managers navigate the boundaries of case management. Collectively, this concept, along with the others found in the literature on

welfare, SLBs, and observational learning created the conceptual framework for this study.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the discretionary power and personal experiences of case managers, who are former welfare recipients, influenced their case load management. This study was guided by three research questions:

1. How do former welfare recipients learn to become case managers?
2. How do a case manager's personal experiences as a former welfare recipient inform decisions about caseload management?
3. How does a case manager's use of discretionary power inform decisions about caseload management?

Definitions of Terms

To provide consistency and clarity in the discussion of this study, I define the following terms:

- *Choices* is "the employment services program associated with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program" (Workforce Solutions Brazos Valley, 2017).
- *Discretion* is the subjectivity case managers have over making decisions related to caseload management (Lipsky, 2010).
- *Case manager* refers to the individual working as a case manager in a welfare services program. The terms case manager, case worker, and welfare worker are used interchangeably in this study.

- *Street-level bureaucrats* are social workers who "interact with citizens in the course of the job and have discretion in exercising authority; in addition, they cannot do their job according to the ideal conceptions of the practice because of the limitations of the work structures" (Lipsky, 2010, p. xvii).
- *Welfare recipient* is an individual receiving TANF, food stamps, and/or Medicaid.

Significance to the Field

This study of the influence of discretionary actions and personal histories of case managers as former welfare recipients on caseload management has potential implications for literature and theory, practice in the field, and policy. In the areas of literature and theory, this study adds to the current literature on welfare and expands the literature in the areas of adult education, adult learning, and human resource training and development.

In the field of practice, this study has implications for training facilitators, program administrators and directors, and frontline staff. Training facilitators can gain insight on how to efficiently train case managers to implement policy and effectively communicate with welfare recipients. This study also provides insight for program administrators and directors on the implications of selecting, hiring, and supervising frontline staff. For frontline staff, this study may impact the service delivery of welfare benefits and services and impact contributions to program performance measures.

Finally, this study has implications for welfare policy in the design, implementation, research on, and devolution of policy at the local level. In addition, at

the local level, there are implications for further devolution and dissemination of policy, recruitment and retention, designing program performance measures and goals, and strengthening the collaboration of partnerships among agencies in the welfare system.

Summary

This study's purpose was to investigate the influence of discretionary actions and personal histories of case managers who are former welfare recipients on caseload management. In this introductory chapter, I provided the background for the study, which investigated a case manager's use of discretionary power in the practices of and during the decision-making process in caseload management, and I discussed how the personal experience of being a former welfare recipient influenced the use of discretionary power.

Due to the purpose of this study, the appropriate research approach was qualitative methodology and was comprised of identifying and interviewing former welfare recipients working as case managers. By using a qualitative approach, I uncovered the how the participants made sense of their experiences, and how those experiences influenced them as case managers. Chapter 2 reviews four bodies of literature that informed my study. Chapter 3 presents the methodology of the study and provides the details of the methods used to gather and analyze the data. Chapter 4 focuses on the findings revealed in the data, and Chapter 5 presents the conclusions, implications for current practices, and future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The previous chapter provided a brief historical overview of welfare, followed the evolution and devolution of reform policy, and chronicled the emergence of discretionary power in case management from the early 1900s to 1996. Under the new welfare regime of 1996, case managers gained more discretionary power as recipients became subject to stricter policies. Although reform policy was designed to decrease the number of individuals receiving benefits, it also transformed the case management workforce. The composition of the case management workforce shifted from requiring a skilled professional to employing a deskilled, former welfare recipient. This study's purpose was to investigate how discretionary power and personal experiences of case managers who were former welfare recipients influence their case load management.

Schram (2012) traced how the qualifications of case managers changed from requiring a skilled to deskilled individual. He also discussed the economics and rationale behind agencies hiring former welfare recipients as case managers. According to Schram, the new case management workforce is comprised of former recipients tasked with reducing welfare dependency as prescribed by the new legislation. This call to action encourages case managers to be actively engaged in moving recipients into the workforce as quickly as possible.

Case managers implementing welfare reform policy have been transformed into job coaches with the ability to empower and encourage or enforce penalties on

recipients. This new approach to case management creates a decentralized disciplinary chain. In this chain, case managers maintain discretion in allocating resources and issuing penalties even though their choices are closely monitored and constrained by the requirements to meet performance goals (Schram, 2012). In addition, the culture of welfare has also changed from a social work approach to a business model.

Consequently, agencies contracted to implement reform policy sought to lower labor costs. Lowering labor costs meant agencies hire deskilled case managers. The new labor pool of deskilled case managers is disproportionately comprised of former welfare recipients (Ridzi, 2009; Schram, 2012; Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011; Watkins-Hayes, 2009a). Schram (2012) stated, in addition to lowering cost, staffing welfare offices with former recipients as case managers is a way to meet welfare recipients on their level.

Furthermore, Schram (2012) suggested that former welfare recipients know how the system works and can show current recipients a successful path off welfare and into work. Schram asserted by hiring former welfare recipients, the new welfare regime assumes a friendlier face and is more community based. Similarly, Deichert and Austin (2004) acknowledged that hiring former recipients promotes increased diversity among employees since most come from different cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. However, Deichert and Austin also speculated about the challenges of hiring former recipients. The authors noted the challenges include a lack of work experience required to navigate workplace issues and relationships, a lack of experience in interviewing and filling out applications, and insufficient support networks in former recipients' personal lives.

This chapter discusses four bodies of literature influencing this study: (a) welfare to work, (b) SLBs, (c) observational learning and organizational socialization, and (d) insider/outsider perspective. In this study, the insider/outsider perspective was used to examine the researcher's role, which is in Chapter 3, as well as to investigate the phenomenon surrounding how former welfare recipients (outsiders) shift perspectives to become case managers (insiders).

This review begins by examining the literature, which documents welfare recipients' experiences transitioning from welfare to work. It is important to understand a recipient's prior experiences because, as Pearson (2007) claimed, case managers make decisions based on arbitrary interpretations of policy, personal beliefs, or prior experience. Likewise, May and Winter (2009) pointed out that welfare recipients who step into the role of case manager come with prior knowledge and attitudes about welfare policy, mandatory work requirements, and the barriers to employment.

Welfare to Work

Bruster (2009) suggested stereotypes, stigmas, and discrimination may temporarily impact a recipient's journey to self-sufficiency. Other researchers have also suggested there are a diverse set of barriers one encounters when attempting to obtain, maintain, or advance in long-term employment may also directly impact employment outcomes (Danziger, Danziger, Seefeldt, & Shaefer, 2016a). These barriers may be defined as the personal challenges or situations experienced by some recipients during the transition from welfare to work (Danziger & Seefeldt, 2000).

To better categorize these barriers, Martin and Alfred (2001) completed a comprehensive examination of the perceptions of employment retention, advancement problems, and barriers to employment for the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. Using a survey design to collect data, the researchers interviewed Wisconsin Works (W-2) employees, employers, and a broad population of low-income workers with family responsibilities. The findings uncovered the following four categories of barriers: situational, education and learning, personal issues, and disabilities. Utilizing Martin and Alfred's findings, the next section explores education and the *work-first philosophy's* situational and personal issue barriers. The work-first philosophy is the cornerstone of welfare reform, and it requires welfare recipients to go immediately into the workforce.

Education and Work-First Barriers

Much of the literature relating to welfare recipients and education revealed that welfare recipients need more than just a high school education and minimal work experience to get a job and move out of poverty (Alfred, 2005; Alfred & Martin, 2007; Madsen, 2003; Rivera, 2008). Madsen (2003) noted, "Welfare reform consists of policy that pushes high-school educated women into jobs with poverty level wages and provides minimal training for everyone else" (p. 141). While empirical research demonstrated that education may lead to long-term self-sufficiency, policymakers have promoted the work-first philosophy and made work, not education, a priority for welfare recipients (Hanushek & Wobmann, 2010).

Bok (2004) maintained the work-first philosophy is based on the widely-accepted belief that any type of employment leads to economic self-sufficiency. However, Bok pointed out that often, low-income women who have a limited education find jobs which are considered "dead end." These jobs offer workers no insurance benefits, no sick or vacation time, and little or no mobility in moving up in the organization. Low-income women become stuck in these dead-end jobs and often remain on some type of assistance, thus never achieving economic independence or self-sufficiency.

To become economically self-sufficient, it is important for low-income women to have access to adult basic education, GED programs, and postsecondary education. Nevertheless, D'Amico (1997) stated federal and state policymakers deemed the purpose of education for welfare recipients is for immediate job placement. Bok (2004) noted the reasons federal and state policymakers may resist allowing welfare recipients to participate in long-term education programs are as follows: (a) long-term programs do not allow for immediate placement in the workforce; (b) long-term programs conflict with federal policy on work requirements; (c) long-term programs are more expensive alternatives to lower-cost job-readiness training; (d) it is believed that low-income women only need job-readiness training; and (e) policymakers think long-term, more costly programs do not work.

In Waldner's (2003) personal narrative on being a sociologist and former welfare recipient, she concluded, "Poor public policy or not, the current welfare system reflects deeply rooted, shared cultural beliefs in rugged individualism or the equality of opportunity" (p. 97). It is a shared cultural belief that welfare recipients should be able to

pull themselves up by their bootstraps. For Waldner, the bootstraps are equal to a postsecondary education. Unfortunately, federal and state policymakers continually write policy that resist allowing welfare recipients to participate in postsecondary education despite Waldner's argument that welfare recipients may not be able to pull themselves out of poverty and become self-sufficient if they are not allowed access to postsecondary education.

Waldner's story is one of four narratives in the 2003 book *Reclaiming Class: Women, Poverty, and the Promise of Higher Education.* In the introduction to the book, editors Adair and Dahlberg (2003) underscored education provides many women with the ability to become economically secure and intellectually fulfilled. In the first part of the book, the authors recounted their exit from poverty through higher education. Additionally, Adair, Sullivan, Dahlberg, and Moody shared their personal experiences of living in poverty and sometimes on welfare while on their journey to earn a higher education. This collection of narratives presents a compelling argument on the power of a higher education for women living in poverty.

Similarly, Weikart's (2005) study emphasized the importance of postsecondary education for low-income women. She reviewed relevant literature, examined state and federal policies and regulations, and conducted interviews with state officials and advocates. Her study reported that only 15 states developed programs to help welfare recipients pursue a 4-year college degree. The study focused on comparing the strategies and limitations of advocacy coalitions in Maine and New York. The welfare advocates working in these coalitions worked hard, often struggling to create programs to allow

welfare recipients to remain in 4-year colleges. Weikart concluded under the new rules of TANF, most states felt the pressure to fulfill the quotas attached to the work requirements, thus confirming many states resist helping welfare recipients obtain a postsecondary education. The findings revealed the advocates in Maine focused on using Maintenance of Effort funds to help keep welfare recipients in higher education.

It is significant to note that not all welfare recipients are in immediate need of higher education; some require basic literacy skills, access to GED classes, or other forms of adult basic education. Rivera's (2008) study on women's literacy and poverty in the post-welfare era explored the struggles of women participating in the Adult Learners Program at a local shelter in Boston. Using the voices and personal stories of the low-income women, adult education teachers, and many others, Rivera presented a convincing argument for improving access to adult basic education programs and increasing funding for programs which serve low-income women.

Even though research has provided empirical evidence on the importance of low-income women having access to educational programs, policymakers still consider the work-first philosophy as their best option in achieving economic self-sufficiency for welfare recipients. However, Rivera (2008) noted while some of the women in her study remained on welfare, others found low-wage jobs. She pointed out that despite having a job, they struggled with other barriers such as a lack of transportation and limited or no access to quality childcare. Such barriers often hindered their employment retention.

Situational Barriers

Situational barriers, as defined by Martin and Alfred (2001), are situations participants experience that may inhibit their ability to remain or secure employment. These barriers—for example, housing instability, lack of childcare and transportation, being victims of crime—as noted by Rivera (2008) and Martin and Alfred (2001) are categorized as situational barriers. Situational barriers are interconnected and impact one another. As Martin and Alfred asserted, the lack of transport complicates the issue of childcare and limits the employment prospects for recipients to certain geographical areas. Similarly, Green and Mayhew (2003) also noted a lack of transportation results in a spatial mismatch. This mismatch is created by recipients residing in one area while suitable childcare or job opportunities are in another area.

Transportation and childcare problems may also affect absenteeism. Holzer, Stoll, and Wisshoker (2004) suggested recipients without reliable transportation or childcare might frequently miss work, which eventually leads to job loss. The inability to maintain employment limits a recipient's access to affordable and permanent housing. Thus, recipients often seek temporary public housing through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) or private living arrangements with relatives. The struggle to become self-sufficient is further compounded and complicated by many personal issues.

Personal Issues

Martin and Alfred (2001) maintained personal issues, including substance abuse, domestic violence, being charged with a crime, and mental, physical and learning

disabilities, may inhibit a recipient's ability to obtain and retain employment. Substance abuse, as defined by Martin and Alfred, is the excessive or inappropriate use of alcohol, drugs, or tobacco. McLaughlin (2013) reported in 2011 that over 36 states proposed laws ordering welfare recipients to be drug tested. Furthermore, McLaughlin noted that prior to the enactment of welfare reform, states actively worked to identify welfare recipients with alcohol and drug problems. Considering the proposed legislation, the public outcry for drug testing welfare recipients was prevalent in the news and social media.

While recipients are often characterized in the media as substance abusers, Grant and Dawson (1996) and Taylor and Barusch's (2004) research affirmed the number of welfare recipients using, abusing, or dependent on alcohol or drugs is small in comparison to the national averages. Unfortunately, while research has provided evidence of low numbers relating to the issue of drug abuse, it has illuminated the high number of those receiving assistance who experience domestic violence.

Domestic violence or abuse is often linked to poverty and directly impacts the physical and mental health of recipients. Gilroy et al. (2015) reported on how the lack of employment, in relation to poverty, is the key variable for the increased risk of violence against women. In 2001, Tolman and Rosen also examined the prevalence of domestic violence and its impact on the lives of welfare recipients. They conducted face-to-face interviews with 753 recipients.

The findings revealed 43% of the study's participants discussed how an abuser interfered with their employment. The sample also exhibited a considerably higher prevalence of violence than the nationally representative sample of abused women.

Although the prevalence of violence was high, Tolman and Rosen maintained the study's findings are consistent with previous work which links poverty and violence. Although a link exists between poverty and violence, Gilroy et al. (2015) mentioned there are additional risk factors which contribute to partner violence.

In addition to substance abuse and domestic violence issues, Martin and Alfred (2001) noted recipients charged with a crime will often have trouble maintaining employment. This issue necessitates that recipients appear in court, pay fines, and face the possibility of short-term or long-term incarceration. Most often, in the literature, crime in the context of welfare accentuates the problem with welfare fraud. Kohler-Hausmann (2015) noted welfare fraud became the evidence of program failure and indicated a need to prune the welfare rolls. This perceived welfare crisis prompted policymakers to overhaul the welfare system in 1996 and perpetuated the myth of the welfare queen.

Last, the issues of mental, learning, and physical disabilities also may hinder a recipient's employment opportunities. Martin and Alfred (2001) showed that mental and learning disabilities are often undiagnosed or undetected. Some physical disabilities may impede full engagement in the workplace, and most disability recipients may be deemed exempt by welfare offices and not required to participate in job search programs.

Personal issues, along with the other barriers to employment previously discussed, may impede a recipient's ability to obtain and maintain employment. Yet, Danziger, Danziger, Seefeldt, and Shaefer (2016) speculated that prior to welfare reform, little research existed on the barriers. However, after 1996, researchers began to

investigate and document these barriers and their impact on a recipient's employment opportunities. Interestingly, the literature gives little or no attention to how these barriers are uncovered during a recipient's interaction or over the course of their relationship with a case manager.

Case Managers and Case Management

A considerable amount of the interactions between recipients and the welfare system are conducted through a case manager. These interactions occur when a recipient applies for benefits, needs to report a change, turns in paperwork, or needs to discuss the status of the recipient's case. Not long after welfare reform, Meyers et al. (1998) conducted a case study which examined the implementation of welfare reform policy and case workers in offices in California.

The findings revealed case managers used discretion by altering communication about policy information to ensure that policy goals were met. The researchers pointed out the case managers in their study did not fully inform the recipients about welfare rules, childcare benefits, training opportunities, transitional benefits, or incentives available when work and welfare were combined. More specifically, Meyers et al. (1998) suggested, "Welfare workers control large amounts of information needed by clients whose economic survival may depend on their ability to successfully navigate a complex system of welfare programs" (p. 9).

Recipients depend on case managers to help them navigate the complex welfare system; thus, it through their interactions they form relationships built on two-way communication and trust. In the literature, these interactions and relationships have been

documented as incidental to the larger research investigations into the impacts of policy, stereotypes, and racism in found in case management practices (Bruster, 2009; Chen & Corcoran, 2010; Pearson, 2007; Watkins-Hayes, 2009a, 2011). It is true that recipients often claim during interactions they are ignored and discriminated against; however, their relationships also suffer from the effects of distrust and disrespect. As illustrated in Rivera's (2008) study, participants reported caseworkers were often rude, verbally abusive, and used their discretionary power to determine whether recipients were worthy of benefits and services.

Case Management Practices

Several studies have reported on the negative interactions occur between case managers and recipients. For instance, the participants in Levine's (2013) study reported their case managers acted as gatekeepers who distrusted them. She interviewed a total of 95 women, 26 before welfare reform and 69 after welfare reform. The purpose was to explore the social interactions and context relevant to low-income women's economic actions of receiving welfare and employment. The findings suggested the interactions, which consisted of distrust with case managers and employers, affected the behavior of the welfare recipient.

In addition, Chen and Corcoran's (2010) study analyzed the employment patterns of current and former welfare recipients. The researchers sought to understand why recipients transferred from welfare into temporary jobs instead long-term, permanent employment. The participants reported their case managers pressured them to

move from welfare to work without considering the recipient's barriers to employment or the possibility to develop job skills.

With the high frequency of reported negative interactions, it would seem none of the recipients experienced positive interactions with their case managers. Albeit, some of the participants in Levine's (2013) study did report having neutral or positive interactions with their case managers. The study's participants discussed general statements of praise and offered some detail on their positive interactions. However, the literature documents the interactions and relationships between case managers and welfare recipients as overwhelmingly negative. Hays (2003) and Watkins-Hayes (2009a) suggested the negative interactions between recipients and their case managers may result from the manager attempting to balance the punitive rules and the recipient's barriers.

Previous research focused on the interactions and the relationships between case managers and recipients as an incidental part of case management practices. As Schram (2012) noted, the role of case manager has changed, yet there is little or no research on how these interactions and relationships are developed. Thus, it is also unknown how these case managers are managing their interactions and relationships with current recipients while struggling to balance policy guidelines, recipient needs, and their discretionary power in implementing policy.

Discretionary power in case management. The challenges and struggles in finding a balance for most case managers may stem from finding themselves amid a policy which places an emphasis first on personal responsibility and work for the

recipients. Morgen, Acker, and Weight (2013) confirmed case managers are faced with new daily practices designed to reduce caseloads, increase employment, and promote self-sufficiency among the poor women in their charge. By serving as the mediator between policy and recipients, most case managers are in a unique position to implement, enforce, and disseminate information about welfare programs to recipients at their discretion.

Lipsky (2010) defined discretion as the subjectivity public service workers have in making decisions related to management and allocation of public resources to those seeking public assistance. For example, he documented that a welfare case manager may use his or her discretion when offering a welfare recipient support services such as access to childcare or transportation assistance. In these instances, case managers assume the role of an SLB making decisions about resource allocation. Pearson (2007) added the decision to provide support of services may be based on arbitrary interpretation of policy, personal belief, or personal experience.

However, Morgen et al. (2013) argued a case manager's discretion is limited and influenced by two goals weaved into his or her daily practice. Schram (2012) and Morgen et al. agreed the first goal of case managers is to minimize reliance on state assistance, and the second is to remove or reduce government support in wages. Morgen et al. noted these two goals when combined might result in reproducing the inequities currently found in society resulting from race, class, and gender. This reproduction of racism, classism, and heterosexism is not only noted in case management, but in policy as well.

Of the three inequities, racism may have the greatest and most direct impact on case management practices. According to Davies and Derthick (1997), policymakers have been unwilling to directly engage in the complex topic of racism as it is relates to welfare; instead, they have weaved it indirectly into welfare policy. Therefore, case managers may either knowingly or unknowingly practice racism while providing case management services. This context is necessary to understand how case managers are influenced directly or indirectly by the embedded racism found in policy, discretionary power, and personal experiences in decision making about case management. Since the 1996 welfare reform implementation, scholars have produced a vast amount of literature on the effects of race and racism in case management practices.

Racism as a case management practice. Racism, as defined by Bell, Castañeda, and Zúñiga (2010), is a "set of institutional, cultural, and interpersonal patterns and practices that create advantages for people legally defined and socially constructed as 'White,' and the corollary disadvantages for people defined as 'non-White' in the United States" (p. 60). The institutional patterns and practices of racism are solidified by policymakers indirectly engaging in the conversation about race in welfare policy. Racism is present in institutional practices of eligibility requirements and sanctioning practices, thus lending credence to the concept of welfare racism (Davies & Derthick, 1997; Gilens, 2009; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001).

Neubeck and Cazenave (2001) defined welfare racism as the organization of racialized public assistance attitudes, policymaking, and administrative practices found in the formation, implementation, and outcomes of welfare policy. The evidence of

welfare racism is prevalent in the literature on the institutional practice of sanctioning. Keiser, Mueser, and Choi (2004) defined sanctioning as a reduction in the amount of a welfare recipient's grant for failing to comply with program requirements. As the federal government devolved the sanctioning process down to the state level, states were given choices in how to design their sanctioning policies. Federal and state welfare policies set the guidelines on when sanctions may be imposed. Like Morgen et al. (2013), Limbert and Bullock (2005) suggested case managers are given discretionary authority to reduce or terminate a recipient's benefits for failing to comply with program requirements. In addition, Limbert and Bullock pointed out that failing to comply is a formality through which sanctioning is allowed and aims to reduce or terminate a recipient's benefits to minimize reliance on state assistance.

Multiple researchers have written extensively on the link between the practices of sanctioning, race, and racism (Burnham, 2005; Keiser et al., 2004; Schram et al., 2009; Watkins-Hayes, 2011). All suggested that racism's stronghold in welfare resides in both the history of and contemporary content of U.S. welfare policy. Burnham (2005) agreed, noting, "The passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), commonly known as welfare reform, underscored how deeply embedded racial bias is in public policy" (p. 309).

