

MOTHERS OF STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF EXPERIENCES WITH SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

by

Mary Jane Harris

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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2021

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APPROVED BY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand what school discipline means to mothers of students with a disability at various school districts in Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. School discipline was defined as the policies and procedures schools use to manage student behavior. This study was supported by Oliver's social model theory, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, and Bandura's self-efficacy theory. The purpose of data collection in this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study was to gather data so an empirical analysis could be completed of how mothers of students with a disability define school discipline. Interviews, focus groups, and timelines were used as the data sampling techniques with mothers of various ages and races who have children in assorted grades at different schools. Data were analyzed using the modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi Keen Method. Findings of this study showed mothers of students with disabilities experience school discipline policies and procedures through the conduct of school administration and teachers, the compliance with special education mandates, the application of various disciplinary consequences for their children, and through the communication with school staff. The theoretical, empirical, and practical implications for school administrators, teachers, and stakeholders demonstrate a need for clear, direct, and positive communication as well as the building of relationships with mothers of students with disabilities.

Keywords: school discipline, social cognitive theory, social model of disability, ecological systems theory, students with disabilities, mothers

Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated first, to my Lord Jesus, who brought me through when I was not sure I would be able to complete the work; second, to my loving husband, who picked me up off the floor, dried my tears and encouraged me to keep going forward; and third to my mother who prayed many days and cried many tears as I pushed ahead. I also dedicate this work to my daughters. I love you always and I hope you see the value of perseverance.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Margaret Ackerman and Dr. Lucinda Spaulding for the patience and dedication through this doctoral process. You have been supportive throughout the entire process and have made this entire research study rewarding. I would also like to acknowledge my study participants. Thank you for sharing your stories and emotions with me. You have taught me so much about being an educator and have shone a light on changes that need to be made to educational practices.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	2
Dedication	4
Acknowledgments	5
List of Tables	9
List of Abbreviations	10
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	11
Overview.....	11
Background.....	12
Situation to Self.....	22
Problem Statement.....	23
Purpose Statement.....	25
Significance of the Study	26
Research Questions.....	28
Definitions.....	31
Summary	33
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	35
Overview.....	35
Theoretical Framework.....	36
Related Literature.....	44
Summary	71
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS.....	74
Overview.....	74

Design74

Research Questions76

Setting77

Participants.....77

Procedures79

The Researcher's Role.....80

Data Collection82

 Interviews.....82

 Focus Groups86

 Timeline Mapping89

Data Analysis90

Trustworthiness.....93

 Credibility93

 Dependability and Confirmability94

 Transferability.....94

Ethical Considerations95

Summary96

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS98

 Overview.....98

 Participants.....98

 Angela99

 Samantha.....99

 Elizabeth.100

Julia	100
Ann.....	101
Sarah.	101
Betty.....	101
Rose.....	102
Molly.....	102
Dorothy.	103
Rachel.	103
Diane.	103
Nicole.....	104
Results.....	104
Summary.....	119
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	131
Overview.....	131
Summary of Findings.....	131
Discussion.....	134
Implications.....	142
Delimitations and Limitations.....	147
Recommendations for Future Research.....	149
Summary.....	151
REFERENCES	153
APPENDICES	184

List of Tables

Table 1 Participant Demographics.....	80
Table 2 Codes and Themes	108

List of Abbreviations

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Office Discipline Referral (ODR)

Response to Intervention (RTI)

School Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)

Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Current trends in school discipline show a disproportionality in exclusionary discipline practices for students with disabilities compared to their typical peers (Whitford, Katsiyannis, & Counts, 2016). The creation and implementation of zero tolerance policies from the 1990s increased this disproportionality in discipline practices, even for students with disabilities who are afforded certain protections under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (Smith, Fisher, & Frey, 2015). Chapter One of this transcendental phenomenology provides the historical, social, and theoretical context for researching the lived experiences of mothers of students with a disability who received school discipline, including exclusionary discipline. Current literature related to school discipline practices focuses on the types of practices that are used (Green, Cohen, & Stormont, 2019), why these types of practices are used (Steinberg & Lacoë, 2017), and how the consequences may impact students (Morgan et al., 2019). Research findings show exclusionary discipline can harm family-school partnerships as well as family-school engagement (Green, Maynard, & Stegenga, 2018). Parents play a powerful role in their children's education, and that includes school discipline. According to Lumadi (2019), parents have significant influence on their children's academic achievement, moral development, and learner discipline. A study by Malm, Henrich, Varjas, and Meyers (2017) cited evidence that parents with higher self-efficacy have children with fewer maladaptive behaviors due to an increase in parental involvement and monitoring.

This study is situated in the philosophical assumption of epistemology, which positions the researcher outside the study as an observer with the goal of reducing bias as each subject has a unique lived experience (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). The problem is researchers

have not yet given mothers of students with a disability the opportunity to share their lived experiences and to describe the meaning they ascribe to the school discipline their children experience. This transcendental phenomenological study addressed what school discipline means to mothers of students with a disability who have lived through the school discipline practices and procedures assigned to their children. This chapter also provides the significance of the study and how it makes theoretical and empirical contributions to current research through its use of qualitative data collection about school discipline practices and procedures in relation to students with disabilities. Phenomenological research questions are presented to focus the research on how mothers of students with a disability describe school discipline.

Background

Discipline and classroom management have been issues for teachers since the development of public schools. Schools used consequences such as corporal punishment, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, fines, and detention, with school suspension being used the most (Allman & Slate, 2011). Discipline data from the United States Department of Education (2016) showed that out of the 49 million students enrolled in public schools in the 2011-2012 school year, three and a half million students were suspended from school. Data provided by the same report showed that 13% of students with disabilities received an out-of-school suspension as compared to their typical peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Although suspension is designed to decrease the likelihood that students will engage in violent or dangerous behaviors, the practice has come under scrutiny for the negative outcomes it potentially has for the students who are suspended (Morgan et al., 2019). Due to legislation passed by Congress such as No Child Left Behind of 2001 (NCLB), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA), and Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA),

education leaders are now evaluating classroom management and school-wide discipline practices to find alternative solutions to student behavior problems to decrease exclusionary consequences for students. A study by Curtiss and Slate (2014) found students who can remain engaged in academic instruction are predicted to be more academically successful; however, exclusionary discipline interferes with this process and breaks important academic bonds, causing students to be less motivated. In 2011, the Supportive School Discipline Initiative was created as a collaboration by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice to tackle suspension rates and create support prevention strategies such as restorative justice practices and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (Camacho & Krezmien, 2020).

Historical Context

Historically, discipline in classrooms in the United States was used to train students to become good citizens and to keep classrooms safe and orderly (Johnson, 2016). Beginning in the nineteenth century, government leaders were concerned about the moral development of students, especially from immigrant populations, who may not have the standards with which the United States was founded (Kafka, 2011). These critics believed students could learn discipline and the values of self-restraint and respect for authority in school. Educators believed training students to submit to authority was the goal of school discipline and that, if necessary, severe punishment could be inflicted for disobedience (Kafka, 2011). As time progressed into the twentieth century, many began to develop the belief that discipline in school was meant to help students develop social responsibility (Kafka, 2011). In response to industrialization and World War II, there was a reorganization in the structure of schools and how students were grouped and taught (Kafka, 2011). Federal, state, and local education agencies affirmed authority for teachers

over students and new classroom pedagogies were implemented that challenged traditional practice (Kaestle, 1978). There was a large increase in student populations due to immigration and compulsory education laws. During this time, the focus of discipline was to keep order within the school and classroom, and corporal punishment was the main consequence used in schools to enforce school rules (Kafka, 2011).

With another increase in population due to the baby boom after World War II, school administrators began to use exclusionary discipline in the 1960s to eliminate problem students from the classroom environment (Johnson, 2016). However, school suspension raised controversy because many students were left at home unattended. In the 1970s, schools began to implement in-school suspension as an alternative to out-of-school suspension (Allman & Slate, 2011). In-school suspension provided a way for students to think about their behavior while also administering a consequence. There was a perception that crime and delinquency among students would threaten the stability of society (Nussbaum, 2018). Zero tolerance policies were developed in the 1980s by U.S. customs in response to drugs that were coming across the border (Martinez, 2009). In the early 1990s, zero tolerance policies were enacted in schools in conjunction with the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 that was passed in response to an increase of gun violence on school campuses (Rodriguez Ruiz, 2017). The act was included in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1994, (ESSA) and required schools to expel students from school for one year if they were found to have a gun on school property (Ritter, 2018). For students with disabilities, zero tolerance policies do not consider the student's conditions or motivation for a behavior (Johnson, 2016). Many students with disabilities demonstrate behaviors that qualify them for exclusionary sanctions found in zero tolerance policies, leading to disproportionalities in this type of disciplinary procedure for these

students (Alnaim, 2018). Data consistently shows that around 20% of all suspended students are students with disabilities with most of the violations being nonviolent (Johnson, 2016). Once students are suspended from school, it is more likely that they will become entangled in the school-to-prison pipeline (Mallet, 2016). In the 19th century, juvenile courts focused their efforts on helping delinquent teens receive rehabilitation for their behaviors (Mallet, 2016). Later in the 20th century, there was a policy shift as these courts collaborated with schools to create punitive measures for students exhibiting significantly disruptive or unsafe behaviors (Mallet, 2016). This led to the creation of a direct pathway for students to enter the criminal justice system. According to recent data, 40% of offenders in juvenile justice centers are students with disabilities (Mallet, 2016).

History has shown that there have been changes in education and discipline policies that have led to an increase in the numbers of students who have been excluded due to out-of-school suspension. As policies in society began to focus more on social control, the policies in schools changed so that students who violated the rules were removed from the learning environment (Perry & Morris, 2014). These changes turned toward more exclusionary and punitive measures. The assignment of school suspension has led to several court challenges under the 14th and 15th amendments, alleging that schools did not provide students with due process rights (Allman & Slate, 2011). In *Dixon v Alabama* 1961 and in *Goss v Lopez* 1975, the courts maintained the students' rights to a due process hearing before being expelled or suspended from school (Allman & Slate, 2011).