For example, Keiser et al. (2004) explored how the race of a client and the local racial context impacted the implementation of sanctioning in Missouri. The case study revealed that in Missouri, "80% of sanctions in effect were imposed because of failure to conform to job training program requirements, so an important source of case manager

discretion is in the application of rules that exempt clients from job training" (p. 319). For instance, a recipient may not be required to participate in job search activities if the individual has a temporary disability. Once the individual is determined exempt, he or she can opt out of participation for a set number of days. At the end of that time, the case manager re-evaluates the exemption and determines if the recipient is ready to begin participating.

According to Keiser et al. (2004), recipients can be considered exempt from participation if there is evidence of domestic violence, a temporary disability, difficulty in obtaining childcare, or when the children on the case are typically 12 months or younger. Case managers have some flexibility in imposing sanctions by relying on the use of exemptions in some cases. In those instances where a sanction can be applied, the decision on when to sanction for failure to supply the required evidence to claim the exemption depends on the case manager's discretion.

Keiser et al.'s (2004) study uncovered the complicated role race has played in welfare reform and found that minorities often face discrimination in the implementation of policy rules. The empirical evidence in that study provides insight into how racism is used as a tool in case management and quite possibly used to reduce the number of individuals receiving welfare. Unfortunately, the researchers were unable to uncover if case managers were blatantly discriminating against minorities or if there are particular characteristics associated with minorities which render them more likely to violate the rules.

Other notable studies on race and sanctioning include research conducted by Fording, Soss, and Schram (2007), Schram, Fording, and Soss (2008), Schram et al. (2009), and Soss et al. (2011). Combined, these four studies focused on the empirical evidence underscoring the systematic inequities, local patterns, and dynamic ways organizations and social markers are used to shape sanctioning practices. Only the 2009 study by Schram et al. investigated how the characteristics of recipients and of case managers impact the decision to impose sanctions.

Schram et al.'s (2009) study investigated implicit racial bias and social markers which shape a case manager's decision to impose sanctions. The study required TANF case managers to determine how they would respond to sanctioning recipients in two vignettes using identical case narratives. The case narratives told the stories of two recipients: Vignette 1 recipients had White- and Hispanic-sounding women's names, and Vignette 2 had White- and Black-sounding women's names.

Their results suggested that case managers who fall into the social groups of being married or religious and who have more experience were more likely to enforce sanctions on the recipients with the non-White-sounding names. However, when considering those same recipients, the study also uncovered that case workers with less than 2 years of experience were less likely to impose sanctions. The researchers acknowledged they were unable to provide an explanation for this pattern in their data.

Although previous research suggested TANF is a race-neutral public policy, Schram et al. (2009) argued the policy "allow[s] preexisting racial stereotypes and race-based disadvantages to produce large cumulative disadvantages" (p. 415). The study's

findings revealed “powerful evidence that racial status and stereotype-consistent traits interact to shape the allocation of punishment at the frontlines of welfare reform” (Schram et al., 2009, p. 415). This study relied on a survey to gather the participants’ demographics as well as present the demographics and program participation histories for recipients in the vignettes. The downside to this study is that the researchers were unable to capture the experiences which may have informed the case manager’s decisions to rely on racial stereotypes and traits to impose sanctions.

When reviewing national statistics on TANF, most government offices, foundations, and other organizations report the total numbers of TANF recipients by race and ethnicity in the nation or by state. More specific data for welfare participation rates and sanctions are recorded and archived at the state level. For example, Keiser et al. (2004) extracted and aggregated data from administrative files across all counties in Missouri. The researchers noted the county level files included sanction status, length of current welfare receipt, race, and education of TANF program participants.

Racism and service delivery. To also capture how race and other social group memberships impact case management services, Watkins-Hayes (2009b, 2011) published studies that explored the experiences of Black and Latino case managers. According to Watkins-Hayes (2009b), welfare agencies in the 1960s, along with other government organizations, began to diversify their employees to reflect and connect with the demographics of their recipients, and agencies began hiring former recipients as case managers (Schram, 2012), thereby resulting in an increase in the number of people of color in government employment (Watkins-Hayes, 2009b).

For Watkins-Hayes (2009b), this increase meant there might have been an increase in the significance of how race, gender, and class influenced case management services. She used data from a previous study that involved participant observations, archival research, and in-depth interviews with 70 welfare employees from two welfare offices in Massachusetts. The purpose of the study was to investigate how race, class, and gender functioned at the local level of providing welfare services. More specifically, she focused on how racialized professionalism was deployed as a tool in the delivery of services in case management. Watkins-Hayes described racialized professionalism as representing

> the integration of one's racial identity into her understanding and performance of work, beliefs about what workplace activities should accomplish, tools leveraged to meet certain goals, interpretations of organizational processes and strategies for how the racial dynamics of the environment should be navigated. (p. 288)

The study's findings revealed the politics of welfare inform racialized professionalism, which in turn influences service delivery. Watkins-Hayes observed three processes in case managers' racialized professionalism: (a) assessing their perceived power within the institution to achieve desired outcomes, (b) engaging in policies they implement to determine how they will use their discretion in service delivery, and (c) strategizing how to use race as a tool in service delivery. Essentially, the case managers and supervisors of color in this study disclosed how their personal and institutional goals influenced service delivery. She also noted their personal experiences and histories influence how they perceive the agency's operations and how they fit in as professionals. Her study fell

short of discussing how those same experiences and histories impacted the participants' delivery of services to clients.

In 2011, Watkins-Hayes completed another study examining how race is employed in client and case manager interactions. The study focused on investigating interactions using the racially representative bureaucracy and street-level bureaucracy frameworks. According to Watkins-Hayes, racially representative bureaucracy theory suggests that racial minority clients benefit from working with a racially diverse staff. The SLB framework suggests welfare case managers use discretion when exercising authority in daily interactions with welfare recipients. Watkins-Hayes combined racially representative bureaucracy theory with the street-level bureaucracy framework to achieve an understanding of how Black and Latino clients interpret and navigate change in the human services system.

Watkins-Hayes' (2011) findings revealed the clients' perspective was that racial sameness could either ease or reinforce the tensions between the caseworker and the client. In addition, caseworkers expressed exercising care in how they used their own social experiences and backgrounds to effectively execute policy. Ultimately, both sides stated the case worker/client relationship was mostly influenced by the power the caseworkers held to address the clients' needs and concerns. The researcher concluded while race is seemingly a salient feature in these relationships, it is the organizational structure and politics in street-level bureaucracies that prevail in how the case services are provided.

Watkins-Hayes' (2009b, 2011) studies focused on how race and the perceptions of race influence the relationships between case managers and recipients. Prior to Watkins-Hayes' studies, Pearson (2007) completed a study which examined the actions of case managers toward welfare recipients and found they are shaped by how they interpret and implement policy. Pearson's study was influenced by Lipsky's (2010) *Street-Level Bureaucracy* and Hays' (2003) *Flat Broke with Children*. According to Pearson (2007), both studies delved into the "myriad, complex ways that interactions between case managers and their clients fundamentally dictate interpretation and enactment of policy at the ground level" (p. 727).

Case managers at the street-level typically meet with clients one on one and implement policy without a supervisor monitoring their actions. Oftentimes in Workforce centers, welfare recipients will attend group meetings with others, and case managers will disseminate policy to multiple recipients at one time. Although case managers do not make decisions about participant requirements, Pearson (2007) added they do "make decisions about the kinds and levels of benefits to be offered [;] case managers' discretionary power is strong regarding the bending and tightening of county, state, or federal policies" (p. 727).

Her study revealed policy, a case manager's beliefs, and life experiences shape their actions and decisions pertaining to welfare recipients. However, her discussion on the case manager's beliefs and life experiences was limited to the similarities and the inequalities found in the family responsibilities for both case managers and recipients.

Pearson did not provide the depth or breadth needed to understand how the inequalities or life experiences they shared affected the overall outcome of case management.

There is a considerable amount of literature on welfare case managers and case management. Although the composition of the case manager labor force is changing to mirror the population they serve, researchers have done little to uncover the how their beliefs, life histories, and personal experiences impact case management practices and decisions. Lipsky (1981) identified as street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) as the frontline workers takes with following a daily routine to implement program policies, case management practices and decisions. The next section of the review explores the literature on street-level bureaucrats.

Street-Level Bureaucrats

The term *street-level bureaucracy* was coined by Michael Lipsky in 1981 and has become a major theme in scholarly literature. According to Hupe and Hill (2007), Lipsky's work on street-level bureaucracies is considered the basis that built the foundation for work done in public administration. Lipsky (1981, 2010) described an SLB as someone who, in doing his or her job, interacts with citizens and exercises discretion in authority. Lipsky (2010) also proposed these bureaucrats are low-level public service workers, whereas Weissert (1994) claimed they simply serve as boundary agents between clients and policy. Yet, SLBs or boundary agents implement welfare policy and enforce guidelines in street-level organizations influenced and shaped by neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism and Street-level Bureaucrats

Brodkin and Marstens (2013) noted street-level organizations include a variety of public, private, or hybrid agencies that hire individuals to engage in policy delivery around the country. They also noted these organizations operate under the influence of and disseminate policy information guided by neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a set of economic policies that resurfaced in the 1980s and 1990s primarily aimed at reducing social support and the process of privatizing welfare agencies.

According to Martinez and Garcia (2007), the main points of neoliberalism include the rule of the market, cutting public expenditures for social services, deregulation, privatization, and eliminating the concept of the "public good" or the community. By eliminating the public good, neoliberalism placed emphasis on the concept of "individual responsibility." According to the concept of neoliberalism, anyone who is dependent on welfare benefits should rely on themselves, family members, charity organizations rather than state for support.

Neoliberalism not only changed how welfare recipients participated in welfare programs but it also changed the everyday processes in which case managers performed their work, thus turning welfare agencies into street-level organizations. According to Gray, Dean, Agllias, Howard, and Schubert (2015) neoliberalism was a major force in transforming the welfare landscape by dismantling and restructuring welfare programs and services. Welfare agencies transformed from being non-profit agencies providing social services to those in-need into privatized agencies competing for state government contracts.

Similarly, Soss, Fording, and Schram (2011) suggested neoliberalism granted SLOs and case managers ability to implement polices to police the behaviors of individuals. These policies rewarded individuals for being rational and what appeared to be self-reliant while punishing others who appear to make bad choices and mismanage their lives. The ability to reward or punish as a result of welfare policy was built into the flexibility of policy design to fit characteristics of each state's local population.

At the local level, case managers were tasked with implementing policies that made work mandatory, restricted educational opportunities, offered limited resources, and reduced their caseload numbers. Brodkin and Marston (2013) noted street-level organizations and case managers were instructed to implement the following changes: a) revamp intake and orientation procedures so that applicants needed to attend daily classes and have 40 hours of participation each week; b) intake meetings were redesigned to offer cash diversions, emphasize difficult program requirements, and encourage applicants to only apply for food stamps or Medicaid; and c) workforce regions were required to institute more frequent and intensive case monitoring procedures. In SLOs, street-level bureaucrats play a critical role in helping people in need access welfare benefits.

Lipsky (2010) noted t SLBs either directly provide the benefits through specific services or they act as a mediator between people and policy. As previously mentioned, a study by Meyers et al. (1998) revealed case managers, or SLBs, serve as mediators or boundary agents in disseminating and educating welfare recipients on program rules and

policies. One of the most notable characteristics attributed to SLBs as mediators or boundary agents is their ability to exercise high-level discretion.

While there has been an increase in the scholarly literature on the use of discretionary powers in welfare case management, Brodkin (1997) argued long before the devolution of welfare policy, case managers possessed and used discretion to disperse benefits in accordance with their own biased opinions of worthiness. In the 1960s, according to Brodkin, welfare case managers were encouraged to use discretion as they intervened in the lives of recipients. Nelson (1990) also noted the use of discretion by case managers can be traced back to the 1931 Mother's Aid Law which was the first documented statewide program created to provide benefits to widowed mothers with children. To be eligible for benefits, Nelson noted, case managers determined if the widowed mother was morally fit to receive aid. The term *morally fit* was defined as encompassing the mother's sexual behavior, use of alcohol and tobacco, housekeeping skills, and the presence of boarders. If a case manager deemed the mother not morally fit, then the potential recipient would be found ineligible to receive benefits.

Although discretion is embedded in the implementation of policy and service delivery, Evans and Harris (2004) argued over the last 20 years, researchers have reported a decline in the use of discretion. However, others have reported that limited resources and implementation of broad policy may require case managers to use their discretion in accordance with their own professional capacity, agency incentives and resources, and casework demands (Brodkin, 1997; Riccucci, 2005). For most case managers, the power of discretion is often found in the use of sanctions, and a client's

race shapes the distribution of sanctions on the frontlines (Brodkin, 1997; Keiser et al., 2004; Schram et al., 2009; Watkins-Hayes, 2009a).

In another study, Riccucci (2005) examined the implementation of welfare reform and allocation of resources by SLBs in Michigan. Her case study's purpose focused on the devolution of policy from state policymakers to local case managers. Some data were collected from a previous study, and additional data were collected through interviews with 10 to 25 welfare officials, managers, and case managers in three welfare agencies. The study's findings revealed frontline workers were in the best position to interpret the goals of policy very broadly when providing support services. In the case of transportation assistance, case managers found that transportation was one of the barriers participants faced when trying to find employment. The agencies provided bus token assistance; however, the amount of assistance was not enough to cover the cost of switching from a city bus to a suburban bus. This shortage in assistance pushed some case managers to advise their participants to apply for emergency assistance funds they could use to purchase or repair a car.

Riccucci's (2005) study did not discuss the discrepancies in the allocations of resources based on the recipient's race. Instead, Riccucci attributed this use of discretion to make a referral as being the result of mixed messages found in state welfare policy. Participants were required to find work to comply with program requirements; however, they were not given enough assistance to enable them to fully participate. Riccucci noted, "It is inevitable that street-level bureaucrats will exercise discretion, especially in

a social welfare setting, given the complicated and often ambiguous nature of the job" (p. 917).

According to Lipsky (1971, 2010), SLBs may be under stress in their bureaucracies due to inadequate resources, threats and challenges to their authority by the public, and ambiguity found in policy. Such stress affects the behavior, decision making, and level of discretion used by SLBs in caseload management. To manage the stressors, these individuals develop a "shorthand" to make decisions quickly and employ defense mechanisms to handle and resolve stress (Lipsky, 1971). For example, a case manager may develop a shorthand, or system, allowing him or her to determine what support services a recipient may need. However, this shorthand may be grounded in personal values or experiences based on stereotypes associated with non-dominant groups.

In a study examining the influence of community and personal values on a case manager's responsiveness to a welfare recipient's needs, Weissert (1994) argued the behavior of SLBs was affected by their professionalism and discretion. Professionalism is related to education level and membership in professional organizations, while discretion, Weissert pointed out, is harder to measure due to agency rules and policies. The level of discretion exercised by SLBs depends on the type of government agency. For example, case managers in welfare programs may have some discretion in determining what counts as participation and take a more flexible approach to ensure the recipient meets the mandatory work requirements.

Similarly, May and Winter (2009) examined the literature on the behavior of SLBs and found the literature suggests four factors that influence the actions and behaviors of SLBs: (a) the signals received from superiors about the overall content and importance of policies; (b) implementation and service delivery; (c) knowledge and attitudes about policy, work, and clients; and (d) contextual factors surrounding workloads, clients, and external pressures. In addition, May and Winter noted the influence of supervision is limited and not as influential as the other three factors. Most administrators and supervisors have limited control over the autonomous behaviors of SLBs. Thus, case managers have a tremendous amount of discretion over implementing policy and caseload management.

Expanding on the work of Lipsky (2010) to explain what causes a caseworker to act, Watkins-Hayes (2009a) suggested integrating the concept of SLB with the notion of situated subjectivity to get a general framework for how a case manager approaches case management. Watkins-Hayes defined situated subjectivity as "one's sense of who one is, of one's social location and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act" (as cited in Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 17). The integration of the concept with the notion transforms SLBs into situational bureaucrats.

Watkins-Hayes (2009a) argued the transformation occurs because the "bureaucrats' discretionary actions are in fact far from a set of random, independent, unrelated of-the-moment decisions" and seem to be actions that are prompted by strict policies or organizational rules (p. 13). The worker's complex, systematic professional identity is constructed from a case manager's individual and group-based social

experiences, which are the basis for how he or she approaches case management. Watkins-Hayes explained individual experiences are those tied to individual- and family-based issues and concerns related to economic status. Group-based social experiences are a result of one's race, gender, class, and community memberships. Thus, case managers may respond to recipients' needs and make case management decisions based on their individual and group-based social experiences.

This section of the literature focused on the behaviors, traits, and characteristics of SLBs. Moreover, this body of literature isolates the need to determine how discretionary power, in the context of policy implementation and resource allocation, is attained by case managers.

Education and Learning

In most welfare offices, case managers are simply tasked with learning to follow highly standardized, structured, and routinized case management practices to respond to a recipient's needs (Watkins-Hayes, 2009a; Weissert, 1994). By standardizing and routinizing these practices, case managers require little or no personnel development throughout the course of their jobs. Additionally, Meyers et al. (1998) noted that due to the large amount of policy information to be disseminated, case managers are typically given a written and pre-approved script to describe the complexity of the welfare program. Therefore, for case managers, learning about policies and procedures has been likened to simple rote learning, yet one must remember case managers are not computers simply processing paperwork.

The approach welfare agencies take in providing training and educational opportunities for case managers may influence how they learn about their role, their expected job performance, and how to exercise their discretionary power. Unfortunately, the passage of welfare reform marginalized the importance of education and training for case managers (Bullock, 2004; Levine, 2013). Thus, few published studies have explored how welfare case managers learn to become case managers or have examined the training they receive when they are hired. This gap in the literature limits the insight into whether welfare case managers learn through observing other workers or through socialization practices in welfare organizations. Since the culture of welfare reform provides few opportunities for adult learning, much of the approach to learning about case management practices come from observational learning and organizational socialization.

Case Manager Education Through Observation

Learning through observation is, as Bandura (1986) stated, an information-processing activity in which an individual learns how to act or behave by observing others. Most of the literature related to observational learning uses the observational framework to examine the learning experiences of children and animals. However, one study conducted at the University of the West of Scotland by Howie and McSporran (2010) evaluated the use of observational learning experiences and prompted reflection practices with social work students in a child protection program. The purpose of this study was "to explore the experiences of observational learning from the students' perspective" (Howie & McSporran, 2010, p. 50).

This study was part of a social work program review in which social work educators were called upon to improve the standards in the curriculum of social work education. Educators were asked to move students from the role of being a passive learner to an active one. The social work educators drew upon multiple adult learning theories and practice learning models to create an experience for students in which students would learn what to do through observation and then practice what was modeled. For this qualitative study, Howie and McSporran (2010) relied primarily on transformative leaning and reflective theories to create their model of observational-practice learning.

The students were asked to fill out a series of questionnaires that were designed to capture their observational learning experiences through reflection. The newly designed curriculum required students to observe practices being modeled by a mentor, discuss what was modeled, and then reflect on the experience in the questionnaire used to gather the data. The questionnaires revealed some students experienced disorientating dilemmas about what they were learning and its importance.

Other students reported that observing their mentor practicing what they were learning in the classroom changed their perspective on the meaning of social work and what it meant to be a social worker. In addition, students reported a transformation in their thinking about how they perceived themselves and their growing self-awareness. By using critical reflection, the students acknowledged the observational learning experiences pushed them from their comfort zones, thus causing them to be

uncomfortable as they reframed their thinking on the relationships between helping others, power, and oppression.

The observational-practice learning model allowed students to practice what they were learning about social work before entering the field. Overall, the findings from this study suggested that self-reflection along with observational learning experiences helped the students transform their frame of reference and gain greater self-awareness in the field of social work. While this study focused on students in a social work program, case managers in welfare offices may practice learning in a similar way. They mainly learn through observing behaviors modeled by a mentor and being socialized with others in the workplace. However, the study did not fully explore the socialization of new social workers in the workplace.

Case Manager Education Through Socialization

In considering the literature on workplaces, there is a specific body of literature on organizational theory which focuses on the organizational socialization of new employees. Feldman (1981) proposed new members in any organization go through a socialization process upon beginning their job. He created a model around this concept and determined there are three distinct areas in which changes occur during the socialization process. These changes occur in the role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance of a newcomer into the organization. Feldman noted his framework might be used to understand the different behaviors, attitudes, and actions of newcomers in an organization.

This model may support how case managers learn to practice case management. The researchers noted three reasons for creating and testing this model: (a) the socialization process, from a theoretical perspective, is about the uncertainty of reduction; (b) a focus of the study was examining the effects of information-seeking and organizational socialization tactics on the outcomes; and (c) this model is a representation of the most commonly studied issues in newcomer socialization.

Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, and Tucker (2007) expanded on the work of Feldman (1981) and incorporated the work by Miller and Jablin (1991) and Jones (1986) to investigate the antecedents and outcomes of the adjustments newcomers make when entering organizations. For this study, Bauer et al. (2007) completed a meta-analysis and created a model that highlighted the antecedents and outcomes in a newcomer's adjustments during organizational socialization (see Figure 1).

The process of newcomer socialization begins with the newcomer's adjustment to the organization. This adjustment may be defined as the newcomer understanding the job tasks (role clarity), learning the tasks and gaining the confidence to perform them (self-efficacy), and feeling liked by and accepted by coworkers (social acceptance). Bauer et al. (2007) also noted the individual's learning during the adjustment is the only latent aspect of the process. All newcomers are subjected to an organization's socialization tactics.

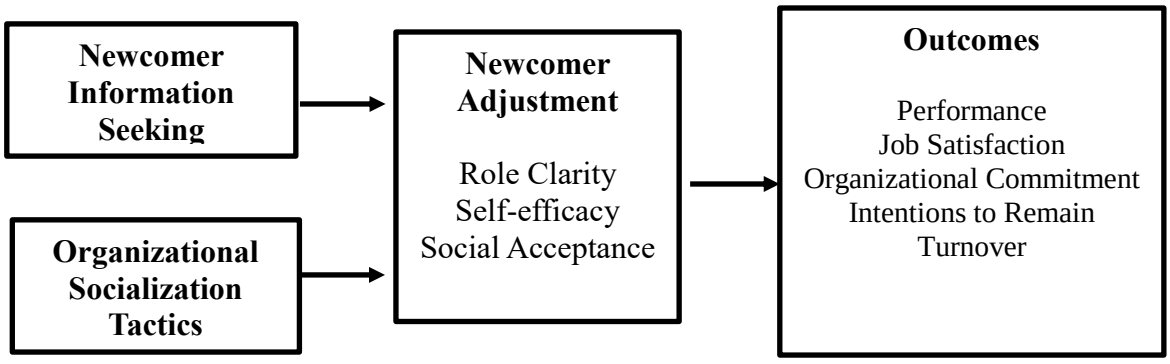

Figure 1. Antecedents and outcomes of newcomer adjustment during organizational socialization. Reprinted with permission from "Newcomer adjustment during organizational socialization: A meta-analytic review of antecedents, outcomes, and methods," by Talya N. Bauer, Todd Bodner, Berrin Erdogan, Donald M. Truxillo, and Jennifer S. Tucker, 2007, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Volume 92, p. 707. Copyright 2007 by the American Psychological Association.