Social Context

School discipline is constructed by social norms and is shaped by a sense of justice and strategies needed to prevent students from breaking school rules (Irby, 2014). Creators of

discipline policies and procedures use fairness as a validation to the reaction to student misbehavior (Irby, 2014). Just as in society, schools develop discipline practices and procedures so they can operate safely and effectively (Yell, Rozalski, & Drasgow, 2001). Welsh and Little (2018) reported there must be a balance between safety and school discipline due to the substantial social and educational implications. While the intent of school discipline practices such as school suspension has been to create safe classroom environments that are conducive to learning, there are negative outcomes for students who experience these consequences. Students have an increased likelihood of dropping out of school, becoming homeless, and getting involved with the criminal justice system as a juvenile (Ohlson, Swann, Adams-Manning, & Byrd, 2016). Findings in a report by Mowen (2017) showed these types of outcomes can break family bonds and place emotional strains on family relationships. School suspension impacts students' social and emotional health as they cause students to feel frustrated and embarrassed, which can impact their self-esteem (Nussbaum, 2018). Students with disabilities experience disengagement in school, a decrease in academic success, and difficulty in creating positive relationships with teachers (Johnson, 2016). These students are also provided services through Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), which are interrupted when the students are removed from the school setting (Raj, 2018). Students who are suspended have an increased risk of participating in antisocial behaviors and using illegal substances (Rosenbaum, 2018).

Social factors also increase the likelihood that students will be suspended from school. For example, studies have shown that boys and students with disabilities are twice as likely to receive a school suspension (Cholewa et al., 2018). These same studies report minority students and students with low socioeconomic status are also more likely to receive an exclusionary consequence for misbehavior (Cholewa et al., 2018). The increase in the suspension of students

with disabilities was first documented in the year 2000, when these students were increasingly mainstreamed and included in general education classrooms (Morgan et al., 2019). For students with disabilities, there is a connection between problems with language, cognitive ability, academic performance, and behavior which causes an increase in suspensions (Christiani, Revetti, Young, & Larwin, 2015). These students may also lack the ability to make good judgments and the necessary social skills to interact or behave appropriately in public environments (Brobbe, 2018). For the students who have not been suspended, schools with higher rates of suspension may have classrooms that disturb the education of all students (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018). This includes lower achievement scores in reading and math for all students, not just the students who have received exclusionary discipline.

There is also evidence to support the notion that students who are suspended are at an increased risk of entering the school-to-prison pipeline, either directly or indirectly. Students can become involved with the criminal justice system directly by being referred by schools for behaviors linked to zero tolerance policies (Mizel et al., 2016). Students can also enter the pipeline indirectly due to patterns of behavior that occur after suspension, such as disconnection from school, decreased academic performance, and an increase in unsavory behaviors (Mizel et al., 2016). For their families, this could include an increased financial burden from lost wages due to being absent from work and from fines, or attorney's fees (Mowen, 2017). Students who receive exclusionary consequences also have a higher risk of dropping out of school. Leaving school without a high school diploma or a general education diploma relates to several disadvantages, such as a lower wage potential, fewer job opportunities, and an increased risk of being incarcerated (Noltemeyer, Ward, McLaughlin, 2015).

According to Knudsen and Bethune (2018), students with disabilities are more likely to receive an exclusionary discipline consequence than their nondisabled peers. For students with disabilities, there are procedural protections in place to ensure that students are not being suspended for behaviors that are related to their disability and to reduce discipline disproportionalities for these students. After the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997, IEP teams were required to hold a manifestation determination review to determine if a behavior demonstrated by a student with a disability is a manifestation of his or her disability once that student has been excluded from instruction for ten school days (Walker & Brigham, 2017). During this review, the team is to determine that all services, aids, and appropriate placements were provided to the student during the time the behavior and discipline occurred (Lewis, 2017). The team must also determine if the child's disability prevents him or her from understanding the impact and consequences of the behavior as well as his or her ability to control the behavior (Lewis, 2017). Once a decision is made, parents have the right to appeal any decision that changes the placement of their children (Walker & Brigham, 2017). IDEA (2004) asserts that a disability should not prohibit students from fully taking part in society and that it is necessary to improve the practices of educators to ensure equal opportunities and full involvement of these students in school settings (Knudsen & Bethune, 2018).

The role of motherhood has changed throughout history. During the time of the American Revolution, it was the father who was responsible for the moral and spiritual guidance of the children as well as the educator (Vandenberg-Daves, 2014). During this time and throughout the early 19th century, mothers were to be gentle, affectionate, and caring, while doting on the needs of their children and husbands (Vandenberg-Daves, 2014). Throughout the 20th century, as fathers fought in wars and second incomes were needed to support families,

mothers played a more supporting role as family decision-makers and income-earners (Vandenberg-Daves, 2014). Today, mothers are central to family life as they influence family communication and often hold together family relationships (Genius, Oddone-Paolucci, & Violatto, 2018). Maternal self-efficacy has a direct impact on a mother's parenting practices. Mouton, Mouton, Roskam and Roskam (2015) cited evidence that mothers with higher self-efficacy demonstrated positive, parental support practices, had greater parental satisfaction, and exhibited less depression and stress. Reports also showed mothers with higher self-efficacy have children with higher self-esteem, greater ability to self-regulate and better academic achievement (Mouton et al., 2015). Mothers of children with disabilities reported experiencing higher levels of stress, depression, and anxiety (Jess, Hastings, & Totsika, 2017). Stress has a direct impact on a mother's self-efficacy and thus parenting practices (Yap, Nasir, Tan, & Lau, 2019). In a study conducted by Lerner and Grolnick (2020), evidence demonstrated that parental involvement positively influences the academic achievement and motivation of students. Results from a study conducted by Coyl-Shepherd and Newland (2013) showed that mothers are more likely to be involved in their children's education than fathers. This involvement by mothers improves their children's competence and leads to higher grades (Lerner & Grolnick, 2020).

Theoretical Context

The social model of disability by Oliver (1983), Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological systems theory, and Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory supported the inquiry throughout this study. The three perspectives helped organize the thoughts, assumptions, and beliefs of the study (Bhattacharya, 2017). The theoretical framework is important for validating the significance of the research (Lederman & Lederman, 2015). Researchers use theories that support their research

to help plan and develop the scope of their research (Flick, 2011) and to serve as a lens during the analysis of data and interpretation of findings.

Social model of disability. During the 1970s, the idea behind the social model of disability was developed by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in the United Kingdom. The UPIAS determined the difference between a disability and an impairment (Chappell, Goodley, & Lawthom, 2001). An impairment is a loss of functioning, while a disability is the meaning that society gives to the impairment (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2013). Disability includes the exclusionary tactics society places on individuals with disabilities due to their impairments. According to the social model of disability, individuals with disabilities are overburdened and marginalized due to social and economic barriers (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2013). The model is a way of thinking or a theory designed to change practice. This theory suggested that current obstacles for individuals with disabilities needed to be removed, anti-discrimination laws needed to be passed, and society needed to respond to the oppression that these individuals faced (Davis, 2017). In schools, students with disabilities became marginalized and faced social, economic, and educational obstacles due to discipline policies and procedures. In this study, the social model of disability supported research inquiry about the experiences of mothers who have children with impairments who have become challenged by certain barriers of school discipline policies and procedures.

Ecological systems theory. The ecological systems theory by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1981) explains how the practices of parents first emulate and then collaborate with environmental and social circumstances of parents and their children (Hoghugh & Long, 2004). The parent may focus his or her activities on the child; however, the parent's relationships, socioeconomic status, and culture may influence the effectiveness of these activities (Hoghugh

& Long, 2004). Bronfenbrenner (1981) described the environment as a set of enclosed, interacting configurations called the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. These systems influence the behavior of individuals, including how parents interact with and raise their children. The microsystem refers to the family and environments nearest to the child, such as school (Hayes, Halpenny, & O'Toole, 2017). The mesosystem is the communication and relationships developed between the microsystems; for example, the family and school (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). Bronfenbrenner defined the exosystem as factors that do not mature an individual as a functioning contributor, but rather settings where events happen that affect or are affected by an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). This might include policies or curriculum in the school setting (Hayes et al., 2017). The macrosystem is the most distant set of elements and represents the values of society or the cultural views of the family (Hayes et al., 2017). The quality of the interaction that takes place within these systems may or may not be supportive to the parent (Hoghughy & Long, 2004). The ecological systems theory supported inquiry about how these systems of support shape how mothers of students with a disability ascribe meaning to school discipline.

Self-efficacy theory. Albert Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as the ability for an individual to believe in his or her own capabilities to organize and execute the actions necessary to attain certain achievements. It is the intellectual foundation for human behavior and gives individuals the confidence needed to function in various situations (Newman & Newman, 2016). Individuals measure their own self-efficacy by social encouragement, personal accomplishments, observed or modeled experiences, and mental indicators (Miele & Wentzel, 2016). How an individual interprets these factors can have an impact on his or her motivation, ability to learn or self-regulate, and achieve. Bandura (2018) theorized that self-belief is a basis for human

ambition and motivation. Self-efficacy can impact choices, experiences, and outcomes as individuals avoid tasks with which they do not feel confident (Miele & Wentzel, 2016). Self-efficacy theory supported inquiry about how the dispositions of mothers of students with a disability ascribe meaning to school discipline.