These tactics may be defined as the organization's approach to disseminating information concerning job tasks and organizational practices during the newcomer's adjustment period. The newcomer's ability to adjust may result in positive job performance and satisfaction, thus solidifying the newcomer's intent to remain in the job and lowering turnover rates. Hence, Bauer et al.'s (2007) findings revealed the newcomer's adjustment is directly connected to the information-seeking process, the socialization tactics, and the outcome of transitioning from being an organizational outsider to becoming an insider.

Insider or Outsider—Case Manager and Recipient

The literature on insider/outsider status provides empirical evidence on the complexities in transitioning from an outsider to an insider and discusses how this concept is most often applied in research. Most often, this perspective is noted in the relationship between a researcher and study participants (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). For

example, in Edmonds-Cady's (2012) study of the welfare rights movements, she was able to situate herself within her research process to formulate questions designed to investigate her participants' experiences as welfare activists and former welfare recipients. The participants in her study were all welfare activists, and only five of the 12 were former welfare recipients. The remaining seven were considered friends.

In her study, Edmonds-Cady (2012) acknowledged her status as white, middle-class researcher and former social worker. She explained that she was viewed as an outsider by the recipients, even though she occupied an insider status due to her past experiences as a poor single mother. However, she noted the friends viewed her as an insider based on their shared gender, race, and class statuses while also simultaneously viewing her as an outsider since she did not grow up in or live her life at the same privileged class level as the friends.

Edmonds-Cady (2012) experienced fluidity between statuses of being an insider/outsider within her study as the researcher. However, the literature does not address how the insider/outsider perspective may be applied outside the researcher continuum. For this study, the insider/outsider perspective provided insight into how case managers understand their job tasks, learn the tasks, gain the confidence to perform them, and feel accepted by coworkers.

Using the newcomer adjustment concept previously discussed, most individuals begin as outsiders in an organization. Outsiders may be described as individuals who are not familiar with a community's membership roles, norms, or culture (Hellawell, 2006). Thus, Naples (2003) described the *outsider phenomenon* as "the processes through

which different community members are created as 'others'—a process which all members participate to varying degrees—and by which feelings of 'otherness' are incorporated into self-perceptions and social interactions" (p. 85).

For an outsider to become an insider, the perspective member must become credible and understand the community. Insiders are often described as individuals who possess intimate knowledge about a community or group (Hellawell, 2006). Those who become insiders are granted admission to a community or group most often based on a shared gender, race, class status, or cultural heritage with the group members (Edmonds-Katy, 2012; Sherif, 2001). To gain admission, the perspective insider must be willing and committed to learning the membership's roles, norms, and culture. Once the perspective member has fully engaged in the core activities of the group, the former outsider may transition to being an insider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

In analyzing the self-perceptions, social interactions, and experiences of being a case manager, a SLB, and a former welfare recipient, the insider/outsider perspective provides a unique lens through which to examine the complexity found in each status and accounts for the obscured boundaries between the two statuses.

Summary

This study's purpose was to investigate how a case manager's discretionary power and personal experiences as a former welfare recipient influence decisions about caseload management. As presented in Chapter 1, the history of welfare chronicles the evolution of policy and provides the formal platform for policy implementation. Lipsky

(1981) provided a realistic view of how, prior to welfare reform in 1996, policy was implemented by case managers acting as SLBs exercising discretion.

The use of discretion is brought to the forefront of the discussion surrounding welfare policy in relation to the sanctioning process. Researchers have exposed the elements of racism found in policy and the formalities associated with making decisions on when to apply sanctions. There is also literature that examines the role of case managers and their case management decisions; however, few studies address how case managers are trained or examine how the personal experiences of case managers come together to influence case management decisions.

This chapter discussed the four bodies of literature that support this study: (a) welfare to work, (b) SLBs, (c) observational learning and organizational socialization, and (d) the insider/outsider perspective. The observational learning section included a discussion of the observational learning outcomes for case managers through the process of understanding and learning case management. The next chapter discusses the study's qualitative research design which was used to uncover how case managers learn to use discretionary power and how their personal experiences influence decisions about caseload management.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate how case managers' discretionary power and personal experiences as former welfare recipients influenced their decisions about caseload management. The three research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do former welfare recipients learn to become case managers?
2. How do a case manager's personal experiences as a former welfare recipient inform decisions about caseload management?
3. How does a case manager's use of discretionary power inform decisions about caseload management?

In this chapter, I discuss and describe the methodology and methods selected for this study. The methodology section discusses the rationale for the research design and its approach to answering the research questions, thus achieving the purpose of this study. The methods section will cover the procedures I followed for participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. Last, this chapter concludes with a description of the strategies used to ensure quality control. These strategies ensure the accuracy, credibility, and trustworthiness of the data.

Methodological Rationale and Research Design

Merriam (1991) defines research as a "systematic or disciplined inquiry; that is, it is a purposeful, systematic process by which we know more about something than we did before engaging in the process" (p. 43). Ultimately, research is a process through

which more is learned about a phenomenon. Phenomena are investigated using one of two methodologies: quantitative or qualitative. The quantitative research methodology is deeply rooted in the natural sciences and is closely associated with the scientific method (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Quantitative research can be defined as explaining the cause and effect of a phenomenon through numerical data (Muijs, 2010). This type of research methodology takes the deductive approach by investigating a phenomenon starting from a broad general perspective and moving to a more specific conclusion may explain its occurrence (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009).

While qualitative research methodology has its roots in anthropology and sociology, it is also associated with the professional fields of education, law, counseling, health, and social work (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research can be defined as seeking to understand how individuals construct meaning from phenomenon. This methodology relies on an inductive approach and investigates a phenomenon by starting from a specific understanding and moving to a general conclusion (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Both of these methodologies are fundamentally different in their journeys to uncover the truth.

By choosing a methodology, the researcher's study falls into one of the two research paradigms. Researchers operate in either the positivist or interpretive paradigm. Researchers using quantitative methods work within the positivist paradigm and researchers using qualitative methods work in the interpretive paradigm. Each paradigm, like each methodology, has a unique set of characteristics, a purpose, and a specific set of methods used to conduct an inquiry.

The methodological approach chosen for this study is qualitative. Qualitative research is emergent and interpretive, occurs in a natural setting, draws upon multiple methods, and focuses on content (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). A qualitative researcher views the social phenomena holistically, reflects systematically on positionality, understands how his or her own personal experience shapes the study, and uses complex, multifaceted, and iterative reasoning (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Moreover, qualitative research is a broad spectrum in which researchers study the lived experiences of participants and the meaning they draw from those experiences. Within that spectrum, qualitative researchers may choose from one of five approaches to understand and plan their inquiry into a social phenomenon.

The five approaches to qualitative research include narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). A narrative approach relies on a first-person account of the phenomena (i.e., a story). The story becomes the focus for the researcher so that he or she can understand how the individual make sense of his or her world. The phenomenological approach seeks to understand the experiences of an individual's social interactions in everyday life. It focuses on how individuals perceive, describe, and make sense of their lived experiences. Grounded theory, introduced by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, focuses on building a theory. The constant comparative method is used to derive meaning from the data, and ultimately the theory emerges from the data. Ethnographies are studies that focus on human groups, and the researcher seeks to understand how the group forms and maintain a culture (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Finally, a case study is an in-depth

approach to studying a single unit or bounded system. The focus in this approach is not on the bounded system itself; instead, the focus is on the context of the phenomenon happening within the system.

While each approach is unique, the basic qualitative study forms the foundation for all five approaches. Within qualitative research, there are four characteristics that help researchers analyze participants' understanding of their interactions at a certain point in time and in a particular context. Even basic qualitative studies exhibit all four of the characteristics found in qualitative research, which are, namely, (a) an understanding of the meaning people construct about their world and their experiences, (b) the researcher is the primary instrument for data collections and analysis, (c) the process is inductive, and (d) the study is richly descriptive (Merriam, 2002).

According to Merriam (2002, 2009), the underlying key idea of qualitative research is that meaning is socially constructed as people interact with their world and make sense of their experiences. The most common approach to qualitative research, although it's not included by researchers in the previous five approaches, is the basic interpretative qualitative study. In this chapter, this approach will be referred to as a basic qualitative study.

According to Van Manen (2014), the basic qualitative approach is the best choice for researching and exploring an individual's experiences and social interactions in everyday life. Because this study examined the experiences and social interactions of case managers, it required an approach that did more than simply report the facts. It required an approach that would capture the essence of a case manager's discretionary

power and personal experiences. This approach also assisted in understanding the internal and external forces which influence a case manager's decisions about caseload management.

Furthermore, this approach allowed me to go beyond the taken-for-granted dimensions of welfare policy requirements, individual perceptions and beliefs, and case management practices. Marshall and Rossman (2011) noted one of the strengths in using a qualitative approach is it values research that explores how and why policy, local knowledge, and practice may be at odds. Thus, this approach aided in uncovering where the similarities or differences occur in the implementation of welfare policy based on a case manager's knowledge, use of discretionary power, or influence of personal experiences.

Researcher Positionality

As the primary instrument for data collection, it is important for the researcher to identify and monitor her or his own socially constructed biases and positionality within the context of the study. Positionality is determined by where the researcher stands in relation to the participants, and these positions are relative to the researcher's values and norms (Bourke, 2014; Merriam et al., 2001). Research is shaped by the identities, perceptions, and biases of both the researchers and participants (Bourke, 2014). Data are analyzed and findings are reported based on or influenced by the researcher's positionality. The researcher's subjectivity becomes the voice through which one can understand the problem through the individuals lived experiences (Bourke, 2014).

Researcher Experience and Background

My positionality was at the forefront of my mind since the inception of this study. I often questioned whether a former welfare recipient could study a welfare case manager or whether a former case manager could study a welfare recipient. More recently, as this study progressed, I asked, "As the researcher, do I occupy an insider or outsider status? Will my previous experience as a welfare case manager gain me insider status? Will my previous experience as a welfare recipient gain me insider status, or will my position as the researcher place me on the outside in both instances?"

Merriam et al. (2001) examined the experiences of four researchers as they negotiated their positionality and insider/outsider status while conducting research in their own culture. For example, Johnson-Bailey discussed her role as a researcher and Black re-entry woman in her 1999 study that examined the educational narratives of re-entry Black women. Johnson-Bailey noted because she was an African American woman researcher, studying African American women allowed her to occupy an insider status based on race. However, she occupied a different social status, and this created tension during the interviews, which also gave her an outsider status. These statuses are not fixed; instead, they are fluid based on the researcher's and participants' perceived race, gender, class, education level, sexual orientation, or age (Edmonds-Cady, 2012).

In this study, my status, I believe, was comparable to the one Edmonds-Cady (2012) presented for herself in her study on the Welfare Rights Movement. She self-identified as a White, middle-class researcher and former social worker, much like me; however, there is one difference—I am also a former welfare recipient. My status had

fluidity as I moved from insider to outsider while exploring my participants' experiences and reflecting on my own during this study. The constant movement between statuses helped me achieve this study's purpose in investigating how case managers' discretionary power and personal experiences as former welfare recipients' influence their decisions about caseload management.

Researcher as Former Welfare Recipient and Case Manager

In 1991, I was pregnant with my first child and separated from my husband. I moved in with my parents and decided to look for a job to support myself. I applied and interview for several jobs; however, I was not offered any positions. With no job prospects, I spent my afternoons with my friend. We talked about my predicament, and she told me to apply for Medicaid and food stamps. I really did not know much about the programs or benefits, but I decided to apply anyway. She gave me a ride to the Department of Human Services (DHS) that afternoon to pick up an application.

The next morning, I returned with my application and feeling better about my future. I walked into the office; it was hot and crowded, with lots of people and crying babies. The lady at the front desk took my application and scheduled an appointment for me. I returned a week or so later and was certified for emergency food stamps and Medicaid. As I left the office, I was given my food stamps and temporary Medicaid card. The food stamps resembled Monopoly money, and I had a hard time understanding how an 8.5 x 11 sheet of paper was going to serve as my health insurance card.

I was excited about having my own money to purchase food and my own health insurance, but my excitement was short-lived and quickly turned into shame. When I

was growing up and went shopping with my mother, she bought the "name" brand of foods, canned vegetables, and juices for our family. Thus, I did not think twice about buying Kellogg's cereal, Green Giant vegetables, and Ocean Spray juice.

The cashier chatted with me while she scanned my items, and the older woman behind me joined in, asking about my due date. I was happy and felt comfortable with my decision to apply for benefits. I opened my purse and grabbed my food stamps. I didn't realize until I had finished counting them that their smiles had turned to frowns. The woman behind me mumbled something about me buying the name brands instead of the store brands while the cashier just awkwardly stared at me. Feeling embarrassed, I gathered my bags and quickly went to my car.

My experience at my doctor's office was similar when I presented my insurance card, the 8.5 x 11 sheet of paper, to the receptionist. I scheduled an appointment to see the doctor I had seen my whole life growing up, thinking he would be my baby's doctor as well. The receptionist took one look at my "card" and laughed. She boldly explained the doctor did not accept Medicaid, and I should have told her before she scheduled my appointment. She scolded me for wasting her time and sent me on my way. To those on the outside, I was the stereotypical welfare recipient, but on the inside, I still felt like my old self and not this new person who was defined by her receipt of welfare benefits. I began to struggle with my own identity as my self-esteem plummeted due to being embarrassed and ashamed.

As I received benefits in the early 1990s, I volunteered to participate in the Job Opportunity and Basic Skills (JOBS) program at DHS. This program offered me the

opportunity to volunteer and gain basic jobs. I saw it as an opportunity to reclaim my identity. I volunteered with the Social Security Administration office and began taking classes at Blinn College. Although I was volunteering and attending college, I still received benefits and was unable to shake the feelings of embarrassment and shame.

Eventually, a file clerk position was available at DHS, and my JOBS case manager asked me to apply. She helped me fill out the application and spoke with the program director on my behalf. I thanked her for help but was curious as to what she saw in me that made her believe I would get the job. She explained I did not belong in the system; instead, she thought I should work for it.

Together, she and I prepared for the interview, and when I got the job, she helped me move into my new office. She continued to me be my friend and mentor until she left her job as a case manager. I worked as a file clerk for about a year. I was promoted to the food stamp clerk's position and continued working at DHS for another year. My career in social services continued to grow as I moved from DHS to the Office of the Attorney General's Child Support Division and ended at the Brazos Valley Workforce Solutions office.

I was hired as case manager at the Workforce center. When I began my case management training, I spent the first 2 weeks reading the Choice Manual. My supervisor asked me to read and memorize the policies and procedures. After 2 weeks, I was assigned my first case to work. As I worked with my customer, I asked the most experienced case manager questions about policy and customer participation. We facilitated the Workforce Orientations for Applicants (WOA) and Employment Planning

Sessions (EPS), while other case managers prepared the customer's paperwork for each of these meetings.

As I learned more about managing cases, I realized that policy was designed to be a one-size-fits-all; however, in real life one-size policies do not fit most. I worked hard to make sure my customers met participation and contributed to meeting the overall performance goals. I did not hesitate to penalize customers and was always reluctant to give exemptions for non-participation. I received verbal thanks, no plaque or bonuses, for consistently meeting performance goals and having the highest performance in the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program.

During a monitoring visit, the state auditor sat and observed me conducting a WOA. As I moved through the script and explained the rules, she interrupted me and asked that I tell my story. At first, I was puzzled. What story? I didn't have a story to tell. However, she persisted. Thus, I told the WOA participants that I once received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, and food stamps; therefore, I understood their challenges and struggles. My self-disclosure did not magically inspire the room full of applicants; instead, it just left me feeling embarrassed.

I put that WOA out of my mind and went back to work. After work one day, I decided to stop by Walmart to do some grocery shopping. As I moved up and down the aisles, I noticed a woman and some small kids coming toward me. I smiled, and she stopped. She turned and asked me why I denied her food stamps. I didn't recognize her, and I advised her she must have me confused with someone else. She explained she was

one of my Choices customers, and I denied her benefits. Again, I insisted she had me confused with someone else, and she got angry.

The next day in the office, she returned to discuss her denial of benefits. We spent some time discussing what happened on her case and the cause for the sanction. I spent about an hour with her and discovered she suffered from depression. She had missed the EPS because she was a having an "episode"—her word, not mine. We talked about what she would do to feed her children for the next month and what she could do to appeal her sanction.

After the customer left my office, I thought about the way my own case manager had encouraged, supported, and helped me get a job. I thought about how kind my case manage was in investing her time to help me. I realized I was no different than the customer that had just left, and I once struggled to care for my child. I went through the same system and had the good fortune to come out working for it.

I made a conscious decision to change the way I practiced case management after that meeting. I decided to invest time in each of my customers to uncover their unique barriers. This new outlook on my case management practices caused my performance to drop. I spent more time learning about my customers and working with them overcome their barriers. I was no longer quick judge and sanction them for non-participation.

I discovered the flexibility built into policy by discussing my cases with my more experienced coworkers. I stopped asking questions and began looking for places where I could exercise my discretionary power. Soon, I found myself working in the "gray" areas of policy and transforming into a street-level bureaucrat.

Roberta was one of my most successful customers, and her personal situation fell into one of those gray areas. She entered the program and fully participated in her 6 weeks of job searching. She received a job working at the university and successfully moved out of the welfare system. On paper, she was a welfare success story, yet in real life, she was human. She got sick, missed meetings, her car broke down, and she could not complete her job search a couple weeks in a row. Each time she failed to meet her participation goals, I used the flexibility built into the policy to benefit her instead of sanctioning her.

Being a street-level bureaucrat was rewarding, I soon began helping my coworkers to work around policy and meet the needs of their customers. As we moved along doing our daily work, the policies became stricter for our customers and the pressure to meet performance stronger. Even so, I continued working as street-level bureaucrat, adapting the rules to meet my customers' needs and advocating on their behalf.

While my customers benefited from work, I began to feel fed up with management and unhappy in my work. I felt as I was fighting to swim upstream. Our center fell under the scrutiny of the Workforce Board, and our director and supervisors were fired from their jobs. We, the case managers, were advised we needed to reapply for our jobs with the new contractor. My coworkers and I received information on the new job positions. Collectively, we discussed who would apply for which positions and submitted our applications. I applied for the Choices supervisor position. The new

contractor visited the office, conducted interviews, and rehired most of the case managers.

I was not one of the case managers who was rehired by the new contractor. In a meeting with the manager, I was told I did not possess a bachelor's degree, which was required for the Choices supervisor position. As we discussed my qualifications, I explained to him that I had experience working for DHS and the OAG office. He informed me that my experience was not equal to a degree and he presented me with my "choices."

I could accept a pay cut and stay a case manager or I could take the optional lay-off. I was given one day to think about it. The next morning, I returned to work with my decision and met with the manager. I explained I had worked hard over the last 13 years, and I just could not take a pay cut and keep doing the same work. I had not even finished my sentence before I was advised that I had five minutes to clear out my desk and leave the building. He said for me not to speak to anyone and to gather my things and leave. I left that day feeling as if I had been betrayed and uncertain about my future.

I spent some time engaging in self-pity and being angry. I also reapplied for food stamps and Medicaid to supplement my unemployment benefits. I often joked with friends that I knew the system from the inside and knew exactly how to adapt the rules without the help of my case worker. I only received benefits for a short time because I returned to school to work on getting a degree.

As I entered the graduate program, my former life as a welfare recipient and case manager were the topics for most of my papers. Those experiences feed my passion and

led me to my dissertation topic. When I began this study, I was excited about uncovering the experiences of my participants and comparing them to my own. After each interview, I wrote field notes that reflected how I felt and identified with each participant.

Although I had similar experiences as a welfare recipient and case manager as most of the participants, Cora and Helen were the participants I identified with the most. These two interviews tested my abilities as a researcher, and I often had to remind myself that I was an observer and not a participant in the study. These two interviews evoked strong emotions and feelings of frustration within me.

Cora spoke to me as if I were an insider; she shared her feelings and opened up about her personal life and work within the office. She openly spoke about surviving domestic violence, feeling irritated toward her coworkers, being burned out and frustrated when she was passed over for a raise. She often said, "Oh, you know what I mean" and appeared perturbed when I asked for clarification on office policies and procedures. As I listened to her speak about her experiences, I was caught off guard by the reemergence of strong emotions from my experiences as a case manager. I left the interview feeling frustrated and upset, as if the injustices she described were committed against me. When I contacted Cora for the second interview, she explained she no longer worked at the center and shared the happiness she had found in her new job. I congratulated her on the new job and silently applauded her decision to leave the Workforce center.

Helen also treated me as an insider; she also openly discussed her frustration and anger toward her managers and coworkers. She felt as if they were "stabbing her in the

back" and sabotaging her work. She, much like Cora, spoke of how hard she worked, yet she felt so unappreciated. Once again, those strong emotions emerged. I received a reprieve from them when our interview was cut short. The human resource director had arrived to conduct Helen's exit interview. At the time of our first interview, I did not know I had scheduled it on her last day with the center. During our second interview, Helen shared she had enrolled in a master's program and would begin in the fall, and I congratulated her on her decision to pursue an advanced degree.

After my study, I revisited the questions I had asked myself in the beginning: As the researcher, do I occupy an insider or outsider status? Will my previous experience as a welfare case manager gain me insider status? Will my previous experience as a welfare recipient gain me insider status, or will my position as the researcher place me on the outside in both instances?" I realized my personal experience as a former welfare recipient and case manager granted me insider status. I clearly understood the policy and program terminology used the participants when they responded to my questions. The participants also did not elaborate on the meanings of acronyms or the specifics of the policies or rules they followed; it seemed to be unspoken that I just knew what they were discussing. However, being the researcher also kept me just outside of the participants' comfort zones and they limited their discussion on how they learned about and used discretionary power. Sometimes, the participants hesitated or paused prior to answering a question and seemed to choose their words carefully. Whether I was considered an insider or an outsider, my experiences helped me act and observe appropriately within the private worlds of participants.

Methods and Process

The research process or design indicates the plan the researcher follows in selecting sites and participants, data collection, data analysis, and validation strategies. The following sections present the research plan for this study. However, a qualitative research design is emergent. An emergent design allows researchers to modify aspects of the study to achieve the study's purpose and answer the research questions. This flexibility allows the researcher to focus on understanding the meaning participants socially construct about one aspect of their world and their lived experiences. According to Creswell (2014), this means the initial plan for the study may not be prescribed, and some parts of the study may change or shift. Although, this design allows for flexibility, as the researcher, I did not feel it was necessary to make any changes to the design of the study.

Site and Participant Selection

In Chapter 1, I discussed how Texas utilizes a welfare-workforce approach. Gainsborough (2003) noted a welfare-workforce combo links the welfare function with workforce developments around the state. Texas has 28 Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) are responsible for planning and implementing the TANF Employment and Training (Choices) Programs across the state. The boards contract with approximately 198 local non-profit or for-profit Workforce Solutions agencies around the state to implement the Choices Programs.

All Workforce Solutions offices offer the Choices program, the employment services program works with recipients certified to receive the TANF benefits. I selected

Workforce Solutions offices located in four of the 28 WDB areas. The single criterion for selecting an office was that they currently employ former welfare recipients as case managers.

To determine the sites to recruit participants, I examined the Texas Workforce Commission (2015) Workforce Development Boards map. This map provides the location of each board as well as a link to its website. The WDBs are responsible for developing a local plan to implement policy, provide local service delivery, and allocate resources in their designed counties. For this study, I recruited participants from the Workforce Solutions offices located in the WDB areas of the Brazos Valley, Heart of Texas, Rural Capital Area, and Gulf Coast. To better understand the WDB areas and select areas to recruit participants, I consulted with a program director on one of the local workforce boards. After much discussion on the participant criteria and drawing from her knowledge of the board areas, I selected the four board areas based on which areas might employ the highest number of possible participants. The program director provided with me the contact information of the other program directors to request permission to recruit in the local areas.

The four WDB areas border each other and overlap in the lists of growing industries and targeted occupations. Each WDB targeted occupations list includes educational services (K-12 teachers), construction and skilled labor (electricians, plumbers, welders), and health services (nurses, medical assistants, and secretaries). Table 3 provides a profile of the WDB counties and includes the number and locations of Workforce Solutions offices, urbanization status, and population.

The Brazos Valley WDB area has one office per county. The Heart of Texas WDB area has six counties and only four offices. There are no offices listed for Bosque and Limestone Counties. The Rural Capital WDB area has one office per county except for Williamson County, which has two offices. The Gulf Coast WDB has one office per county except for Harris County, which has 16 offices. In addition, each county is a mix of both urban and rural areas. Participants were recruited from rural and urban offices within the four WDB areas.

Table 3

Workforce Development Board Area—County Profiles

	No. of Workforce Solutions Offices per WDBA	County	Urbanization Status	County Population	Location of Workforce Solutions Office
		Brazos	Urban	209,152	Bryan
		Burleson	Urban	17,253	Caldwell
		Grimes	Rural	27,172	Navasota
		Leon	Rural	16,861	Centerville
		Madison	Rural	13,862	Madisonville
		Robertson	Urban	16,500	Hearne
		Washington	Rural	34,438	Brenham
		Bastrop	Urban	78,069	Bastrop
		Blanco	Rural	10,812	San Marcos
		Burnet	Rural	44,943	Burnet
		Caldwell	Urban	39,810	Lockhart
		Fayette	Rural	24,833	La Grange
		Hays	Urban	185,025	San Marcos
		Lee	Rural	16,742	Giddings
		Llano	Rural	19,510	Llano
		Williamson	Urban	489,250	Round Rock and Taylor
Heart of Texas	6	Bosque	Rural	17,855	None
		Falls	Rural	17,493	Marlin
		Freestone	Rural	19,646	Teague
		Hill	Rural	34,823	Hillsboro
		Limestone	Rural	23,230	None
		McLennan	Urban	241,481	Waco
		Austin	Rural	29,114	Sealy
		Brazoria	Urban	338,124	Lake Jackson
		Chambers	Urban	38,145	Winnie
		Colorado	Rural	20,719	Columbus
		Fort Bend	Urban	685,345	Rosenberg
		Galveston	Urban	314,198	Texas City
		Harris	Urban	4,441,370	Houston
		Liberty	Urban	78,117	Liberty
		Matagorda	Rural	36,519	Bay City
		Montgomery	Urban	518,947	Conroe
		Walker	Rural	69,789	Huntsville
		Waller	Urban	46,820	Hempstead
		Wharton	Rural	41,168	Wharton

Sources: Texas Association of Counties (2013) and Texas Department of State Health Services (2013).

I selected participants using a purposeful sampling strategy. Creswell (2014) described the concept of purposeful sampling as selecting individuals and sites for the study based on their ability to purposely inform an understanding of the research problem and the phenomenon being studied. This technique is the sampling technique most often used in qualitative research. More specifically, I also used the purposeful sampling strategy of snowballing. After the initial participants were selected, they were asked to recommend other potential participants for the study.

The individuals selected to participate provided perspectives about their experiences of being a former welfare recipient who later began working as a welfare case manager. Participants who received welfare after 1996 have experienced the new stricter policies and guidelines for participation to avoid being penalized. Participants who have worked more than 1 year as a case manager have experienced implementing policy and exercising discretion in making case management decisions.

Therefore, the inclusion criteria for participants for this study were as follows: (a) must be a female welfare case manager, (b) must have at least 2 years' service as case managers, and (c) must be welfare case managers who self-identify as former welfare recipients and who received welfare benefits (e.g., TANF, Medicaid, and food stamps) after welfare reform in 1996 for at least 2 years.

Procedures

As the researcher, I had an obligation to follow the mandates set forth by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Texas A&M University. I followed specific steps to ensure I would gain the approval of IRB to conduct my study. These steps included

submitting and obtaining (a) an approved IRB to study human subjects, (b) approved email and phone scripts to recruit participants, and (c) an approved consent form.

After receiving IRB approval, I began recruiting participants for my study. I contacted the following number of offices from each county located in the following WDBAs:

- Brazos Valley—seven county offices.
- Heart of Texas—four county offices.
- Rural Capital Area—five county offices.
- Gulf Coast Area—six county offices.

During the time of participant recruitment, I discovered TWC was conducting site visits to monitor case management. Thus, site directors and Choices supervisors were reluctant to distribute my recruitment materials. Although I provided the appropriate documentation to prove that I was conducting a university-authorized study, my request was met with skepticism. Ultimately, the Gulf Coast Area denied my request and advised me that I was not allowed to contact their center directors, Choices supervisors, or case managers.

I waited an estimated 3 weeks for monitoring to be completed by TWC and resumed recruitment. Again, I reached out to the center directors and Choices supervisors to distribute my recruitment materials. After I was granted access to recruit participants from one WDB area, I inquired about the possible reason for the denial. The Choices supervisor advised me the center director might think I was a "mystery shopper." She explained mystery shoppers were sometimes employed by the WDB areas

to measure the quality of service and the case managers' knowledge of the program rules.

Eventually, I identified a group of 12 possible participants. I contacted all 12 participants, but only eight volunteered to participate in the study. Participants were contacted by email and phone to set up interviews. Interviews were scheduled for the date, time, and place chosen by each participant. Participants were asked to participate in two interviews. The first interview was done face-to-face, and for the second interview, participants were given a choice of face-to-face, phone, or email.

Data Collection

Wolcott (1994) noted qualitative data are gathered using interviewing (enquiring) and studying documents (examining). Regardless of the sources and techniques, the researcher remains the primary tool used to collect and analyze data. Thus, I selected techniques to collect thick, rich, and descriptive data to gain insight on or understand the phenomenon being studied (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011).

According to Gay et al. (2011), interviewing is a purposeful interaction between a researcher and individual to gather information. Researchers can choose between unstructured, structured, or semi-structured interview processes. For this study, I used a semi-structured interview process. This type of interview is well suited for exploring the experiences of participants in complex and sensitive situations and allows a researcher to probe for more information or to clarify participant responses (Barriball & While, 1994).

The interviews were guided by a predetermined list of questions I asked each participant (Creswell, 2014). During the interviews, I asked additional questions that

emerged from the dialogue and used these same questions to inform the questions used during the second interviews. Participants reconstructed their past relationships and experiences, made meaning of the present, and envisioned the future (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

While interviewing offers the researcher some advantages, such as allowing for control over questioning, Creswell (2014) noted there are limitations when using this technique. The limitations may include interviews being held in a designated place that is not a natural setting, participants not being equally articulate, and biased responses elicited by the researcher's presence. To diminish these limitations, I followed the recommendation of Gay et al. (2011), who suggested researchers listen more and talk less, do not interrupt and be patient, avoid asking leading questions, and do not be judgmental or debate with participants on their responses.

The participants in this study were asked to participate in two interviews. The initial interview lasted 60-90 minutes and were taped recorded. This interview took place at a day, time, and location selected by the participant. The interview protocol was constructed using my own personal experience as a case manager and former welfare recipient and guided by the literature (Appendix A). In the first round of interviews, I gathered basic demographic information about each participant and inquired about the participant's experiences as a welfare recipient and as a case manager. When I transcribed the interviews, all participants were given pseudonyms to ensure their identities remain anonymous.

Prior to the second interview, each participant received a copy of the transcript from their first interview and a second set of interview questions (Appendix A). The second set of interview questions were intended to clarify previous discussed topics with each participant and allowed me to probe for more information.

After each interview, I recorded field notes. Gay et al. (2011) pointed out field notes contain two types of information: (a) descriptive data heard or seen by the researcher and gathered directly and (b) reflective information captured from the researcher's personal reactions to the observations and the researcher's experiences and thoughts about what was observed. My reflections were promptly recorded after each interview.

I reflected on my reactions to answers the participants provided to the interview questions, their experiences, and the thoughts and feelings expressed by each participant. I recorded handwritten notes on the interview protocol about my initial reactions after the interview. The handwritten notes were typed up and expanded to capture my reactions, thoughts, and feelings. The field notes were incorporated into my prologue and used to help clarify my own bias.

In addition to interviews and recording field notes to collect data, I requested access to examine training manuals, documents, certificates, or other public documents to gain insight on how former welfare recipients are trained to become case managers. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), documents are used by researchers to supplement interviews and observations.

I was granted access to and reviewed the *Choices Guide* (Texas Workforce Commission, 2016) in one of the offices. The participant stated I could make copies but said a copy of the guide is online. I reviewed the guide, which includes program and policy information, online at http://www.twc.state.tx.us/files/partners/choices-guide-twc.pdf.

I also reviewed the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) manual created by Deanna (a pseudonym), one of the study's participants. Her SOP manual contained copies of purchase orders, case notes, screen shots, and other documents were exhibited as examples for the purpose of demonstrating how to complete them. This manual also included some interpretations of policy and program guidelines. My request to make copies of the documents in the manual were declined since the participant noted her creation was not approved by the site director and merely served to fill in the gaps found in the *Choices Guide*.

Data Analysis

To uncover the meaning, the data analysis involves separating and taking apart the data, then putting it all back together again (Creswell, 2014). To analyze the data, I followed the six steps discussed by Creswell (2013): (a) organizing the data, (b) reading and memoing, (c) coding the data, (d) developing themes or categories, (e) interpreting the data, and (f) presenting the data.

I transcribed each interview verbatim in a timely manner and typed up my field notes. I began the data analysis process by reviewing each transcript and gathering information to create both a participant profile and Table 4. Each participant profile

provided background information on the participant's prior knowledge of welfare policy, on how the participant transitioned into a case manager's position, and on where the participant is currently employed.

I organized the data from the first and second transcripts, my field notes, and the online copy of the *Choices Guide*. As Merriam (2009) suggested, I reviewed the study's purpose and then began reviewing the transcripts. First, I began by reviewing each transcript, highlighting segments of the data, and making memos. For example, the Table 3.1 includes an excerpt of the raw data from Barbara's interview transcript and my memo.

Table 3.1 *Researcher Memo and Reflection Notes*

Barbara:	My memo:
Well, I mean, you know, unfortunately the most unfortunate, ridiculous, or hard part of the training process is whenever you come in, particularly with a program that's as confusing as Choices is, with all the time requirements that there is… They pretty much sat me down with a rule handbook, and they were like, "Read this!"	I am highlighting the "rule book." This a similar process to something the first Participant described, and I may see it appear again. My reflection: Ummm, this process/stage of learning case management has not changed since I worked there! I remember being given the rule book in 2004 and being put in the office for about two weeks to read policy, and I was instructed to ask the supervisor if I had questions.

I read over each interview transcript and made memos in the margins to gained an overall general sense of the data and reflected on its overall meaning (Creswell, 2014). The recorded memos captured my reflections and reactions and possible themes or ideas about the interview data.

After the initial analysis, I began unitizing the data. I reviewed segments from the transcripts and looked for natural breaks in the participant's conversation found in the dialogue to form the units. Each unit of data contained single or multiple sentences or entire paragraphs from each interview transcript. These units were printed on note cards.

I used a constant comparative method to place the data on the printed note cards into categories. All the data were assigned a code, and the codes consisted of words or phrases that collectively described the data. The codes were placed in an Excel spreadsheet, and then I began second round coding.

In an Excel spreadsheet, I created columns to record the codes, the word or phrases, which emerged from the initial round of coding and began the second round. The second round consisted of *axial coding*. Saldaña (2009) explained axial coding is a process which allows researchers to reduce the numbers of initial codes by sorting and grouping codes into conceptual themes or groups. As I sorted and grouped the codes, I further refined them by using the constant comparative method again. This method was used to compare the codes with one another to determine if there were any similarities or differences between them (Merriam, 2009).

Once the codes were sorted and combined, I reassembled them into conceptual themes. Within each theme, I isolated and labeled main and subthemes using single words or descriptive phrases. Thematizing the data resulted in the following themes: learning processes, experiences and relationships, and case management. These themes represent the participants describing their transition from being outsiders (recipients) to

becoming insiders (case managers). From these themes, I better understood the meaning my participants made from their social interactions, worlds, and lived experiences.

This was the final step in the data analysis process. I reviewed and reflected on the themes to ensure the findings captured the voices of and accurately represented the participants' experiences. The findings are presented in a rich, thick descriptive written narrative supported by participant quotes.

Validation Strategies

The quality control for this study was ensured by validation strategies. Creswell (2014) opined that validity in qualitative research is checking for the accuracy of the findings by employing multiple strategies. According to Creswell, there are eight primary validation strategies: (a) triangulation; (b) member checking; (c) rich, thick descriptions; (d) clarifying researcher bias; (e) presenting negative or discrepant information; (f) spending prolonged time in the field; (g) peer debriefing; and (h) using an external auditor. For this study, I used the following three validation strategies: (a) member checking, (b) triangulation, and (c) use of rich, thick descriptions.

First, I used member checking to help determine the accuracy of the interview data. Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) suggested member checking may be conducted at the end of the interview. At the end of the first interview, I summarized my handwritten notes on the responses and asked the participants for immediate input. I asked for clarification on my understanding to omit any errors of fact or inconsistencies in my interpretations of their experiences. Prior to the second interview, I emailed each participant a copy of their interview transcript and asked them to review it for accuracy.

By member checking at the end of each interview and later asking participants to review the interview data, I strengthened the accuracy of the data.

I used triangulation as my second strategy, and I relied on three sources of data to provide credibility for the findings. Namely, these different data sources were used to build rationale for the themes. I compared what I observed in the context of the participant interview responses to the notes I made from reviewing the *Choices Guide*. I reviewed how each participant described the information they learned from the manual to what is written in the manual on specific program policies and procedures. By comparing these two sources of data, I validated the *Choices Guide* contains the program policies and procedures that participants described learning in their first 2 weeks of employment and in the first stage of learning to become a case manager. In addition, I reviewed Deanna's SOP manual to confirm how learning occurs in the second and third stages of learning. Her manual contained examples of forms and documents that Deanna created after asking more experienced case managers how to fill out participant forms and perform data entry.

Finally, I presented the findings in thick, richly descriptive narratives. The written narrative provides the detailed experiences and the descriptions of participants that describe their interactions with their customers, the office setting, and their training on case management procedures. Participants' quotes were used to offer the many perspectives used to develop the themes. By using rich, thick descriptions, I created realistic and rich findings contributed to the feeling of being in the setting and sharing in the discussion of participants' experiences.

Summary

Since the purpose of this study was to investigate how the discretionary power and personal experiences of case managers, who are former welfare recipients, influenced their case load management, I selected a qualitative methodology to explore the phenomenon. In this chapter, I presented the methodology which guided this basic qualitative study. In addition, the chapter details the methods I used to select participants, collect data, complete the data analysis, and ensure the validity of the research. In Chapter 4, I discuss the three main themes and the subthemes which emerged from the data.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the discretionary power and personal experiences of case managers, who are former welfare recipients, influenced their case load management. The study sought to understand the process of transitioning to the role of case manager and understand how welfare recipients learn case management practices and the use of discretionary power. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do former welfare recipients learn to become case managers?
2. How do a case manager's personal experiences as a former welfare recipient inform decisions about caseload management?
3. How does a case manager's use of discretionary power inform decisions about caseload management?

The data revealed three overarching, broad themes: (a) learning, (b) experiences and relationships, and (c) case management. The most frequently recurring themes` within the data revealed case managers learn about case management through four processes. However, as they discussed the learning processes, participants were reluctant to discuss how they learned about their discretionary power. In addition, participants discussed their personal experiences and relationships they maintained with their own case load participants and former welfare case managers. This chapter opens with the

profiles of the participants and is followed by a presentation of the three broad themes and subthemes.

Participant Profiles

The participants in this study were (a) female welfare case managers; (b) case managers who have worked as a case manager for 2 or more years; and (c) individuals who self-identified as former or current welfare recipients and who either received or receive TANF, Medicaid, Food Stamps, Women Infants and Children (WIC) or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) after 1996. All participants work in urban office locations. Two participants worked in what is considered a county office and the other six worked in the larger offices. County offices are small offices often located in the outlying counties but are part of the larger WDB area and may be designated as urban.

Generally, county offices have only one employee and may employ volunteers. The one employee is tasked with being the office manager, receptionist, resource room attendant, and case manager for all programs. For example, Frances explained,

> I didn't know until after I got hired the multiple programs I was going to have to case manage. I currently case manage SNAP [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program] participants, Choices, and WIOA [Workforce Investment Opportunity Act] programs. I also facilitate the participant orientations for all those programs. For the unemployment insurance program [UI], I do facilitate the orientations; however, UI participants don't have to be case managed. And then, of course, I provide customer service for the people who just come here to job search.

While County office case managers' work multiple programs, the total number of cases for all programs is small. The caseloads may consist of one to two Choices cases, three to five WIOA adult, youth, or dislocated workers' participants, and 10 to 15 SNAP participants. The numbers of participants receiving UI is not tracked by the county case manager since these participants are not case managed. County offices do track the number of individuals who come into the resource room to use the computers and printers to job search. The resource room in county offices is equipped with computers, printers, and fax machines. These resources are available to anyone in the community.

In addition to the multiple roles and programs they are responsible for, the two county case managers noted the difficulty of living and working in such a small community. For example, Gale stated she has had to ask case managers from other offices to manage the cases of her fiancé's relatives. She said, "I did work with his uncle one time, and three weeks into working with him, he messaged me on Facebook to say he couldn't come in for a meeting. I had to get someone else to penalize him." Gale explained she frequently uses Facebook to communicate with her customers. It was important for Gale to apply the rules equally and to avoid the appearance of favoritism by being contacted on Facebook by a relative, so she requested that someone else work his case. She also worried that penalizing him for non-participation might cause hostility among family members. Because they live and work in small communities, Frances and Gale's work impacts their personal lives outside of the office. Both participants discussed the awkwardness of meeting penalized participants in local grocery stores, restaurants, or merchandise shops.

The participant profiles provide important insight into each participant's experience with receiving welfare benefits, their entry into the system, and the pathway to becoming a case manager. Participants ranged in age from 27 to 38 years old and had 2.5 to 12 years of experience as a case manager. All participants were female; five were African American, one was White, one was Hispanic, and one was Middle Eastern. Participants' education levels varied between some college, attending college, or having obtained a master's degree. Participants received or currently receive a combination of TANF, Food Stamps, Medicaid, HUD Housing Assistance, WIC, or CHIPs. Table 4 provides individual participants' demographic information. All participants worked as case managers in urban offices as designed by the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs.

Table 4

Participant Demographic Profiles

Name	Age	Race	Education	Type of Benefits Received or Receiving	Work Location	Years Worked as Case Manager
Angela	38	African American	Some college	TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid	Urban	12
Barbara	33	White	Some college	TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid	Urban	8
*Cora	27	African American	Bachelor's degree	Food stamps, Medicaid, WIC, and CHIP*	Urban	5
Deanna	29	African American	Master's degree	Food stamps, Medicaid, WIC, and CHIP*	Urban	3.5
Emily	33	African American	Bachelor's degree	Medicaid and food stamps	Urban	6
Frances	43	African American	Bachelor's degree with a minor	Medicaid, food stamps, and HUD	Urban	5.5
Gale	36	Hispanic	Attending college	Medicaid* and food stamps*	Urban	2.5
Helen	38	Middle Eastern	Bachelor's degree	TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid	Urban	6

* Indicates participant currently receives this benefit for self-and/or family members.

The following sections offer a glimpse into each participant's experience receiving welfare benefits, her relationship with her case manager, her transition into case management, and where she is now. Since this study concluded, five of the case

managers have transitioned out of their jobs, and three are still working in the Choices program as case managers.

Angela

When she began seeking assistance, Angela was only looking to apply for Section 8 Housing. The Section 8 Housing program, also known as the Housing Choice Voucher Program, is a federally funded program that provides low- to moderate-income families with rental assistance (Section 8, n.d.). The Section 8 Housing case manager suggested she apply for food stamps and TANF.

She explained she really did not understand state benefits and was scared at first because of her lack of knowledge about public assistance. She went on to explain that she felt an overwhelming feeling of being lost when trying to navigate the system. Her first experience with the Workforce center was being *outreached*.

She explained the outreach process involves the center staff contacting participants who have applied for TANF to come in for a mandatory Workforce Orientation for Applicants (WOA) meeting. During the meeting, participants are advised of the program requirements, resources, and penalties for non-participation if they are approved for TANF. Angela disclosed she was approved for housing assistance, TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid for her children.