Situation to Self

As an intervention specialist and a former elementary assistant principal, I observed and participated in the discipline practices and procedures that are used with students in special education. I also had firsthand knowledge at the schools with which I was employed of the number of students who were suspended for behaviors that were most likely a manifestation of their disability. IDEA (2004) allows schools to suspend students with disabilities up to ten days per year without a manifestation hearing (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015). I became interested in the data about the use of exclusionary discipline very early in my career when I saw the same students receiving these consequences, no alternatives being created, and the students feeling targeted and pushed aside. As a teacher, I began eliminating the use of office referrals in my classroom and created individual behavior plans for students to ensure that all needs were met. As an administrator, I relied on alternatives to suspension, such as restorative justice and working with parents to ensure that students did not miss school. During parent-teacher conferences, mothers would often ask for resources or strategies they could use at home to help improve their child's behavior. Many times, during phone calls to parents when I was an assistant principal, these same individuals would become upset that there was not more support for their children at school when they received a disciplinary consequence.

Philosophical assumptions. Epistemology is the study of the quality of truth and knowledge and how these are achieved and assessed (Knight, 2006). This research was

supported by my philosophical assumption of epistemology, that knowledge is dependable, and there are various methods to obtain knowledge in the educational process. My epistemological assumption in this research study also supported the notion that mothers create their own meaning from their experiences with school discipline practices and procedures enacted upon their students with a disability. My ontological assumption embraced the realness of the disciplinary situations mothers of students with a disability have experienced (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My axiological assumption was that all qualitative research contains the values of the researcher, theories, and research participants. It is necessary for the researcher to include these values within the research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My rhetorical assumption was that this research study was written at times as a personal narrative with the inclusion of first-person language. My methodological assumption for this study was that I used logical, inductive, qualitative procedures that were revised during data collection methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research paradigm. This transcendental phenomenological study is supported by the research paradigm of constructivism. Constructivism is a theory about how individuals obtain knowledge and comprehend themselves and their circumstances (Rasmussen, 1998). Constructivism accepts the idea that people learn by observing; however, their understanding is shaped by perception and the way something was observed (Rasmussen, 1998). According to Husserl, in phenomenology, knowledge of the world is obtained through an individual's perception using his or her senses (Kjosavik, Beyer, & Fricke, 2018). In this study, the mothers' perceptions of school discipline have influenced their knowledge and experiences.

Problem Statement

Current discipline data shows students with disabilities are suspended twice as often as their typical peers (Brobbe, 2018; Whitford, 2017). Even though some data reports show

students with disabilities comprise about 13% of the student population, they represent 25% of the students who are referred to law enforcement due to school-related incidents (Raj, 2018). Numerous research studies provide evidence of the negative outcomes that exclusionary consequences have for students (Anderson & Ritter, 2017). This type of punishment can lead to increased misbehavior, poorer student achievement, and student disengagement (Pyne, 2019). Students also experience increased aggression, lower self-esteem, lower achievement scores in math and reading, and difficulty maintaining relationships (Pyne, 2019). When removed from the classroom for discipline, students miss the type of instruction that is difficult to repeat or make up. Lacoé and Steinberg (2019) found that after serving a suspension, students had decreased academic achievement due to missing time in class. In fact, there has been consistent research that documents a significant relationship between school suspension and academic failure (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Students with high rates of suspension have lower literacy rates and graduation rates (Kirkman et al., 2016). Schools that have high suspension rates have also been found to have low state achievement scores in reading and math (Noltemeyer et al., 2015).

There is also a disproportionate representation of students with disabilities in the juvenile justice system. Recent studies have found that students with learning disabilities are at least twice as likely than their non-disabled peers to participate in delinquent offences that cause them to become engaged with the police (Mallett, 2016). Students with disabilities are protected by special education law in that they are given the right to a free and appropriate public education as well as due process rights for the parents (Skiba, 2002).

These types of consequences that lead to connections with the juvenile system can be harmful to families that are in a weak position, such as families with low income who may be in danger of losing a job for missing work or those who have delicate family relationships (Gibson

& Haight, 2013). A report by Green et al. (2018) found school discipline policies and procedures that include exclusionary practices can also be harmful to family-school partnerships and cause parents to disengage from school involvement. Research supports ensuring that parents are proactively involved in school discipline policies as well as the school discipline of their children rather than after a behavioral issue occurs (Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, & Gordon, 2009).

The problem is that while current studies have provided evidence of negative student outcomes associated with the practice of exclusionary discipline (Pyne, 2019; Raj, 2018; Noltemeyer et al., 2015) and the disproportionate rate of suspensions for students with disabilities compared to typical peers (Welsh & Little, 2018, Green et al., 2018), meaning has not been ascribed to school discipline by mothers of students with a disability. A gap in research exists as studies have not yet included the lived experiences of these individuals.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand what school discipline means to mothers of students with a disability. School discipline was generally defined as school guidelines and procedures appropriated by school staff with students to prevent or stop undesirable behaviors (Baumann & Krskova, 2016). The theories guiding this study were Oliver's (1983) social model of disability, Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological systems theory, and Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory. Oliver proposed that individuals may have impairments, but society has constructed disabilities that create barriers for such individuals (Davis, 2017). Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological systems theory proposed parents interact with various environments that influence their parenting behaviors and experiences (Luster &