As she moved through the system and received her benefits, her relationship with her first case manager was immediately affected by miscommunication. She was penalized and lost her benefits due to the miscommunication. They were able to work through the miscommunication and she was able to begin receiving benefits again.

While she was upset about the loss of benefits and being penalized, she explained she did not want to fault anyone and would not provide any additional details about her penalty. The relationship with her second case manager was good. She described the case manager as open, honest, friendly, and approachable. They worked together to set goals for Angela during the 6-week duration of the job search activity. As her job search time ended, Angela was placed into a volunteer position with the Workforce center, which led to her transition into case management. Angela described her transition into case management as follows:

> I ran out of job search time, and I had to volunteer. There was a volunteer spot at the Workforce Solutions office, and I started volunteering. The administration staff began seeing my dedication in coming to work and completing tasks, so they offered me a position as administrative assistant.

By working hard as a volunteer and administrative assistant, Angela moved into a case manager position. She has worked as a Choices case manager for 12 years in an urban office. Recently, due to her experience and knowledge of the programs, she transitioned out of case management to become a manager in another social services program.

Barbara

In 2007, Barbara experienced what she described as culture shock when she applied for and started receiving benefits. She had never received benefits and did not know anything about the process for applying for and participating in the welfare system. She recalled,

> Honestly, I didn't know anything about it. I'd never received benefits before. So, when I started receiving benefits, it was very confusing. The case manager told me about all the rules I'd have to follow. There were a lot of them, and they were very confusing. I had no idea there were time limits. I had no clue. When I attended orientation, they told me about the time limits, and I really didn't even understand what they meant by time limits.

For Barbara, the time limits would become salient because she was unsuccessful in finding a job during her 6-week search. She was placed in a volunteer position at the Workforce center. Her volunteer position consisted of asking the case managers if they needed any assistance with filing, pulling case files, or shredding paperwork. She described her transition from volunteer to case manager in the following fashion:

> Surprisingly enough, the connection was pretty direct. I volunteered as part of the Choices program. They require you volunteer so many hours a week, and I volunteered for 8 months or 10 months. Eventually, they hired me as a temporary worker to work directly for the Workforce center as an administrative assistant. I transitioned from that position into case management.

Barbara described her transition into case management as being direct; however, she moved from volunteering to an administrative assistant role to a case manager's position. She has been a case manager for 8 years in an urban office. In her office, Barbara was one of four case managers assigned to working with welfare participants. Recently, she has accepted and moved into a position working directly with individuals applying for unemployment benefits.

Cora

For Cora, the path to being on welfare was paved by her experiences in college and with domestic violence. She explained:

> I am a survivor of domestic violence, and that is how I was led down the path of being on welfare. I was on welfare while in college. I was putting myself through school …. Once I got pregnant with my son, I applied for and was approved for WIC while I was pregnant. When I had my son, I continued to receive WIC, and I got food stamps. I also received Medicaid for him.

Cora revealed she did not want to receive TANF because she did not want to receive child support from her child's father. She revealed,

> I was going to apply for TANF, but the reason I didn't was because of the child support portion. There was domestic violence with my son's dad. TANF was something that I didn't want because of the type of situation. So, that's the reason I didn't want to follow through with TANF.

In Texas, when participants apply for TANF, the Office of the Attorney General becomes involved and the noncustodial parent is compelled to pay back the TANF benefits. In addition, noncustodial parents are granted visitation rights and access to the location information of the custodial parent unless the domestic violence has been documented by the court and police.

After college, she applied for and accepted a case manager position in the federal prison system in a southeastern Texas city. She worked as a contractor for the prison.

The pay for her first job out of college was low paying and she subsequently moved out of the area to seek better work opportunities.

Her search for a better opportunity led her to where she currently lives and works in south central Texas. She applied for her Choices case manager position and was hired based her on past work experience. She was a Choices case manager for 5 years in an urban office. At the time of the second interview, Cora explained she no longer worked in the Workforce center. She left her position due her inability to receive a raise and overall frustration with coworkers.

Deanna

Like Cora, Deanna stated she was also considering a career change. Her desire to change careers is related to her education. She holds a master's degree in a specialized field of counseling. Deanna explained she applied for her job as a Choices case manager because at the end of her master's internship she was unable to find a job in her degree field. She stated,

> In December of 2012, I finished my internship for my master's program. I had been trying to get a job in the field [of her degree]. I had an interview or two and didn't get the jobs because other people, of course, were more qualified than me. The only experience I had was my internship. I spoke with a friend that was in my master's program, and she told me about the WIA [Workforce Investment Act] Program. She said, "It's kind of similar to what you've been applying for; however, you won't be just working with people with disabilities, as it's more employment focused."

Deanna explained that she was excited about the job in the WIA program and was interviewed but was not offered the position. She then applied for two Choices case managers' positions, one at the center where she interviewed for the WIA position and the other in a different county. The supervisor from the office with the WIA position called and offered her the job as a Choices case manager. As she explained,

> I had already interviewed twice [once for WIA and Choices]. The supervisor called and asked me to take the [Choices case manager] job. I accepted the job; however, the pay wasn't what I expected, but I accepted it anyway. It was the first and only job I was offered.

She has been a Choices case manager for 3.5 years and explained she is currently looking to switch fields.

Much like the beginning of her career with the Workforce center, her experience as a recipient was contentious. When she initially applied for Medicaid and food stamps, she was denied because the Health and Human Services case manager did not correctly calculate her income to determine her eligibility. She recalled, "It really boiled down to the caseworker [who was] working my file at the time miscalculated my income. It took three different people to recalculate my income three different ways, and I finally got my pregnancy Medicaid."

After her son was born, she continued to experience challenges with receiving Medicaid, and she eventually enrolled in him into the CHIP. However, due to her income level, they only received CHIP for a few short months, and she eventually added him to her insurance at work, which she as "painfully expensive."

Emily

As a full-time college student, Emily and her husband were happy to learn they were expecting their first child. They decided to apply for Medicaid and food stamps. However, she understood the benefits were temporary because they would eventually graduate and find jobs. She explained after she graduated from college,

> Instead of me going into the field, because my first major was business, I said, "Well, maybe I can do some volunteer work at the Workforce." They had a position as a receptionist there, and I said, "Well, okay, I'll do this." And it was only for six weeks. The program director, at the time, she loved me. She was like, "Why won't you try to do case management and see if you like it?" I explained, "I don't have the degree for it, you know. I don't really know what it entails, but I can try it."

The program director of the center asked her to take a job in the unemployment department. She explained she was responsible for calling people receiving unemployment to go over their Work in Texas accounts and explain their unemployment benefits and whether their benefits were approved, denied, or pending.

After she spent some time working in unemployment, the program manager approached her again and asked her to begin working with food stamp recipients, and eventually she moved into a Choices case manager's position. She has worked as a case manager for the last 6 years and continues working in the Choices program.

Frances

As a full-time college student, part-time employee, and mother of two boys, Frances found herself in need of assistance. She shared,

> So once upon a time, I did receive food stamp benefits for myself and my two boys when I lived in [north Texas]. It helped me to take care of them because I was working a part-time job and going to school.

Although receiving benefits was necessary to support her family, Frances had very strong feelings and emotions about being a recipient. She described it as a loss of privacy, and she had a strong desire to be normal. As she explained,

> I hate receiving benefits. I was thankful that I had it that there to help me, but it's the constant always having to come up to the office and making sure I had the right check stubs. And I understood that they need that information for the eligibility process. It's a headache to always have to provide it. You're going through the motions all the time, and sometimes it felt like there was a disconnection. I just wanted to be normal like everybody else, like how my mom and dad were. They just worked and paid bills and bought groceries and stuff, and I wanted it to be that way. I didn't want it where people were in my business—where I had to constantly report to someone.

After college, Frances continued trying to become "normal like everybody else." She moved to southeast Texas and worked for a while in the local community. She was laid off from her job and soon found herself using the Workforce center's resources to look for work. She described what led her to apply for the case manager's job:

> I had been laid off, and I was looking for work. I was coming here to job search. There was a case worker here, and she asked for my resume. She said she was leaving and knew what my [employment] history was like. She asked if I wanted to apply and I was like, "Okay, sure." But I [thought it] was kind of questionable because at one point there was a high turnover rate here. So, I said, "Why would I want to be here?" She explained to me what was going on and everything, so I applied, and I went from there.

Frances was hired and currently works in an urban office that is also considered to be a county office. She is the office manager and only case manager. At the time of our interview, she had a volunteer helping her with filing, answering the phone, and mailing out letters.

Even though she had a volunteer, she explained being the only full-time employee in the office was difficult due the customer expectations. She stated her customers felt as if she did nothing all day but sit at her desk. However, she is solely responsible for determining eligibility, verifying participation, mailing out letters, holding informational meetings, and case managing multiple customers in multiple programs.

Gail

Gail, like Frances, also works in a county office. Gail described similar challenges to being the sole full-time employee and having to manage multiple cases and programs. She noted the struggles of being a case manager in a small, one room office. The one room serves as her office, the reception area, meeting room, and the resource

room for customers. She often struggles with balancing the needs of customers and her myriad other responsibilities. As a result, customers complain about the lack of attention they receive from her.

As a current and past benefit recipient, Gail understands from her personal experiences the struggles of her customers. She stated she received benefits prior to becoming a case manager and is still eligible for Medicaid and food stamp benefits because of her low income. When discussing her current receipt of benefits, she stated earlier this year she had some financial trouble. She explained, "I actually went through some struggles with Medicaid in January. My fiancé and I were told that if we didn't live together that the state was going make him pay child support." Due to her receipt of Medicaid for her children, HHSC requested the Office of the Attorney General-Child Support Division to pursue her fiancé for child support. In Texas, the state law assumes that

> the person paying child support will also pay for the child's health insurance. If the custodial parent is required to provide health insurance coverage, the court will order the noncustodial to pay additional support in the form of cash medical support. (Attorney General of Texas, n.d.)

To avoid paying child support, Gail and her fiancé moved in together. She closed her Medicaid case and applied for the CHIP. She said that soon after they moved in together, her fiancé lost his job. Gail at the time was working in a local retail store as a cashier and attending college online. Her struggle to provide food and medical insurance resumed, and she reapplied for Medicaid and food stamps.

One day while her fiancé was utilizing the resource room at the Workforce center, she stated the previous case manager "ran into him because he was up here [at the Workforce center] and she asked him, 'Does Gail want a job here?'" The case manager, Lisa, has known Gail for a long time and worked with her on her food stamp case. Lisa was in the process of transferring to another Workforce center, and she needed someone to replace her. She recommended Gail for the job, and the director immediately hired her based on her experience and knowledge of the community.

Gail is also solely responsible for determining eligibility, verifying participation, mailing out letters, holding informational meetings, and providing case management for multiple customers in multiple programs. She, unlike Frances, does not have a volunteer to support her in her many roles.

Helen

Upon exiting her government job in her native country, Helen entered the United States through a refugee program. She explained she and her husband entered the country roughly seven years ago. They were receiving assistance through the refugee program that placed them in Texas. As her time on refugee assistance drew to a close, she began to look for employment. She explained that based on her education, experience, and lack of work history in the States, she was having a difficult time finding a job. She explained,

> I received refugee assistance when I came first to this country in 2009. Eventually, I started receiving TANF and food stamps. I couldn't obtain any employment. It was really so slow as the unemployment rate was really high in

> 2009. And I couldn't obtain employment even at Walmart because either I'm overqualified or they didn't like me.

She was told about the Workforce center in her area as a resource to assist her in finding employment. She went to the local center and soon discovered that by receiving TANF, she would be able to find employment. Her case manager explained that as a two-parent family, and with her husband working, she was not required to participate. However, her desire to work brought her to the center every day. She said, "But I chose to be there, go every day just to find a job and talk to the case manager. And that's how I got the subsidized employment there." She further explained,

> At the time, my case manager empathized with me, and she tried to help me find a job. And I think I was lucky that they . . . finally placed me in subsidized employment. She offered me two subsidized positions. She said, "I know that you worked." I worked with an agency. I was in public relations because my English was good. I worked also with the U.S. [Government]. She tried to find office work for me. She offered me two positions within the Workforce Solutions—one in the same office or another in a different place.

Eventually, she was employed at the Workforce center where she was once a customer and was promoted to a Choices lead supervisor position.

Helen no longer works for the Workforce center. I interviewed her on her last day with the center; she explained she was leaving because she was frustrated with her job duties and her coworkers. She commented,

> Yeah. I love this job. It's like something I am really successful doing, and I have never failed. But some people here are angry, rude, and so disrespectful to me, and I take it personally. Even my coworkers, not all of them, [but a] couple of them have been trying to ruin everything for me. And they are my team members; the ones that I have been supporting. We recently had somebody else join the team, and she has been not good for the whole office. I feel like I tried to take the problem to management and HR [Human Resources], but I never heard from them, or they always turn my complaint down. And it's been so stressful that I started getting sick. I take my frustration home to my kids and my husband. Sometimes I just collapse because of my work, because my energy and my focus are all here.

She has decided to pursue her master's degree in hopes of finding a less stressful, more fulfilling career.

Presentation of the Themes

Just as the participant profiles provide important insights into participants' experiences as former welfare recipients and their transition into case management, their stories contribute to the validation of the findings discussed in the next section. Three broad themes represent the findings mainly discussed in the following sections.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the discretionary power and personal experiences of case managers, who are former welfare recipients, influenced their case load management. The study also sought to understand how as new case

managers they learned about case management practices and used their discretionary power, and how personal experience informed their case management decisions.

Overall, the data revealed three major themes along with subthemes. The major themes consisted of learning, experiences and relationships, and case management. The data revealed the experience of being a welfare recipient and the relationships with former case managers influenced case management decisions. While the use of discretionary power was found to influence case management decision, only one participant described it as being used to bend the rules, while the other participants stipulated that they followed the policy guidelines.

When asked about their case management duties and the use of discretionary power, participants were wary about discussing how they learned about discretionary power and how they executed it but were forthcoming with information on how they learned to become case managers. Participants agreed discretionary power was not derived from learning to bend the rules but from using an assessment of the customer to determine how much time to spend working with him or her.

Learning Case Management

All eight participants were consistent in describing the formal and informal processes by which they learned about case management practices. Formal training was described as being conducted by TWC staff or contracted out to another local non-profit agency, and policy changes are disseminated through TWC's Intranet. The Intranet is a password-protected, online system wherein case managers can find the newest changes to policies and program requirements. Participants discussed what they considered to be

informal training conducted in the office by more experienced case managers as the source for discovering the four stages of knowledge about case management. These four stages consist of book learning, job shadowing, question and answer, and case review.

Book learning. For this study, *book learning* is defined as knowledge that is acquired from reading books and not acquired through observation or experience. Workforce center managers relied on rote learning as the initial training technique for new case managers. Participants stated new case managers spend their first 2 weeks as a case manager reading the *Choices Guide*, which was created and distributed by the TWC.

The manual provides case managers with information on Choices policies and procedures along with some guidance and instructions on assisting recipients in entering the workforce. New case managers are provided with a copy of the guide, and for the first 2 weeks of employment, they spend their time reading and memorizing the roughly 112-page manual, which is often referred to by participants as the "policy book."

Describing the manual, Emily stated, "it's just a big binder and you're reading it." However, Barbara shared a negative learning experience with the policy book, noting,

> Well, I mean, you know, the most unfortunate, ridiculous, or hard part of the training process is whenever you come in, particularly with a program that's as confusing as Choices is, with all the time requirements. They pretty much sat me down with a rule handbook, and they were like, "Read this!" And—and, uh, you know, reading all that information is extremely overwhelming and a lot of the

> information that they provide you, while it's important to know, it's extremely confusing!

Without having any prior experience with or knowledge the terms used in the Choices policy rules and guidelines, Barbara felt confused and overwhelmed by reading the guidelines in the policy book. She expressed that trying to remember the complicated policies that mandate customer participation and the lifetime limits are overwhelming. As she explained,

> Trying to remember all the limitations and participation requirements is very confusing. So, my whole training was just trying to remember the rules, and it was just so overwhelming. I remember thinking, "Holy cow! I don't think I'm ever gonna be able to do this job."

Without the opportunity to see how policies are applied to actual cases, Barbara worried she would not be able to quickly recall and apply what she had learned. Frances also described reading and memorizing the policy manual as well as other guides to learn about her additional programs. She works in a county office and manages multiple programs. Frances also shared some similar experiences; She explained,

> When I first started, I spent the first week in the [main] office reading the different manuals to learn the procedures for all the different programs. And it made no sense because I'm a hands-on person. I was reading it, but it wasn't until I actually started working, seeing customers, and applying the rules to the different cases that I started really getting it.

Frances did not find sitting and reading the manual beneficial to her learning style. Similarly, Cora did not find reading the manual to be useful. When asked about learning about case management practices and the training, Cora said, “It’s nonexistent [the training]. They have something called a *Choices Manual*. It’s basically a whole lot of stuff. It pretty much just tells you the rules.” She also said, “But the thing of it is the manual hasn’t been updated. They only update the manual once every 20 years.”

Cora expressed frustration with the manual and the program policies. She stated the Workforce Board in her area is responsible for updating and making decisions about what is included in the manual. Gail also suggested training for new case managers is nonexistent and noted, “There was no training. I was told, ‘Here is the manual; study the rules.’” Gail’s supervisor gave her the manual and she had to study it to learn about the programs in her county office.

Deanna also expressed frustration with the training she received as a new case manager. She did not discuss being given a policy manual to read when she began working at the center; instead, she discussed how and why she created her own manual. She stated,

> I actually made my own manual for myself and everybody else. I shared it with all the other Choices case managers because I need to know not only what needs to be done, but I also need to know how to do it. And so, I made a manual, and I gave it to every new person coming in after me. I try to keep it updated. It’s not updated now . . . that just kind of fell to the wayside as my caseload grew, and I was given more tasks.

Deanna's manual contains copies of purchase orders, instructions on how to do eligibility, copies of the scripts for orientations and the paperwork completed during the orientation, instructions on how to do outreach, and step-by-step instructions on how to complete other tasks. Her manual provides insight into what needs to be done during a customer orientation meeting.

In order to deal the complex and challenging rules of the program, Deanne customized and used high levels of innovation to development a manual meet her needs and enhance the learning of others. Her manual was specifically designed to incorporate Deanne's on-the-job training with existing program information. Ultimately, she developed a manual that provided new case managers with information on what she considered to the essential functions of the job.

Deanne's manual provided a real-life glimpse into the work case managers are responsible for on a daily basis, unlike the Choices Guide that provides a 112 pages of abstract policy information. For this reason, many of the participants felt being required to read and memorize the policy manual was overwhelming, confusing, and caused frustration. The second stage in learning case management practices was job shadowing, and this stage provided participants with more hands-on approach to training.

Job shadowing. The participants described learning case management by observing a more experienced case manager through shadowing. As new case managers, they observed customer interactions and orientation meetings, assisted in filling out customer paperwork, and observed coworkers enter data into The Workforce Information System. In describing the process, Angela shared,

> We didn't have any formal training on [filling out] Individual Employment Plans (IEPs). We learned from the other case managers. At one point, we were completing them manually on a form, and then we had to document it in the State of Texas system.

At this stage of learning, new case managers are acquiring knowledge about the center's processes and how to apply the Choices guidelines through peer learning, socialization, and observation.

Participants noted they were expected to shadow another manager until they were assigned their own caseload. Caseloads are assigned gradually each week during the orientation meetings as individuals applying for assistance are approved for benefits. Participants agreed that approach to learning was more informative as it involved practice and sharing knowledge rather than reading and memorizing policy.

As Barbara explained, "I was paired with somebody for a while shadowing them. I watched them do data entry for a week or two before they sent me on my own; after that, I pretty much considered them a mentor. . . . The second half of the training was much more interesting to me because it was much more real, and it was the part of the training that I actually utilized." Participants identified this stage as the one in which they learned case management practices step-by-step as they worked through real-life cases.

Frances noted as a county case manager, most of her training took place in the main office. She traveled to the main office and shadowed more experienced case managers in the multiple programs. Once she was transferred back to her county office,

she stated, “I had to come out to this office [the main office], and I actually trained there, she [the supervisor] trained me. She started me slowly and she showed me step-by-step what I needed to do for managing cases.” Gail, also a county case manager, noted that she job shadowed in the larger office as well. She stated, “Yeah, I was in [main office] for six weeks.” However, her training resembled the type of work often assigned to volunteers. As she described it,

> Me and Rose—the girl I started with—we sat right across from each other, and what we did was get a whole bunch of letters and mail them out. Sometimes we had to find stuff to do during the six-weeks training.

Gail expressed disappointment when discussed how she and another new case manager did not get to participate sharing knowledge and creating relationships with more experienced case managers by job shadowing. While Helen had a more satisfying experience as she discussed shadowing her former case manager, she stated

> I had to shadow my own case manager. Yeah, the same case manager [who] worked my case. She was also my coworker. And I had to sit with her, and I told her “I’m going to follow everything you do because I know you are [a] successful person.” I was shadowing her and I was listening to her. When I started getting [my] caseload, I would go to her and ask, “What do I do, what do I do?”

Job shadowing for most participants, apart from Gail, became a crucial stage for learning case management practices. Deanne noted the importance of shadowing as she shared, “you could read policy and procedures all day long, but policy and procedures does not

tell you step-by-step to work with people." Job shadowing offered participants the opportunity work one-on-one with a more experienced case manager on how to handle the unique challenges of managing a caseload. Once they began working with individuals on their caseloads, participants entered the third stage of learning, which they referred to as the question and answer stage.

Question and answer. After about 4 weeks of reading and memorizing, observing, and asking general questions, participants were gradually given cases to manage. As they eased into practicing case management, they noted most of their time was spent asking questions about specific case management practices and how to make decisions that fall within the gray areas of policy. *Gray areas* can be defined as those customer situations that policy does not directly address or does not clearly define a procedure to handle them. Participants noted they relied on the explicit knowledge and experience of their coworkers to help them understand how to meet a customer's needs while staying within the policy guidelines.

Cora discussed the physical layout of the office in relation to asking questions and the spontaneous sharing of information with everyone. She stated "We're all in cubes, you know? Someone else will have a situation, and they'll be asking questions about it. They'll get a resolution and share it with all of us, and that's how we get it."

The question and answer stage of learning also presented case managers with the opportunity to discuss the gray areas of policy. Cora provided the one of the best example of how she sought answers in navigating the gray areas of policy in the Choices

program. She described a time she was trying to help a customer meet the participation requirements. She stated,

> So, a customer [comes] in and says, "Well, this is going on," and I'm just compelled because I want to help them. So, I would tell the supervisor, this is the situation, and she is short on participation hours. I would ask, "What can we do to help them?" We would look to see if there is a new rule that may help her. It's basically kind of case-by-case basis, and you'll be stumped. The thing is, Choices is unlike WIA or SNAP, whose rules are black and white. Choices is very gray because you can take some of A, you can take some of C, a little bit of D, maybe some E, and throw it in there, and that's how you solve the problem.

By asking questions about the unique challenges of each Choices case, new case managers learned about their discretionary power. They learned ways to mix and match strategies to make what may be considered questionable case management decisions while staying within policy guidelines. While this is the stage where discretionary power is learned, most participants were reluctant to talk about instances where they learned about or used their discretionary power.

This stage of learning was important for all case managers as a way to share knowledge, build networks, brainstorm and develop insight on how to handle challenging cases. Frances and Gail mentioned they frequently relied on and reached out to other county case managers to ask questions and get answers on case management practices. Frances revealed she was instructed as a part of her training, to ask other

county case managers as they possessed insight on and solutions to her questions about case management. She stated,

> When I came on board, I was actually told by a hiring manager [that] they were confident that I could do it; however, if I had questions, she [another county office manager] was the one I should really hook up with to ask questions and to help me. And so, between the supervisor and her, that's how I got my training and the help I needed to learn case management, the different programs, the policies and rules, and the procedures.

By contacting the former office manager and another county office manager, Frances was participating in peer learning. She was instructed to learn case management strategies from others without the intervention from the center manager in the main office. This is particularly significant as county case manager often make case management decisions without consulting upper level managers. Gail also discussed a similar experience and the importance of being able to ask questions and get answers from more experienced case managers.

The question and answer stage of learning did not always occur one on one. Emily stated she would often meet with other case managers and the lead case manager to discuss special cases. She shared,

> When we have what we call our special cases, or cases that we just really don't know which way to go with them or which steps to take on the case, I take it to the other career coaches and our career lead. We strategize with each other and come up with the possibilities of how can we interact with him or her so they can

become successful, or what do we need to do to allow them to be able to be themselves.

Emily also participated in peer learning as she worked collaboratively with others to find strategies to ensure her customers meet participation requirements. For both new and experienced case managers, the final stage of learning, case review, was designated by participants as the one that contained the most difficult and steepest learning curve.

Case review. Participants discussed the process of case reviews as being grounded in the formal and established work practices associated with formal policy. They stated every three to six months, case readers/monitors would select a portion of their caseload to review. These were done by internal and external monitors. Internal case monitors, in most offices, are WDB staff, who review cases to ensure accuracy and timeliness of data entry, and the customer's folder contains all required documents. Internal monitors precede the monitoring conducted by the state-level or external monitors. These monitors are employed by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC).

The internal monitors document any case errors and provide reports to the center director. These reports include for example, missing documentation such as a customer's time sheet from work, case notes which describe interactions between customers and case managers, or participation hours entered after the deadline. During internal monitoring, participants noted this when they most often learned about changes in policy and customer participation requirements.

Case managers are required to fix any case errors to prior to the external monitors' site visit. The goal is to avoid having too many case errors uncovered by the

external monitors. By having too many errors, case managers risk losing merit raises and the centers risk losing program funds.

Most participants did not see this as effective method of teaching or learning. This learning strategy fostered strong emotions such as anxiety and fear of failure among case managers. They noted they learned about changes in policy or program requirements by their case being "ripped to shreds" by monitors. Case managers were found to have case errors when a customer's participation was not entered timely, case notes were missing, or a customer's paperwork was missing from the file. Cora described this process:

> With TANF, it's forever changing, and there's so many…there's so much repetitiveness, and there [are so] many things that are different, that we have something called a case review that happens every three to six months. They take our cases, they look at them, and they pretty much rip it to shreds and try to find any and everything wrong with it, and they do.

She expressed frustration over the frequency of the monitoring visits and changes made to policy. She also expressed anxiety over the process as she felt as if the monitors were intentionally trying to find something wrong with her work. However, she also believed monitoring served as means for the local Workforce Board and program director to disseminate and make policy changes. She stated,

> They make the rules changes, and often times they'll tell our program manager what those changes are, and she doesn't tell us. Communication comes from the top to the bottom. No upper person has ever, ever, ever, ever sat down and just

> been like, “Hey, this is what you need to improve on.” Because all my file reviews have been horrible. They say, “Oh, well, you did this wrong and this wrong and this wrong.” And then as soon as you fix those things, they’ll do another file review and it’ll be something totally different. So, you’re never abreast on what’s going on, and it’s frustrating because you don’t have the most current, up-to-date information.

Cora’s frustration in not knowing when policies were changed was apparent. She also felt as if there was no or a lack of communication between her and the program director. Deanna also expressed similar frustration with case reviews. She stated,

> Sometimes we don't know of changes until we're being audited on it. Yeah, it is one of our frustrations. Yeah, after we're dinged on it during an audit, and they’ll say, “This is a problem,” and we're like, well, if we'd known about it—we could've corrected it or been doing it that certain way. I don't know or want to say they review a set number of cases. All I know is we hear about it on a Monday and they can be here on Friday. The State may come one to two times a year.

The participants expressed a desire to do a good job and meet all program performance measures. However, if the policy changes were not disseminated to them timely manner then case errors were unavoidable. Deanna also discussed the process of internal monitoring:

> We have an internal audit. Sometimes they know, or our program manager, knows what the State is looking for because the State has gone to other boards,

> and I guess the word's getting around. Other boards may say, "This is what they've been looking at," and so they come in and to do an internal audit. It's not like a set number of times per year.

The internal monitoring review is completed as a way to prepare prior to the state-level review. For Gail, internal reviews made her feel as if she was being set up for failure. However, she had a friend on the board who completed internal reviews and helped ease her anxiety. She said,

> They set me up for failure. When you do it wrong and the board's monitoring you, it falls on you. It doesn't fall on your supervisor.
>
> My friend, she's [an internal monitor] and is not allowed to look at my cases. She's not allowed to monitor my cases, but she had to one time because I guess somebody wasn't there or something and she text[ed] me. She said, "Gail, I had to monitor you today," and I was like, "Uh-oh." I asked her, "What happened?" She said, "Nothing. I was really impressed with your case notes." I said, "I've had a lot of training," and she was like, "I wish everybody else was very detail-oriented like you. You even put the next step in on what's gonna happen."

Case notes are the written detailed interaction between the customer and case manager. These notes allow reviewers, supervisors, and other case managers to understand what is happening with a particular case. The notes describe in detail the customer's participation requirements, reasons for exemption or good cause, any support of services the customer is receiving, and many other important aspects about the case. By having a friend on the internal side of the case review process, Gail said she received positive

reviews of her work and she expressed pride that her hard work entering detailed case notes had been appreciated.

The quality and timeliness of case management practices determines whether the Workforce center is meeting the participation goals set by the TWC. Cora noted, “When you don’t make the numbers, it affects your raise.” She was the only participant in this study to discuss the negative effect that case errors had on her not meeting goals. In the context of discussing how they learned case management practices, participants also discussed how they educated their coworkers using their experiences and how personal relationships influenced how they make case management decisions.

The Influence of Personal Experiences and Relationships

The data also revealed the influence of personal experiences and relationships on decisions about caseload management. Participants noted being former recipients helps them educate their coworkers about how to better understand, build rapport with, gain the trust of, and become approachable to the customers they serve. In addition to their relationships they experienced with their own case managers, coworkers and customers also influenced and informed decisions about caseload management.

Personal Experiences—Past and Present

Participants reflected on their past and current experiences as both a former/current recipient and a case manager. As former/current recipients, they discussed their knowledge of benefits prior to applying for them, participation in the program, and educating others about receiving benefits in the context of their relationships. The discussion of their current experiences as case managers focused on

reliving their past experiences as they shared their story with their customers, their case management style, and the support they receive from their coworkers.

Past experiences as a former/current recipient. Participants described their knowledge of welfare policy, participation in the programs, being sanctioned, and how they educated others on receiving welfare benefits. Most of the participants shared that they had never heard of, experienced, or knew about welfare services or policy prior to applying for benefits. Angela explained,

> At first, because I never needed assistance, I knew nothing about it. I come from a family that didn't even know anything about public assistance. Being a single parent, I wanted to do it on my own. I was using that for a step up versus, you know, just a handout. And so, I really didn't understand how state benefits worked or anything. Someone referred me. They said, "Hey, maybe you can go over here and get help." I went to apply for a Section 8 Housing, and they said, "Maybe you need to go and apply for TANF." I got approved for housing and then I got approved for food stamps and TANF.

When she applied for benefits, she stated no one in her family had ever received welfare benefits; thus, she did not know what services or benefits she would receive from the program. She also stated she felt lost when trying to understand the program benefits, services, and participation requirements. The majority of the participants in this study explained they did not have prior knowledge of welfare policies or the program. Deanna reiterated, "I didn't know. I had no clue. I didn't ask anybody, like any family or

friends, and Health and Human Services does not tell you what to expect with these benefits. So, I didn't know."

However, Cora and Helen expressed they both had prior knowledge of the policies and the program. Cora noted, "So I knew what was required. My sister, she's a single mother of four, and she had been on it before. And so, I understood it." Because she had a sister who had received benefits, Cora applied for benefits and understood the program policies and requirements. However, she did not know about the workforce part of the program.

For Helen, the workforce part of the program appealed to her and ultimately is what led to her apply for TANF. She explained, "The main reason I entered into this program was I learned they would help me find a job." Helen had a strong desire to work and no longer wanted to receive any type of benefits.

Once in the program, most participants discussed their Choices program participation, being sanctioned, denial of benefits, and appealing the denial. As a requirement of receiving TANF benefits, recipients are required to participate in four weeks of a job search. If they are unsuccessful in obtaining employment by the end of the four weeks, recipients are required to do volunteer work. Angela shared, "I ran out of job search time, and I had to volunteer, so there was a volunteer spot there at the Workforce Solutions, and I started volunteering." Barbara, Emily, and Helen also volunteered as part of their program participation requirements.

Angela discussed being sanctioned for non-participation. She said, "I was sanctioned one time and I can remember it. I was really upset about it. I think it

happened due to a miscommunication with my other case manager at the time." The miscommunication over weekly participation requirement with her case manager caused Angela to lose her benefits temporarily, but she noted she was "able to demonstrate" and get her benefits reinstated.

Deanna also discussed her experience of being denied benefits. She shared,

> I didn't know I was going to have to come into an office or do anything. The first letter I got in the mail said I was being sanctioned. And so, I called in and asked "Hey, what's going on with my case?" They said I failed to respond to the first letter. I said, "Did it come from Health and Human Services?" They said, "No, it came from us; it was yellow." I said, "Well, I didn't receive it." I was told that I could appeal the sanction.

When recipients are denied benefits, if they disagree with the reason they were denied, they have the right to appeal the decision. The appeals process requires the recipient to submit a form, attend a hearing, and meet with the appeals officer. Deanna shared that while she was upset about being denied, she did not file an appeal. She shared, "So I was just like, you know, I'm working, and it's gonna be cut off, so I'm just gonna leave it alone."

While being sanctioned and being denied benefits was upsetting for both participants, Angela used her cultural capital to educate others and dispel popular myths about the program. Angela stated,

> I clarified and I said, "Hey, it's not like that." "You know, it's there to help, but you have to do what you need to do in order to keep it. And if you don't, you

> don't get it," I said. So, I had to clarify because a lot of people— [they think they can do] nothing and they're getting SNAP benefits, they're getting TANF benefits. However, they have to do something to get those TANF and SNAP benefits.

In addition, Angela talked about today's use of social media perpetuate the popular stereotypes and myths about welfare recipients' being lazy and getting a hand out. While Gail's discussion of the public's perception of welfare centered on, at the time of the interview, a presidential candidate. She commented, "It's kinda like Donald Trump. He doesn't know what it's like to be at the bottom. He's had everything hand held—fed to him." Angela and Gail both continually find themselves confronted by and struggling to dispel the dominant stereotypes and stigmas related to welfare recipients.

Present experiences as a case manager. The experiences of being a case manager was shaped by participants building their social capital. Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources one gains from the relationships formed by groups. Thus, participants relied on their social capital and networks to move them from being a welfare recipient into a case manager's job. As they reflected on their journey, the participants discussed how their personal experiences served as a guide. Each participant discussed how they shared their own personal story and journey with their current customers. Angela reflected,

> Being a former client yourself and former Choices participant, it really helps. And it helps me understand that individual, and it helps me to understand how

> that individual feels. I've shared my stories a couple of times in our Choices job-readiness class.

As the facilitator of the Choices job-readiness class, Angela's job is to present customers with the program policies and requirements, yet she also has felt compelled to share her personal story. By sharing her story, she hoped to encourage and actively engage them in program participation. Barbara was also extremely open with her customers about being a former welfare recipient. She explained her primary goal is to help current recipients understand she was a recipient too but she used her social capital to improve her social status. Conversely, while Deanna noted, "I definitely sympathize with the customers because I know what it feels like to have to apply for these benefits," she does not share her story often.

Deanna holds a master's degree, and she feels sharing her story may discourage or intimidate some of her customers as they may not have attained the same level of education. As she explained,

> A lot of my customers haven't graduated high school or don't have a GED, don't have a strong work history, or just bounce around from small job to small job. So, I don't share it too often. Usually, I share it with someone who I feel may be at the same level I was, having to apply for benefits and they have a bachelor's, or have years of experience or they're seeking this high pay or they're looking to go into higher education. But for someone who didn't graduate high school, we're going to focus on GED classes, interview techniques, and creating a

> resume. So, I just don't want to feel like I'm bragging to them or that I'm above to them, so I kind of don't bring it up.

She also explained she does not have her degrees hanging up in her office either because she feels this may also intimidate her customers as well.

Although Deanna's educational attainment kept her from sharing her story, Emily does not let her education hold her back, and she shares her story with her customers. Emily stated,

> I feel like being a welfare recipient and letting them know this is where I came from, and this is where I'm at now, is going to motivate them and help them push forward in life without dwelling on the past. I try to share my story with everyone, because I want everyone to know that we're not just going to start out on top. Instead, we have to take baby steps to work our way up to where we want to be in life. I tell that to a lot of my customers, because I want them to understand that I'm just not coming from here, I came from the bottom and worked my way up. And I want them to feel like they can do it too.

Participants felt sharing their personal stories would be inspiring and motivating their customers.

The experience of being a former welfare recipient was also reflected in their case management styles. Participants relied on building trust, being sincere, and being an advocate for their customers as approaches to managing their caseloads. Emily noted the first thing she does with customers is begin building trust. She stated, "If you want me to trust you, it has to be a two-way street. If I trust you, I want you to trust me." However,

Emily wanted her customers to understand she also needed to be able to trust them. In this relationship, trust translates into each person believing the other person is reliable.

Cora shared when she felt her customers were being unfairly sanctioned due to not meeting the participation requirements, she was willing to advocate for them. She explained, "So I talked to her [the supervisor], like, I'm very adamant, like that's so unfair. I shouldn't have to sanction her because she was off for Christmas break when school was closed." As the participants reflected on their approaches to caseload management, they discussed how their relationships with their former case manager may have influenced their approach to case load management.

Relationships—Past and Present

Participants commented on the importance of building trust, having open communication, and the role of support in their past and present relationships. As a result of these relationships, some participants were encouraged to continue working as case managers while others were pushed into leaving case management.

Past relationships with former case manager. Due to the interweaving nature of the welfare system as a whole, it is not uncommon for a recipient to participate in multiple programs and have a different case manager for each program. Thus, participants shared their experiences in the relationships with their various Choices, HHSC, HUD, and WIC case managers.

Barbara, felt she had a good relationship with her Choices case manager and shared, "The case workers that I was assigned were actually really good case workers,

and they did a good job being personal and treating you like a real person, you know." She also defined what being treated like a person meant her. She explained,

> What I mean by treating me like a person is [not] being critical and telling [me] what I have to do. For example, [instead of] her saying, "This is what you have to do. You're going to do it, or else" … it was, "This is what you need to do if you want to keep your benefits. This is what you have to do to earn the benefits." It was more along the lines of there are options, and the options that you have are along these lines. And as long as you're participating within the guidelines we provide you, you should be okay.

Barbara noted being treated like a person and having options helped ease her culture shock and build her confidence. It also provided a very important open line of communication and social networking between her and her case manager that led to her volunteering at the Workforce center.

While Barbara described her good relationship with her Choices case manager (CCM), Frances described her CCM as being serious and "flat faced." She explained that during their initial meetings,

> There was no emotion. It was like, this is just my job. Give me your information so I can see the next person. There wasn't any connection until I said, "This is what I'm doing," and then she asked me what my major was.

Frances was receiving benefits while attending college, and it was not until her case manager asked about her major that they made a connection. She shared,

> So, when I told her, she stopped typing and said that she was really proud of me for trying to further my education and stuff. But she was really serious, real. Just to the point of creating a flat effect.

The brief connection revealed the more approachable side of her indifferent case manager. She also described how the relationships with her HHSC and HUD case managers made her feel. Like Barbara, she commented these workers treated her like a person. She explained,

> I was really grateful she [her HHSC case manager] took the time out to not look at me as just a SNAP [Supplement Nutrition and Assistance Program] recipient and just trying to work the system. She treated me like a person.

Emily, who was also attending school, received SNAP and Medicaid. Since her children were under the age of five, she was not required to participate in the Choices program. She described her relationship with her HHSC case manager:

> I only had an HHSC case manager because I was receiving food stamps and children's Medicaid at that time. And I really enjoyed her. She was an older woman; she was basically telling me the ins and outs of the program. She said, "You got to meet these requirements; you have to do this; you have to do that; you will probably have to look for full-time employment," so on and so forth.

Emily expressed true appreciation for the open communication and guidance she received on navigating the program from her HHSC case manager. The relationship between Emily and her case manager allowed her to build her social capital and network.

Deanna stated when she interacted with her HHSC case manager, it was a bad experience due to her being denied because of the miscalculation of her income. However, her interactions with her WIC case manager were "great." She noted this case manager provided her lots of support and guidance on breastfeeding.

Present relationships with coworkers. Participants also discussed their relationships with their coworkers in both a bad and good context and described how they often educate their coworkers about the population they serve. If coworkers expressed stereotypical views of their customers, participants felt compelled speak up and to defend them. The desire to combat perpetuating the stereotypes was drawn from their lived experiences as a welfare recipient.

For Angela, being a case manager for the last 12 years has empowered her to advocate on behalf of current recipients. She reflected,

> Seeing the clients with their babies, it just gives me flashbacks. I think that was me with my babies. My heart just pours out for those ladies because I know how it feels. I know they are hurting and I know they're embarrassed.

Because she is able to empathize with the customers, she often educates her coworkers on how to relate to their customers and humble themselves to work with them. She said,

> I find myself saying, "No, you shouldn't be like that." "You don't understand her; you have to build that rapport with that customer. They feel like you're superior and they're not going to open up to you. And they're not going to provide you with their information. You have to be approachable. You have to be able to relate with them on their level."

Aside from feeling sometimes like an outsider, Angela also described the levels of support and encouragement she received from her coworkers and supervisors. She also stated her coworkers viewed her as being a good case manager with a big heart. The view of Angela having a "big heart" may relate to her ability to empathize with her customers.

Angela's supervisor never lets her be too hard on herself when she feels she has failed a customer. She often feels as if she has failed a customer if they drop out of the system or get penalized for not participation. She shared, "When I felt like I failed somebody and was hard on myself, my supervisor would come and say, 'Hey stop and think about it. You did everything you could to help.'" Her supervisor always takes the time to point out all her hard work and everything she had done to help her customer to be successful despite his or her failure in the program.

Barbara shared she also she felt supported by her coworkers and supervisors. She referred to their willingness to help her when she was unable to make decisions on how to manage her caseload. Similarly, to Angela, she also educated her coworkers on the real struggles and challenges of being a recipient. She shared,

> There would be some discussion, and that was one of the more difficult things, because, you know, you run into different people with different attitudes. Some would say, "Oh, well they're just on Choices," or, "They're just on TANF; they have nothing but time." I would respond, "No, there really are things going on. You can't just expect somebody to desert their kids for three hours unless you're gonna help them with childcare."

She felt her coworkers were making an unfair assessment about how recipients manage their time or recognize the time commitments of taking care of their children.

Cora also found herself educating coworkers about being a welfare recipient and survivor of domestic violence. Being a survivor of domestic violence and sharing this aspect of her life with her coworkers was important; however, she stressed she did not want anyone to feel sorry for her. She explained,

> No one understands like, "Why don't you just leave?" I haven't really had disagreements with the other case managers, but I have said, "Can you imagine that? This person has isolated you from your family, from your friends. You have no one to go to. You've left three or four times now. Your family is over it. You have no other choices. You know, you don't understand what it's like. This person has psychological control over you." I get to educate them and help them understand because a lot of them are very wealthy people. They are wealthy people who got into social work because they wanted to change the world and they wanted to do this and that. I'd say that's great, but you don't get it. You don't understand. And then some of them say, "Help me understand. Help me get it." So, I'll just explain my life to them and say, don't feel sorry for me, please just understand it's not easy.

The continuous stress and anxiety of Cora having to educate her coworkers about domestic violence led her to contemplate a career change. She stated the conversations with her coworkers led to her feeling frustrated and jaded. During the second round of interviewing, Cora revealed she left her case management job. She went to work for the

school district feeling as if this work environment would better suit her. Cora stated, “I felt as if I was constantly having to defend myself and my position, so I made a career change.”

While Cora’s relationship with her coworkers was filled with tension and frustration to her personal experience, Helen described her coworkers as being outright disrespectful and rude. Helen shared that she felt ultimately her coworkers wanted to see her fail at the job she loved. Although she shared her distress with management, she stated the stress with coworkers started affecting her health and her family life. She reported her energy was low and sometimes she went home and cried from the stress. The stress of the friction between her and her coworkers led Helen to also leave her job. She is currently attending a master’s program at a local university.

Present relationship with customers. Participants consistently stated that customers on their caseloads held unrealistic expectations about how their case should be managed. Participants placed their customers in two categories: successful or challenging. Successful customers were those who followed the program rules, full participated, and focused on where they wanted to go in life. Frances worked with a man in the WIA Adult program in her county office and shared an example of a successful outcome in which the customer followed the rules:

> He actually followed the process to get into the WIA program and to go to truck driving school. Everything that I asked him to do and told him he needed to do to be successful, he did it because he wanted it.