Okagaki, 2005). Self-efficacy theory suggests that an individual's self-belief can manipulate his or her actions, endurance, effort, and achievement (Miele & Wentzel, 2016).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was to determine how mothers of students with a disability experience the school discipline policies and procedures of their children. There have been numerous studies performed about the significance of exclusionary discipline compared to students with disabilities; however, no studies have focused on how mothers of students with a disability experience the school discipline policies and procedures for their children. School reform policies are beginning to try to reduce the number of school suspensions by either banning or limiting the reasons that students in kindergarten through third grade can be suspended (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). While discipline reform is beginning at lower elementary levels, the National Assessment of Educational Progress begins at fourth grade and has found that there is a widening achievement gap for students with disabilities (Sparks, 2018). Studies have shown students suspended in sixth grade have a considerably greater likelihood of being imprisoned (Heilbrun, Cornell, & Konold, 2018). As mothers in the study shared their lived experiences about school discipline policies and procedures, school leaders can develop a foundation for creating alternatives to discipline that will benefit the entire school (Niemi, Kumpulainen, Lipponen, & Hilppö, 2015).

Empirical significance. This study contributed to what has been studied about students with disabilities and school discipline. A study by Morgan et al. (2019) found disproportionalities in the rates of school suspensions among students with disabilities when compared to non-disabled peers. A research study by Skiba, Arredondo, and Williams (2014) provided evidence of the negative outcomes associated with exclusionary discipline practices

and their connection to the school-prison-pipeline. A similar study was conducted by Gibson and Haight (2013) with caregivers of African American students and how they described their children's experiences with school suspension. These caregivers described school suspension as harmful, unjust, and inappropriate in helping students manage their problems (Gibson & Haight, 2013). This transcendental, phenomenological study collected data about school discipline policies and procedures from mothers of students with a disability that will enhance our understanding of the disproportionalities, outcomes, and experiences related to school discipline.

Theoretical significance. Proposed by Albert Bandura (1997), self-efficacy theory suggests self-efficacy, or self-belief affects human behavior and facilitates how individuals interpret their experiences. This study also contributed to knowledge that has already been obtained about the self-efficacy of mothers of students with a disability. A study by Yap, Nasir, Tan and Lau (2019) found the self-efficacy of mothers of children with a disability can be affected by the behavior of the children and the mother's stress level. A study by Kuhn and Carter (2006) regarding the self-efficacy of mothers of children with autism showed depression, guilt, and stress were factors related to feelings of competence in the role of parenting. Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological system's theory proposes establishing information about parents and their environments to understand how they are related and then exploring what factors foster parent success (Algood, Harris, & Hong, 2013). Using Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological systems theory, this study also added to the literature about relationships within the microsystem for mothers of students with a disability. Algood, Harris, and Hong (2013) found positive family support was a central element in successfully parenting a child with a disability. Oliver's (1983) social model of disability supports the inclusion of students with disabilities throughout the general education environment. Sullivan et al. (2014) reported while IDEA

(2004) provides students with disabilities equal access to public education, exclusionary discipline practices prevent them from obtaining this access. Brobbey (2018) found excluded students with disabilities were likely to dislike schoolwork and to respond to difficult tasks with disruption, further exacerbating their achievement gaps. This study added to the knowledge of how school discipline practices influence students with a disability in terms of academics and relationships.

Practical significance. This study was of practical importance to schools and their relationships with mothers of students with a disability as it adds to the existing knowledge about how they experience school policies. A study by Stanley (2015) reported while parents try to advocate for their children with disabilities concerning school policies and procedures, there are barriers that reduced the parents' perceived self-confidence in these advocacy efforts. Mothers in this study reported communication difficulties with school staff, administrators, and service facilitators as one of the main barriers (Stanley, 2015). Angell, Stoner, and Sheldon (2009) found that mothers of children with disabilities experienced a lack of trust with school officials when there was a lack of communication or when school officials demonstrated a lack of knowledge about the mothers' children.

Research Questions

In qualitative research, the research questions help to focus the purpose and assist in indicating the method of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is critical that researchers choose quality, appropriate research questions that will guide the methodology and findings of the study (Kross & Giust, 2019). This will increase the accuracy of the research results. A qualitative study also contains a small amount of subquestions to help support the central question (Creswell

& Poth, 2018). In this transcendental phenomenology, there is one central research question and three subquestions which helped establish the essence of the lived experience in the study.

Central Question

How do mothers of students with a disability experience the school discipline policies and procedures of their children? A study by Nagro and Stein (2016) found parents of students with disabilities who had positive communication experiences with school officials had students with positive school outcomes, such as lower drop-out rates, high grades, and better behavior. This communication helps parents better understand the procedures and policies of the school. In another study by Lumadi (2019), parents and guardians felt that when there is cooperation between schools and the family, the students have better academic achievement, attendance, self-esteem, and classroom behavior. Mowen (2017) found discipline procedures can hurt family relationships due to a shortage of coping skills. Many caregivers support appropriate consequences; however, in a study by Gibson and Haight (2013), families felt school suspension was not helpful.