Frances also attributed the client's success to her ability to work and listen to his needs. She noted, "Even though he's not open to case management with me, he knows that I'm here to assist him. I listen to what he wants as well, and that's why he continues to come back." For Frances, it was important to maintain a good relationship with her customer after they exited the program.

Emily considered her most challenging customer her most successful. She commented,

> I had this client, she was a single parent and she had two children, and she had an eighth-grade education. She was a domestic violence recipient, meaning that she was being abused by her spouse. And at the time, she was staying with her mother, because she had just got away from him. [Then] her mom died, so she had to move into a shelter with her kids. I feel like that was one of my hardest cases, because not only is she going through grief, she's also going through domestic violence, trying to get help with her children for childcare, and she was working full time. She was trying to also obtain a GED, because she knew she needed that to be able to move up the ladder at her job.

Emily went on to explain that she was dedicated to helping this customer, so she worked with her for a year and half. During that time, her client earned her GED, was able to secure her own transportation and apartment, and eventually remarried. Emily described her as being her "success story." Other participants also described similar successes with at least one customer on their case load.

They also described the expectations of and situations presented by her challenging customers. Frances stated some customers expected her to do everything for them. She shared,

> Sometimes I have customers that expect me to do everything for them. I mean everything. I've had customers who actually want me to apply for their jobs. I told them I cannot apply for your jobs, and I explain to them why.

These customers present the biggest challenge for her due to their perception that she does nothing while at work. She shared,

> Some people think I don't do anything but just sit here. And I've had people think that I'm just sitting behind the computer playing games. I explain to them, "I am working." They don't know that I do case management because they'll say, "Don't you get bored in here by yourself?"

The relationship the participant established and maintained with her customer influenced how much time and effort they invested in each customer. This investment in relationship building was directly reflected in their case management practices and their decisions to exercise their discretionary power.

Case Load Management and Discretionary Power

The practices associated with case management are structured and guided by program policy and requirements. The decisions made about case load management, for instance when deciding to sanction or exempt a customer, are guided by policy rules and guidelines. In making case load management decisions, participants described their use of discretionary power, or in other words, their flexibility with the rules.

Daily routine practices. Customers enter the Choices Program after being approved for TANF and/or SNAP benefits. Customers attend an employment planning session facilitated by case managers at the workforce center. Customers are provided with the program policies and requirements for participation and required to signed an employment. Helen described the process as follows:

> We pull them from the workforce orientation to go meet with the case manager and to complete their employment planning session. We have an action plan and create their IEP; it's the Individual Employment Plan.

The IEP is a contract between the case manager and the customer that outlines program requirements, participation, and penalties for non-participation. Once the paperwork is complete, most customers are assigned to a case manager and placed in job search activities for four weeks. At this point in the management process, case managers begin following a weekly structured schedule to track a customer's participation.

Most participants shared a similar version of the weekly schedule they follow when practicing case management and providing customers with support of services. Deanna, for example, described a typical routine:

> Mondays and Tuesdays are normally the busiest days for Choices staff. You get there; you have your customers, you have your supervised job search customers there; you have multiple individuals just coming in to turn [in] their work hours or job-searching hours. Then you have your days when you're supposed to enter your penalties, which are on Monday mornings, and there are always sanctions to be entered. Then on Tuesdays, we also have meetings with the project director

> and the managing director. Then we have a meeting with the Workforce Board to go over and look at each case individually.

Most participants agreed Wednesdays were spent contacting the customers who did not come in on Monday or Tuesday to turn in their paperwork. On Thursdays and Fridays, participants scheduled one on one meetings with customers, entered case notes, and job search hours. Those working in county offices described their weekly schedule as varied and sometimes hectic. For example, Gail and Frances stated managing multiple programs means time management is key. As Gail explained,

> I have SNAP, Choices, and WIOA programs. We also conduct unemployment meetings. I do everything with the resource room. I have to take people to do work keys for unemployment insurance. It's a lot, a lot.

Since she is the only case manager and the office manager, she works hard to keep a consistent weekly schedule that offers the same services on the same day each week. She strives to have as little disruption in her schedule as possible. For example, she shared,

> On Fridays, I do my resumes. I'm a time management person, and I try to be there for everybody, even though sometimes it's harder than the other times, especially like Wednesday morning. I always tell everybody, "If you need help, don't come in on Wednesday mornings because I'm doing a class, and I can't help you."

When customers initially enter, and begin participating in the program, the case managers begin building a relationship with them. Participants stated at this point in

their management practice, they begin to make decisions about how much time to invest in working with a customer. Cora explained,

> You have the ones who just don't care. And so, really, what I tell them is, "I'm going to give you what you give me. So, if you want to do it, I will spend hours on end with you if that's what you want." For the people who need emotional help, we'll sit and talk about it. We'll work through it; I'll refer you to people who you can talk to. So that's my approach to them and the people who just don't want to do it. I do my regular part. I'm still going to send you job searches. I'm still going to sit down with you every day. I'm still going to ask you to build a resume. But it's just, those [cases] usually take care of themselves because they say, "This is too much work and I'm not going do it." They either get sanctioned or move out of the system; they take care of themselves.

Based on the customer's willingness to engage in and fully participate in the program, case managers decide how much time to invest working with the customers.

Decisions. As Frances explained, the unwillingness of a customer to participate exemplifies their decision to be sanctioned. Frances said, "They decide that ... if they don't participate like they're supposed to, then they get sanctioned. So, that's why I said, I don't decide that. They decide that." In the process of deciding whether to sanction or exempt a customer, participants explained those decisions were guided by policy and monitored by their managers. As Barbara explained,

> Deciding whether or not they were exempt, the rules are pretty cut and dry on what is and what isn't okay. So, anything that's in a gray area usually goes to the

> supervisor and I'd say, "I think that they should be exempt because of this. I'm not really sure."

Barbara went on to define *gray area*:

> What I mean by gray area is the rules are generally cut and dry, but every once in a while, there's a gray area—something having to do with a medical condition and their doctor turned in a form, I think it's called an 1836, and it wasn't clear on whether or not they were actually unable to work.

So, gray areas are those cases in which the case manager has a hard time in determining whether a customer has broken the rules. When case managers find themselves in a gray area, most participants agreed that they defer to a supervisor for the final decision. The decision to exempt a customer is reported to the Health and Human Services Commission office (HHSC) and they are also required to document the reason for exemption. If the customer's need for an exemption fell outside the program guidelines, then some participants openly discussed their use of discretionary power in bending the rules.

Cora's decision to exercise her discretionary power on a case-by-case basis. She stated she will contact the customer to find out why they did not meet their participation requirements and then make her decision. She explained,

> So, if they provide me proof showing this actually happened, a letter saying they got evicted from their home, then I may be able to do something about it. So definitely, it's case by case, for sure, but with time you learn the program. I kind of just do my own thing. And there have been times when I should have

> sanctioned someone and I chose not to. And luckily, that particular case didn't get audited, and so it was a pass.

Cora, felt they knew the customer and had a good relationship with her; therefore, she chose not to sanction her. By "doing her own thing," Cora recognized if the case had been pulled for review, she would have been cited with a case error.

Deanna also discussed how she decided to use her discretionary power to choose to continue providing support of services, childcare, for a customer participating in the Choices program and explained how she documented it in the case notes. She shared her approach:

> If they're receiving childcare, the childcare rule says they have to do 30 hours a week to continue receiving childcare assistance. It can get sticky because if they turn in a week that's 25 hours and they've already worked it, I think, "If I deny their childcare, how can they continue to work and work more hours?" It's tricky there, but what we have to do is remind them this is only 25 hours and keep in mind it has to be 30 hours. So, let's make a plan that next week you work 35 hours. But we have to verbally go over that with the customer. We do have leeway to kind of do that. We have to be careful how we word it in our case notes; we can't say that they're going to make it up because you can't make up something from the past. So, we say they're going to do an additional five hours, ten hours, or whatever. If they can't work additional hours, we might have to put in the notes, "I counseled the customer on making sure that they do 30 hours and let them know at the end of the month, this is where we need to be. So, if you can

> pick up some more shifts or whatever, let's try to do that." For the most part, I'm not going to deny childcare for anybody. I know losing their childcare could result in them losing their job, and then they're going to be unemployed. And that's not the goal.

Furthermore, Deanna uses her discretionary power to seemingly punish customers she perceives as rude and non-compliant. As an example, she shared the following:

> I do have a customer who's not very friendly and always has an attitude. I called her and said, "Hey, I want to remind you your timesheets are due for this week. Please turn them in on Friday by four." If she doesn't, I'll send out a notice of penalty letter giving her another appointment date. At that time, I do send in a request to end her childcare.

While the other participants discussed their approach to the use of discretionary power as the flexibility found in the rules when practicing case management. Participants exercised this flexibility while working with customers, so the customer could meet their family obligations and secure employment. Helen explained,

> Sure. I always really give them good cause for the week, that's what we call it. As long as they contact me and they communicate with me and they tell me what's the reason, I really try to avoid sanctioning them as much as I can. Sanctions count as a negative toward the center's performance and the customers. The system has this rule that if a customer gets sanctioned with TANF, they lose their all benefits with TANF, SNAP, and Medicaid. They lose

everything, including childcare and transportation assistance. So, that's a big loss for them and we tell them that up front.

Most participants expressed reluctance to discuss their use of discretionary power when making case load management decisions. They often cited the program rules as being "cut and dry" and did not feel comfortable in using a flexible approach in making difficult case management decisions. Instead, participants exercised their power in making the decision on how much time to invest in a customer who was either deemed willing or unwilling to participate in the program.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the discretionary power and personal experiences of case managers, who are former welfare recipients, influenced their case load management. This study sought to understand how the learning process, personal experiences, and the ability to use discretionary power inform and influence caseload management decisions. The data revealed the use of discretionary power and personal experience inform caseload management decisions.

Three major themes emerged from the data. These themes include learning, experiences and relationships, and case management. The major themes also included subthemes. Learning included the subthemes related to the four stages former welfare recipients go through to learn how to be a case manager: (a) acquiring knowledge about case management through book learning, (b) observing more experienced and learning by job shadowing, (c) asking questions and seeking answers to aid in managing their own caseload, and (d) learning about policy changes through case reviews. The

influences of experiences and discretionary power in making case load management decisions were reflected in the participants' past relationship with their former case manager and in current relationships with coworkers and customers. Caseload management and the use of discretionary power are influenced by the gray areas found in the daily routine case management practices.

All of the themes overlap and intertwine to provide insight into what influences and informs caseload management decisions. Although the discussion on discretionary power was limited to two participants, all participants discussed how their past experiences and relationships informed their case management practices as well as their decisions.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The welfare case manager profession, according to Schram and Silverman (2012), no longer requires a skilled individual. Welfare agencies are now hiring deskilled, former welfare recipients to perform case management services. This shift enables agencies to lower labor cost and provide a friendlier face for the welfare reform. Although there are multiple areas of scholarship which address the issues surrounding welfare, these areas are often fragmented and focused on specific aspects of welfare policy, characteristics of welfare recipients, and the case management profession. There seems to be little or no literature which focuses the intersection being a welfare recipient and case manager.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the discretionary power and personal experiences of case managers, who are former welfare recipients, influenced their case load management. Specifically, I sought to understand the process of transitioning into case management and the stages in which former welfare recipients learn case management practices and discretionary power. To facilitate the investigative nature of this study and achieve the purpose of this study, I applied qualitative methodology using a conceptual framework to investigate the phenomenon.

The conceptual framework selected for this study incorporated the following bodies of literature: (a) welfare to work, (b) SLBs, (c) observation learning, and (d) insider/outsider perspective. In this study, I investigated and explored the personal experiences of former welfare recipients who transitioned into case management

position at Workforce centers. The study aimed to answer the following three research questions:

1. How do former welfare recipients learn to become case managers?
2. How do case manager's personal experiences as a former welfare recipient inform decisions about caseload management?
3. How does a case manager's use of discretionary power inform decisions about caseload management?

After consulting with a program director with one of the local workforce boards, I chose four WDB areas out of the 28 located in Texas. She provided me with the board areas she believed would contain the individuals that would meet my participant criteria. I elected to recruit participants in the Brazos Valley, Heart of Texas, Rural Capital, and Gulf Coast WDB areas. Twelve participants were recruited and eight agreed to participate in this study. The participants included five African American women, one White, one Hispanic, and one Middle Eastern woman. They ranged in age from 27-38 years and had 2.5-12 years of experience as case managers. At the conclusion of the study, four of the participants continued to work as case managers, two participants transferred to other positions within the Workforce centers, and two participants left their centers and secured jobs in other industries.

Data collection consisted of two interviews, one face-to-face and the second via email and phone. The first interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes and the second interview lasted 15 to 30 minutes. Interviews were transcribed, unitized, and coded. The thick,

rich, and descriptive data revealed their learning process, the influence of experiences and relationships, and routine case load management.

Overall, there were three themes and multiple subthemes emerged from the data. Learning to become case managers, the first theme, consisted of four stages: (a) book learning, (b) job shadowing, (c) questions and answer, and (d) case review. The second theme, experiences and relationships in the past and present, consisted of four subthemes: (a) past experiences with former recipients, (b) present experiences with other case managers, (c) past relationships with former case managers, and (d) present relationships with current customers. The final theme, routine caseload management, contained two subthemes related to daily practices and decisions.

The first theme revealed how new case managers learn to become case managers and how they learn about case management practices. The second theme uncovered how the past experiences and relationships of former welfare recipients influence the current relationships these case managers maintain with their customers and coworkers. The third theme identified the routine practices of caseload management and influences on case management decisions. Unequivocally, the point at which these three themes intersect divulges how personal experiences and discretion influence the practice of case management and decision making.

Discussion

Researchers suggest welfare case management is a highly standardized and deskilled profession that focuses on monitoring and disciplining recipients who do not comply with the rules (Ridzi, 2009; Schram & Silverman, 2012). Thus, contracting

agencies rely on hiring this type of staff as a means to lower operating cost and to achieve performance goals. Schram and Silverman (2012) also noted performance goals are achieved by motivating recipients to move off welfare and into employment. Therefore, the new labor force of case managers has been formulated to resemble a representative bureaucracy.

Schram and Silverman explained this type of bureaucracy draws on the population it serves, thus providing a workforce that is familiar and sensitive to unique needs, struggles, and concerns of the community. From an outsider perspective, this philosophy is logical since it follows the recovery model. Schram and Silverman explained the recovery model is based on the 12-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous and drug treatment programs rely on recovering clients to support others in overcoming their addictions.

Although the staffing patterns may seem logical and are representative of the population being served, this philosophy does not account for how case managers learn to apply the rules or make decisions when practicing case management. For participants in this study, case management practices were often confusing and frustrating and were used as a form of punishment for not meeting performance goals. Thus, learning case management was a dominant theme in this study.

Bandura (1986) stated a person learns new information from observing a model. However, the learner is not simply imitating or mimicking the model because learning is largely an information-processing activity governed by four processes. Participants also noted four similar processes in learning case management practices. As participants

learned about case management, they also learned how to exercise their discretionary power.

According to Lipsky (2010), although a welfare case manager's discretionary power is restricted by the rules and monitored by supervisors, they still exercise discretion in providing recipients access to benefits and support services. Participants were reluctant to discuss their use of discretionary power in adapting the program requirements to meet the needs of their participants. Instead, they discussed exercising their discretionary power in their professional relationships with customers.

Participants explained they used their discretion to determine how much of their time to invest in working with a customer. Customers who invested time complying with program requirements received more attention, and those who did not comply fully received less time and attention. This commitment or lack of a commitment to work together formed the basis of the relationships between participants and their customers. These relationships were influenced by participants' experiences of being a former recipient and their past relationships with their previous case manager.

In discussing the themes of relationships and experiences, participants disclosed how they continuously moved between being an insider and an outsider. Their status shifted, as evidenced by their reflections on how they educated their families, friends, customers, and coworkers about being a welfare recipient. Throughout the study, the theme of learning remained strong as participants learned to become insiders while practicing case management and outsiders while helping others learn about the complex nature of the welfare system.

The Findings

The review of the current literature reveals researchers have investigated the complexities of the welfare system and recipients. More recently, researchers have begun building and expanding on earlier research pertaining to welfare case managers' roles, identities, and case management practices. By tracing the evolution of the welfare case management profession, researchers investigated the bureaucrat phenomena and the influence of individual and group-based social experiences.

In 1981, Lipsky introduced the concept of street-level bureaucrats, and Watkins-Hayes (2009a) further narrowed this concept to include the personal experiences of case managers, and she created the framework of situational bureaucrats. Watkins-Hayes examined the ways in which caseworkers created their identities amid conflicting job demand and balancing the needs of customers while achieving program performance goals. She explained welfare case managers construct a professional identity based on individual and group-based social experiences.

In 2012, Schram and Silverman revisited this concept when the case management labor force changed to employ deskilled, former welfare recipients. The researchers also noted this change transformed case managers into representative bureaucrats. Representative bureaucrats understand the unique needs and struggles of the recipients because they have had similar experiences. While all of these previous researchers noted overall personal experiences influence how individuals approach case management, they did not investigate the unique experiences of former welfare recipients as case managers.

This research contributes to and expands on this body of literature by examining how the personal experiences of being a former welfare recipient influence caseload management. It also investigated the influence of discretionary power in caseload management. The participants' narratives illustrate learning to become case managers, exercising discretion, and being influenced by past and present relationships and experiences converge to inform caseload management practices and decisions. Their narratives also demonstrate they are not deskilled workers; instead they are workers who bring a unique set of life experiences and tacit knowledge needed to work with welfare recipients.

Research Question 1

The first research question asked the following: "How do former welfare recipients learn to become case managers?" The findings of this study indicate there are four stages associated with learning to become a case manager. Through the stages of learning, new case managers are socialized into their new roles within the welfare system. Learning to become a case manager occurs in formal and non-formal educational or training sessions. According to Merriam, Caffarell, and Baumgartner (2007), formal education is highly institutionalized and bureaucratic, while, non-formal education occurs outside formal institutions and is short-term and local or community-based.

For case managers, formal trainings are normally conducted by the governing state agency and limited to training case managers on the computer system and data entry. Primarily, the socialization process and stages of learning occur simultaneously in

non-formal trainings held in the local office. Even though the environment is non-formal, the socialization and learning are invaluable in helping the case manager achieve performance goals and helping the customer work toward self-sufficiency.

In the first stage, book learning, a case manager begins learning by reading and memorizing program and policy information in the *Choices Guide*. The manual, referenced by the participants, provides the background information on the Choices program and definitions of Choices terms; it also covers areas of the governing board, general policy information on the Choices program, sanctions, support of services, and case management processes. The manual also describes case management as being the "organization and coordination of formal or informal activities, services, and support. It is designed to help individuals become employed and self-supporting through participation in Choices services" (Texas Workforce Commission, 2016, p. 31).

As newcomers to the workforce centers, the participants described book learning as overwhelming and frustrating. Although the participants were hired for their familiarity with the welfare system, they lacked the basic policy knowledge to understand the complicated terminology and application of the program policies and requirements. Participants were expected to simply memorize, recall, and apply the information found in the Choices Manual. However rote learning, as indicated by participants, was not an effective technique to understanding and knowing how to apply the policy rules.

For case managers, the rules governing customer participation or non-participation become the statute that most follow when deciding on participation

requirements, what support services to provide, or when sanctioning customers. Eventually, case managers are paired with more experienced case managers to learn in greater detail the procedures of case management practices. Thus, case managers move from book learning to job shadowing, the second stage of learning, they observe and participate in peer learning with their coworkers to gain role clarity.

Bauer et al. (2007) noted a newcomer's role clarity is garnered through time management, learning, and understanding how to perform and prioritize a task. By observing and through peering learning, new case managers learn implement policies and procedures, provide support services, and sanction customers for non-participation. Boud, Cohen, and Sampson (1999) noted peer learning is a strategy in which individuals learn with and from each other without the intervention of an instructor.

Angela indicated she learned about the program procedures from observing and being taught by her coworkers. She noted she did not receive formal training on how to fill out individual employment plans (IEPs). Instead, other case managers taught her how to determine participation begin and end dates, set customer goals, and access the customer's barriers. By sharing knowledge, Boud et al (1999) suggested they work collaboratively and collectively to deepen a new case managers' knowledge of policy and procedures. Once case managers passed through the job shadowing stage, they were assigned their own caseloads to manage.

Although questions were asked and answered in the first and second stages of learning, the third stage, questions and answers, is where the questions intensify and are directly related to a specific customer's case and to possibly gray areas of policy. For

case managers, this stage is directly linked to informal learning in the workplace. Manuti, Pastore, Scardigno, Giancaspro, and Moricano (2015) and Marsick and Watkins (2001) explained informal learning is characterized by being integrated with daily routines and linked to the learning of others.

Case managers often drew upon the previous learning and multiple experiences of their coworkers to strategize how to address the unique needs and struggles of some customers. Angela discussed how she and the other case managers would meet to discuss their tough cases. Collaboratively, they shared knowledge, translated, and integrated what they had learned into a daily or weekly routine and linked it to what others had learned in their management of difficult cases.

Even though case managers frequently relied on each other to informally learn about case management, they noted important policy changes or participation requirements were often missing from their informal learning sessions. They also noted the information on these important changes were often not disseminated to all by center managers. By not disseminating policy changes, administrators give rise to the anxiety and frustration created in the next stage of learning.

The last stage of learning, case review, often created frustration and anxiety for case managers as they learn about policy and procedural changes during the process. These learners, according to Dirkx (2008), experienced emotions arising from or evoked by the learning environment. This stage of learning is tied to performance goals and meeting those goals. Dirkx (2008) also suggested learning related emotions are reflective of individual experiencing humiliation by persons in authority. While case

managers were not humiliated by administrators, the negative results of a review may translate into the loss of a raise in pays or center funding. Cora openly discussed how not meeting performance goals due to case errors negatively affected her chances of receiving a pay raise.

Case reviews also serve as a measure to determine if local WDBAs will collectively achieve the goals set by federal policy. Thus, case managers are required to enter customer participation hours, job placements, good cause exemptions, penalties, and case notes in a timely manner. Overall, the remaining participants discussed the tensions case reviews between case managers and supervisors due to a lack of communication and dissemination of changes in policy.

The findings demonstrate former welfare recipients informally learn to become case managers through four stages of non-formal training sessions. The findings also revealed two notable barriers or problems in the learning process in the book learning and case review stages. While in the book learning stage, former welfare recipients encounter frustration and feeling overwhelmed by having to learn the language of case management. As former welfare recipients, administrators believe these individuals already know the language and do not need formal training on the context of the terms.