Subquestions

The first subquestion is: How have school discipline experiences shaped the relationships within the microsystem for mothers of students with a disability? Sontag (1996) reported on the importance the role of families play in the growth and academic achievement of students with disabilities. These students and their parents are positioned within various layers of the educational system that influence their experiences and outcomes (Schuelka, 2019). For example, in a research study by Sontag (1996), it was reported that parents of students with a disability who have less social support have students with increased behavior problems. Using Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological systems theory, the macrosystem for students with a

disability includes school policies such as inclusion (Hebron & Bond, 2017). Students and their parents are also embedded within various layers of other ecological systems that will impact their experiences. For example, a study by Brown and Sumner (2019) found that parents of students with a disability had relatively low enrichment from work and higher levels of family conflicts caused by work.

The second subquestion is: How do mothers of students with a disability ascribe meaning to school discipline? For teachers and students, school suspensions cause them to see the school environment as unsafe and the school climate as unappealing (Hemphill & Hargreaves 2009). For parents, this causes uncertainty as how to best support their children. Students who are suspended have a disruption in their adult and social supports from the school environment which increased their risk in participating in truant and risk-taking behaviors (Henderson & Guy, 2017). Families and parents of these students take on the role of being the main support of these students who often receive outside services such as therapy and counseling at school. Lumadi (2019) found parents play an important role in the moral development of their children as they can provide specific knowledge to educators about the effective management of their students. A recent study by Mowen (2017) found formal punishment of students can separate families, hurt their emotional welfare, as well as place a financial burden on family members. Using the social model of disability, parents of students with a disability have expectations that their children will be integrated and recognized in the regular school and classroom environment (Rogers, 2007). However, in a study by Uba, Uba, and Nwoga (2016) researchers found that the stigma of disability influenced the decisions mothers make on behalf of their children.

The third subquestion is: How do mothers of students with a disability describe self-efficacy and factors of agency that contribute to their experiences with school discipline policies

and procedures? From the socio-cognitive perspective, people are characterized by their ability to have extensive and explicit experiences within their own biological boundaries (Bandura, 2002). A person's biological make-up can limit an individual's agency or increase his or her potential of functioning which contributes to experiences (Bandura, 1999). Bandura (2006) wrote that individuals are active participants in their life experiences. This means they are deliberate, have foresight, can self-regulate, and self-reflect. Individuals are not just idle receivers of experiences, but managers of them (Bandura, 2006). Self-efficacy can determine the outcome of an experience just as the outcome of an experience can determine self-efficacy. When an individual feels mastery in an experience, this builds self-efficacy (Bandura, 1999).

Definitions

1. Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA): The reauthorization of this act in 1994 was part of education reform legislation that contributes to improving the quality of learning and teaching for all students (Riley, 1995).
2. Epistemology: A philosophical assumption in which researchers study how knowledge is obtained and confirmed (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).
3. Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): Legislation signed in 2015 that replaced No Child Left Behind and renewed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act which provides funding to schools to improve academic opportunities for low-income students (Egalite, Fusarelli, & Fusarelli, 2017).
4. Exclusionary Discipline: Policies and procedures that excludes students from the classroom environment such as school suspension or expulsion (Welsh & Little, 2018).

5. Free and Appropriate Public Education: Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, students with disabilities are guaranteed the right to special education and related services that are designed to meet their needs without a cost (Raj, 2018).
6. Transcendental Phenomenology: A research design that searches for meanings of an experience or phenomenon by obtaining first-person accounts of the experience while the researcher brackets out his or her own personal beliefs or perceptions (Moustakas, 1994).
7. Individualized Education Program: According to IDEA (2004), schools must implement a plan that outlines the special education services that will accommodate the student's disability (Raj, 2018).
8. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) (IDEA): Federal legislation that provides children with disabilities a public education that is free in a regular education classroom or the least restrictive environment (Raj, 2018).
9. In-School Suspension: A school disciplinary consequence that removes students from the classroom to a separate location within the school building for various periods of time (Cholewa, Hull, Babcock, & Smith, 2018).
10. No Child Left Behind Act: Legislation intended to raise the academic achievement of all schools in the United States, with a focus on raising the achievement of disadvantaged students and ensuring that teachers were highly qualified in their areas of instruction (Ryan, 2004).
11. Out-of-School Suspension: A school disciplinary consequence that denies students attendance to school for one or more days (Cholewa et al., 2018).

12. School-to-Prison-Pipeline: The notion that a school's discipline policies and procedures lead to students' misbehaviors being characterized as criminal, increasing the likelihood that they will enter the criminal justice system (Rodriguez Ruiz, 2017).
13. Zero Tolerance Policies: Regulations that began in the 1990's as a reaction to school violence which require specific consequences when a student demonstrates a particular behavior (Rodriguez Ruiz, 2017).