In the case review stage, again case managers expressed frustration and anxiety in the problem with or lack of communication from administrators in disseminating rule and policy changes. Although case managers frequently share knowledge about case management practices, administrators are the gate keepers of the most important knowledge on program policy. Based on the findings and my own experiences as a

former welfare recipient and case manager, I concluded the stages in learning, socialization, and the barriers to learning for case managers have remained consistent and virtually unchanged over the years.

As the researcher, I note this may be the cause for the high turnover rate in these offices. Unexpectedly, two participants transferred from case manager positions to other parts of the workforce center, and three participants completely left the agency shortly after this study. This unexpected finding is an outcome supported by Bauer et al.'s (2007) scholarship on newcomer adjustment and socialization in the workplace. The researchers noted outcomes such as performance, job satisfaction, intentions to remain, and turnover are directly linked to the socialization of newcomers in the organizations.

Some managers were unable to reach full role clarity due to a perceived lack of communication and dissemination of rule changes during the final stage of learning. The lack of communication may have resulted in the turnover in staff. However, Cora's reason for exiting was directly linked to performance issues resulting from not meeting performance goals, which led to her not receiving a pay raise. For those case managers who remained, their intentions were not explicitly apparent or disclosed.

Research Questions 2 and 3

The second research question asked, "How do a case manager's personal experiences as a former welfare recipient inform decisions about caseload management?", and the third research question asked, "How does a case manager's use of discretionary power inform decisions about caseload management?" The findings from the study revealed a deep interconnection between the influence of experiences and

relationships on the use of discretionary power in making decisions about caseload management. As Morgen et al. (2013) noted, case managers conduct standardized, routine daily practices and make decisions are informed and guided by their past relationships and experiences (see Figure 2).

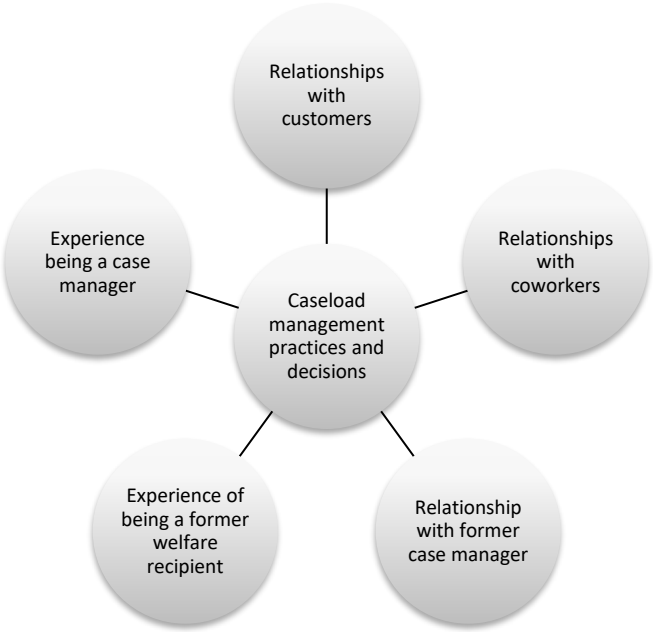

Figure 2. The influence of experience and relationships on caseload management decisions and practices

Case managers used their discretionary power and were informed by the past relationship with their case manager when determining the allocation of time spent with each customer. Initially, when customers enter the programs at the centers, case managers decide whether they feel the customer is invested in following the participation guidelines. For example, as Cora shared, “You have customers who just

don't care. And so, really, what I tell them is 'I'm going to give you what you give me.'" Specifically, Cora was referring to the amount of time a customer may spend searching for employment or attending mandatory meetings.

In addition to investing time with customers who are complying with program requirements, Gail spoke about assisting customers to complete other types of applications. Gail shared, "I also help my customers fill out scholarship applications, help them apply for school, fill out the FSFA, or even their Food Stamp applications." She was willing to invest in helping customers outside of the time she allocated to manage their cases.

For these case managers, exercising their discretionary power to invest time in working with customers was important in helping them manage their work schedule and manage their cases. The relationship the case manager cultivated with customers also determined whether they used discretion in adapting the rules in instances of non-participation to avoid sanctions. Weissert (1994) argued discretion is difficult to measure because the agency's rules and policy requirements compel street bureaucrats to meet performance measures. The use of discretionary power in adapting policy rules and requirements to meet the needs of participants was not openly discussed by participants. Instead, they discussed using cautionary discretionary power to adapt the program rules.

Participants stated the cautionary use of discretionary power meant they were willing to work with customers whom they trusted to complete their hours of participation. Frances discussed *workarounds*, which were intended to help customers instead of punishing them for being short on their participation hours. She defined a

workaround as a practice used to avoid or stall the decision to sanction. Frances felt it was unfair to punish her customers for missing a few hours of participation. She ensures her case notes reflect the discussion and agreement made with her customer to add those missed hours to the next week's participation. While she expressed a willingness to work around the Choices rules, she noted some of the other programs were not as flexible.

Case managers classified customers as either willing or unwilling to stay fully engaged and participate in the program. Those willing to participate benefited from the discretionary power their case manager used to make decisions about their cases. Case managers relied on their past experiences and knowledge about policy to guide the use of their discretionary power.

May and Winter (2009) and Pearson (2007) suggested case managers who are former welfare recipients have prior knowledge of policy influences their attitudes about policies. They also noted case management decisions are based on personal beliefs or prior experiences of case managers. Case managers discussed how their prior experiences as welfare recipients, along with their relationship with their former case manager, influenced their experiences as case managers. The former case managers discussed what they knew about policy, shared their personal story, and highlighted the routine of case management and the decision-making process for the recipient turned manager.

Case management practices and decisions are guided by one's previous relationships and experiences. Watkins-Hayes (2009a) suggested these experiences are tied to individual and group-based personal interactions. Case managers frequently

shared their personal journeys from welfare to work with their customers in both individual and group interactions. By sharing their personal stories, case managers hoped to inspire and motivate their customer. Motivating and inspiring customers, while not openly discussed, was intended to engage customers in the job search process and help case managers achieve performance goals.

Meyers et al. (1998) noted case managers are responsible for disseminating and interpreting policy procedures and participation requirements for customers. As welfare reform was influenced by neoliberalism, the day to day operations of welfare programs were dismantled and restructured to ensure consistency in the application of the rules. Thus, case management practices and decision-making processes are highly standardized and routine. Most offices followed the same weekly schedule in processing paperwork and conducting meetings.

Even though most case managers followed the same daily routine, there was some variation between the larger (main) and smaller (county) offices. In county offices, orientation meetings were conducted as needed, while the larger offices had specific dates and times set aside to conduct orientation. Table 5 outlines the standard routine practices found across both types of offices.

Table 5

Standardized Daily Routine Practices

Day	Routine Practice
Monday	Customers turn in job search sheet, volunteer time sheets, check stubs, or other paper work needed to document full participation.
Tuesday	Meetings conducted: Workforce Orientation, Employment Planning Sessions, Unemployment Insurance Orientation, and SNAP Orientation.
Wednesday	Meetings with customers to discuss participation, support of services, or case changes.
Thursday	Contacting customers about participation issues and data entry of participation hours.
Friday	Issuing sanctions to reduce TANF and food stamp benefits and requesting the discontinuation for support of services, specifically child care.

These daily routine practices represent the myriad of complex interactions between case managers and customers. It also reveals the level influence neoliberalism has on case managers' policing the behaviors of recipients as they were compelled to institute more frequent and intensive case monitoring practices (Brodkin and Marston, 2013). Case management practices are so intense that case managers also find themselves having their behaviors policed by the state. The standardized list of daily routines also serves to track and control the work of the case managers.

While street-level organizations, such as workforce centers, were instructed by to revamp welfare programs to better police recipients; they also created work routines that rewarded case managers for compliance and punished those who are defiant. Pearson (2007) noted these carefully controlled interactions also dictate how case managers interpret, enact, bend, or tighten policies at the street-level. As street-level bureaucrats, their behavior is influenced by their own knowledge and attitudes about policy, work,

and their clients (May and Winter, 2009). Therefore, as case managers disseminate the rules, they reflect on and may share their story to influence a customer's decision meet to participate requirements or leave services to enter the workforce.

Cora shares her personal story when her customers are feeling down and are on the brink of giving up. She shares with her customers that she is a single mother who misses work when her son is sick and who struggles financially. Case managers frequently cited their present and past experiences and to demonstrate how they affected their actions in managing their caseloads and making decisions.

Barbara stated customers who are perceived as unwilling to participate are self-selected to be penalized. Self-selecting a penalty makes it easy for case managers to issue the penalty that falls within the black and white guidelines of policy. However, when deciding to penalize customers whose circumstances fell into gray areas of policy, case managers relied on personal experiences, the relationships with their former case manager, co-workers, and their customers.

In addition, their prior relationship with their own case manager influenced how some of them practiced routine case management. They stressed the importance of communication between themselves and their customers. Communications became a salient part of the daily case management routine for Angela, Frances, and Deanna. For example, all three experienced a lack of communication with their case manager that resulted in their benefits being denied. Thus, they often exceeded the office's obligation to contact customers and relied on the more experienced workers for guidance.

Case managers participate in team meetings or consult with others outside their offices to determine how to balance policy with the personal situation of customers to avoid penalizing them. As Bok (2004) stated, the work-first philosophy is predicated on the belief that being placed immediately into employment leads to self-sufficiency. Case managers who are former aid recipients understand their customers are faced with personal challenges and barriers which directly impact the journey to self-sufficiency.

By understanding the unique challenges and barriers facing their customers, case manager participants sometimes found themselves feeling like outsiders in the relationships with their coworkers. Hellawell (2006) and Naples (2003) discussed the feelings of "otherness" that can arise in a community through social interactions. The social interactions in the office between case managers were not limited in context to the mechanics of learning case management or making decisions. Instead, case managers found themselves defending the behaviors of their customers as their coworkers recited the popular stigmas and stereotypes found in the literature.

Bruster (2009) noted the stigmas and stereotypes associated with welfare recipients may impact a recipient's journey to self-sufficiency. In seeking to educate their coworkers on the realities of and dispel the myths of being a welfare recipient, participants reflected on their own feeling of shame. As Cora reflected on her own experience, she explained not all her coworkers understood or were receptive to her story. She stated she felt as if she were continually defending herself, and the stress of having to do so left her contemplating a career change.

Helen also discussed similar issues with her coworkers. The inability to resolve their outsider status led Helen and Cora to leave their jobs. Edmonds-Cady (2012) acknowledged the movement between the insider-outsider statuses is fluid. Yet, Helen and Cora experienced an overwhelming disruption between the two statuses, and being an outsider far outweighed their insider status.

These case managers in this study were hired by a system that viewed them as insiders to the welfare system. They learned about case management in stages were both rewarding and challenging. Combined with what they learned about case management, they relied on their personal experience and relationships to guide their case management practices, use of discretionary power, and decision-making process. For a couple of them, the stigma of being an outsider was difficult to overcome and led to them leaving case management.

Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and the literature comprising the conceptual framework, the following sections will discuss the implications and recommendations for theory, field of practice, and policy.

Theory

The theories surrounding the bureaucrat phenomenon have contributed to the literature on understanding how case managers work to implement policy and procedures. Lipsky (2010) began researching and exploring the concept of discretionary power used by public servants in the late 1970s and solidified the concept in the mid-1980s with his scholarship on the street-level bureaucrat. More recent researchers, such

as Watkins-Hayes (2009a) and Schram and Silverman (2012), applied Lipsky's broad theory to defining street-level bureaucrat in the context of welfare system.

Watkins-Hayes (2009a) suggested street-level bureaucrats conduct welfare work using a notion of situated subjectivity. By integrating the situated subjectivity with the concept of street-level bureaucrats, Watkins-Hayes expanded the concept to situational bureaucrats. From this expansion, Schram and Silverman (2012) noted a change in the staff patterns in most welfare offices that contributed to the further evolution of street-level bureaucrats. They determined the welfare bureaucracy draws on the population it serves to provide a workforce that is familiar and sensitive to unique needs, struggles, and concerns of said population.

The findings from this study support Schram and Silverman's (2012) theory because the participants indicated they relied on their own previous experiences to guide their work, even within the framework of strict policy rules and guidelines. The implications of hiring a representative bureaucrat, a former welfare recipient, may create opportunities for welfare offices to achieve performance goals and possibly close the revolving door in welfare services. Unfortunately, there are few empirical studies found within the literature on how deskilling the case management workforce has impacted the performances of welfare offices. In addition, there was no research that documents whether these case managers better achieve performance goals or more effectively help current recipients gain self-sufficiency and remain out of the welfare system.

Welfare Policy

Much of the literature on welfare reform focuses on federal, state, and local governments' implementation of policy, the discretionary actions of case managers, and barriers faced by welfare recipients. Since the representative bureaucracy is comprised of former welfare recipients, the consideration of the education barrier rises to the top. Alfred (2005) and Madsen (2003) noted access to education for welfare recipients is key to moving out of poverty and the welfare system. In addition, Hanushek and Wobman (2010) stated education may lead to long-term self-sufficiency; however, policymakers continue to promote the work-first philosophy.

The implications for welfare policy include changing from a work-first philosophy to an education and work philosophy. One unintended finding from this study revealed the recipients being hired may not be a realistic representation of the population they serve. In this study, five of the participants hold at least a bachelor's degree, and three indicated they have some college. Hyer (2015) reported in means-tested programs of welfare recipients that 37.3% of the participants did not graduate from high school, 21.6% did graduate from high school, and 9.6% of these individuals received one or more years of college. The largest portion of the population, 37.3%, did not graduate from high school, yet it appears the individuals being hired are from the smallest portion of the overall population. Thus, 37.3% of the potential case manager labor force is not being considered for the job due to their lack of higher education. Welfare recipients are limited in their access to educational activities because policymakers place a higher value on work activities. Expanding the allowable activities

under welfare policy to include education may lead to hiring realistic, representative bureaucrats and may also contribute to lower poverty, lower public health and welfare cost, and increased tax receipts. These benefits may quiet possibly impact the economic security and success of future generations.

Field of Case Management Practice

Other than researchers noting the job requirements for being a case manager have changed, there has been little research on the training or efforts to retain case managers. The implication for the field of case management practices in Texas includes re-examining the training programs relied on to train and retain case managers. This study's findings conclude the non-formal training procedures need to be redesigned based on the principles of adult learning.

These are straightforward, intuitive principles that, when combined with thoughtful planning, engage and respect an adult learner's needs. The current training program's learning activities are mismatched with the learning styles of the case managers, lack respect for their previous experience, and limit their ability to actively be involved in the learning process. This conclusion is drawn directly from the expressed concerns, frustration, and feelings of being overwhelmed in participants' discussions on the disconnect between the stages of learning. Better training practices may also increase role clarity, aid in the dissemination of rule changes, decrease the risk of center funding cuts, and lower the turnover rate.

Recommendations for Future Research

By investigating how former welfare recipients turned case managers learn case management practices and uncovering the influence of discretionary power, this research has uncovered gaps in the literature. As indicated earlier, the case management profession has changed from requiring skilled to deskilled workers. This shift in practice necessitates a new approach be implemented, and the recommendations highlighted below can encourage a smooth transition.

The first recommendation is for training policy to provide opportunities for case managers to enhance their skills and knowledge to effectively deal with and identify customers with mental health, drug, or alcohol abuse concerns and identify victims of domestic abuse or other hidden barriers. The current literature addresses the barriers welfare recipients may encounter; however, it does not address the role of the case manager in identifying these barriers.

The second recommendation addresses the practice of training case managers. Bryan, Kreuter, and Brownson (2009) noted programs and practitioners benefit from training designed to enhance adult learning. By using the principles of adult learning, Workforce centers could plan and deliver training consistently across centers. The stages of learnings described in this study may influence the overall training design. For example, if trainers combined the book learning, job shadowing, and question and answer stages, case managers would learn to implement policy while practicing case management under the guidance of a more experienced case manager.

The third recommendation for research is to investigate the effectiveness of hiring welfare recipients as case managers and the quality of services they provide customers. Danielson and Klerman (2007) indicated that over a 10-year period, the number of those receiving welfare declined by over half after the implementation of welfare reform. The researchers cited stricter policies on, for example, time limits and sanctions as prompting participants to leave the welfare system. This drop in the number of recipients necessitates an investigation in the effectiveness and quality of case management services being provided by representative bureaucrats.

The fourth recommendation for research is for a comparative study on former welfare recipients and non-former welfare recipient case managers that investigates the tension between the experiences and backgrounds of the case manager. In this study, the tension was significant enough to cause some of the case managers to leave their jobs, and a comparative study may provide insight into strategies on creating a more inclusive work environment.

Conclusion

This study opens with a prologue that presents my reflection and documentation of my personal experiences as a former welfare recipient and former case manager. In Chapter 1, I presented the background of the problem, the purpose of this study, the conceptual framework, and the guiding research questions.

I provided a review of the literature in Chapter 2. I reviewed four bodies of literature which influence this study: (a) welfare to work, (b) street-level bureaucrats, (c) observation learning and newcomer socialization, and (d) insider/outsider perspective.

The literature on welfare to work provided the background information on welfare recipients and their barriers to work. Lipsky's (1981, 2010) theory on street-level bureaucracy explained the use of discretionary power by street-level bureaucrats. Bandura's (1986) observational learning theory was used to help identify the stages in which case managers learn about case management practices and their discretionary power. The literature on newcomer socialization in the workplace underscored (a) the importance of how new employees are socialized to understand their role in the organization, (b) learning the task associated with their job, and (c) their relationships with their coworkers. The insider-outsider perspective provided the lens to examine the fluidity of both statuses as experienced by case managers.

In Chapter 3, I described the methodology used in this study. I included descriptions and profiles of the study's participants, data collection methods, and the data analysis process. Chapter 4 followed with a presentation of the findings. The three major themes were (a) learning to become a case manager, (b) experiences and relationships—past and present, and (c) the routine of case management. Chapter 5 concluded with a discussion of the findings, implications, and recommendations for future research.

The continual streamlining of the case management profession to meet the unique needs of the population it serves has changed who sits on the other of the desk. Welfare recipients are increasingly finding themselves eligible for these deskilled case manager positions. However, the hiring, training, and retaining processes for case managers is created to attract case managers of particular levels of education and

household incomes. In order to change the welfare system and make it a temporary safety-net for those in need, welfare policy needs to be redesigned holistically. By redesigning welfare policy, policymakers have the opportunity to replace the myth of the welfare queen with a more representative face of those in need.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Email subject line: Research Study Participation Invitation

Hello,

My name is Michelle Johnson. I would like to invite you to take part in a research study being conducted by myself and Dr. Mary V. Alfred from the Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development at Texas A&M University.

Study title
"From Former Welfare Recipient to Frontline Worker: The influences of discretionary power and personal experiences" The purpose of this study is to investigate how case managers', who are former welfare recipients, discretionary power and personal experiences influence caseload management.

Participants Need
We are currently seeking 8-10 participants for this study. This study is open to women who have at least two years' service as a case manager and received welfare benefits (e.g. TANF, Medicaid, and food stamps) after 1996 for at least two years.

Time commitment
Two interviews, the first interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes and the second interview 30-60 minutes. Participation involves being interviewed face to face for the first interview by the study's researchers. Your participation is completely voluntary.

If you would like to participate in this study or have questions, please contact Michelle A. Johnson at 979-218-1682 or email michellejohn@tamu.edu.

Thank you for considering this research opportunity!

IRB NUMBER: IRB2016-0216D
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 04/28/2016
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 04/15/201

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT PHONE SCRIPT

Hello, my name is Michelle Johnson and I am a doctoral candidate at TAMU. I would like to invite you to take part in a research study being conducted by myself and Dr. Mary V. Alfred from the Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development.

The title of our study is…
"From Former Welfare Recipient to Frontline Worker: The influences of discretionary power and personal experiences". The purpose of this study is to investigate how case managers', who are former welfare recipients, discretionary power and personal experiences influence caseload management.

Participants Need
We are currently seeking 8-10 participants for this study. This study is open to women who have at least two years' service as a case manager and received welfare benefits (e.g. TANF, Medicaid, and food stamps) after 1996 for at least two years.

Time commitment
We would like for you to participate in two interviews, the first interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes and the second interview 30-60 minutes. Participation involves being interviewed face to face for the first interview by the study's researchers.

Your participation is completely voluntary.

- For participants who agree over the phone: Let's schedule a date and time for our first interview. I will contact you again the day prior to the interview to confirm the date, time, and location of our meeting.

- For potential participants who want to think about participants: If you would like to participate in this study or have questions, please contact Michelle A. Johnson at 979-218-1682 or email michellejohn@tamu.edu.

Thank you for considering this research opportunity!

IRB NUMBER: IRB2016-0216D
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 04/28/2016
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APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

First Interview

1. Tell me about yourself (gather demographic information). What is your age? What is your race? What is your highest level of education? How long you have worked as a case manager? How long did you receive benefits?

2. As a former welfare recipient, tell me about your interactions with your former case manager. How often did you visit with him/her? What did you visit about?

3. Tell me about your experience of receiving TANF, Medicaid, or Food Stamps. Participating job search activities? If you were sanctioned?

4. Tell what you knew about and your perception of welfare policy before you applied for benefits. Program requirements? Time limits?

5. Tell me about what led you to apply for and accept a case manager's position.

6. Tell me about how you felt about being a former client in a case manager's position.

7. Tell me about how you perceived others feelings and thoughts about you as a new case manager and as a former client.

8. Tell me about your case manager training to become a case manager. Who trained you? How were you trained on the policy and program rules? How did you learn about the use of discretionary power?

9. What types of training do you attend? How often? Describe for me your training manuals or SOPs.

10. Describe a typical day in the office for you (case load management process; interactions with clients; interactions with coworker). Tell me more about your meetings with your customers.

11. Tell me about the expectations customers have about your ability to manage their case and client services. How do your supervisors expect you to provide services to your customers?

12. Describe how your personal experience influences your decisions on caseload management. How do you use your experience and discretionary power to help your clients to work toward self-sufficiency?

13. Describe the process and discretionary power you use to make case management decisions. To exempt a client? To sanction a client?

14. Tell me about your most successful customer. Your most challenging customer?

15. Describe for me how you perceive your clients. Other case managers?

Second Interview

1. Describe the "bureaucracy" you and others face in your jobs that make it difficult.

2. Describe what you have learned about the "gray" areas of policy pertaining to customers from your coworkers.

3. What advice to you offer to other case managers, who have never been a benefit recipient or participated in the welfare system, on dealing with customers?

4. Describe for me how you feel about the current policy of Work First. Tell me if you feel this policy helps or hurts customers and why.