Summary

Disproportionalities in exclusionary discipline practices for students with disabilities have increased the need for school discipline reform. With federal legislation, such as IDEA (2004) and ESSA (2015), students with disabilities have the right to a free and public education, provided with an Individualized Education Plan, in the least restrictive environment (Raj, 2018; Rodriguez Ruiz, 2017). School suspension can cause students a plethora of negative social, academic, and emotional outcomes, without improving the behavior of the students (Ohlson et al., 2016; Johnson, 2016). In Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, self-belief can influence optimism for an individual and impact the decisions, effort, commitments, perseverance, and goals he or she makes. The ecological systems theory provides the environmental and social contexts for parental experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). According to the social model of disability (Oliver, 1983), individuals with learning disabilities in schools are subject to becoming a culture of individuals with disabilities who have been labeled and excluded (Tregaskis, 2002). The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology is to use qualitative research methods to understand the definition of school discipline for mothers of students with a disability. The problem of this study was that while current studies provided evidence of student outcomes linked to exclusionary school discipline (Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Lcoe & Steinberg, 2019) and

disproportionality in suspension rates (Brobbe, 2018; Morgan et al., 2019), studies have yet to include the lived experiences of mothers of students with a disability. A study by Lumadi (2019) found parents play a vital role in helping to manage school discipline and are key factors in boosting student discipline as well as student achievement. This highlights the importance of obtaining the meaning mothers of students with a disability ascribe to school discipline and filling the gap in literature pertaining to their experiences with school discipline policies and procedures.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review examines various types of school discipline procedures and other school behavior management practices that are implemented for students in various grades who are identified with a disability. This phenomenological study integrated multiple theories into the study's theoretical framework to provide a lens for examining these discipline policies and procedures as experienced by the mothers of students with a disability. The literature highlights the need for varied school discipline consequences for students identified with a disability that include proactive and preventative measures as well as consequences for each level of behavioral offence (Bergh & Cowell, 2013). Current discipline data shows a disproportionality in school discipline for students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). For example, some data reports show that in the United States, about 11% of the student population are suspended from school yearly; however, this data included 15% of students with disabilities (Sullivan, Van Norman, & Klingbeil, 2014). Researchers also found that students with disabilities count for a much higher percentage of adolescents involved in the juvenile justice system (Counts, Randall, Ryan, & Katsiyannis, 2018). Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA), students identified with a disability are afforded specific protections. Before a school can assign a specific consequence, which does not fit with the student's Individualized Education Plan, the school is required to determine if the misbehavior is a manifestation of the student's disability (Raj, 2018). This determination becomes the root of the type and length of the school discipline that is administered. There are disproportionalities for students with disabilities in school discipline and in the criminal justice system. This chapter provides the literature that represents the theoretical context of this transcendental,

phenomenological study as well as current literature related to school discipline and students with disabilities. This chapter concludes with school discipline practices some schools are pursuing to reduce exclusionary discipline practices.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks are important aspects of all research. The theories presented within these frameworks present the reasonable foundation that allows the researcher to justify or interpret the results of a research study (Gall et al., 2007). A lack of a theoretical framework often establishes poor validity or reliability of data collection (Lederman & Lederman, 2015). The theoretical frameworks guiding this transcendental phenomenological study are Oliver's (1983) social model of disability, Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological systems theory, and Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory. The social model of disability was created to provide support to individuals with disabilities who had been excluded from participating in society (Tregaskis, 2002).

Ecological Systems Theory

According to Bronfenbrenner's (1981) theory, individuals are entrenched in various circumstances, from the micro level, which is very close and personal to them, to the macro level, which is more distant. This theory examines how individuals develop inside the framework of relationships that grow in their environments (Iannotti Tomes, 2013). An individual is part of a microsystem. This system is comprised of family members, but also could include other environments such as schools or their neighborhood (Iannotti Tomes, 2013). The mesosystem consists of the collaboration between two or more of the settings to which an individual contributes (Hoghughi & Long 2004). For adults, this may include their work setting, church, or their social settings. The exosystem concerns parts of an individual's life where the

person is not actively participating yet results or actions happen that affect the individual's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Examples may be policy decisions made by schools or the government. The fourth system is the macro system, which is the most distant from the individual. These influences take place on a cultural or societal level and can include aspects such as an individual's cultural beliefs or the values of society (Hayes et al., 2017). These environments and the individual change as time passes and prompt the development of an individual (Christensen, 2016).

Parenting. Parenting practices shape a child's development and behavior. Studies using the ecological systems framework demonstrated that the practices of parents are impacted by the relationships of their own ecological systems (Hoghughi & Long 2004). Parents may focus on their children, but the effectiveness of their parenting practices rely heavily on the structures of their microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems. Each of the systems have connecting links which affect parents and inherently influence children (Luster & Okagaki, 2006). One example of this can be seen in the macrosystem as cultural and ethnic groups have varied attitudes about parenting and parenting practices (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002). These cultural and ethnic influences can impact how a child develops, as well as how individuals see themselves as parents. The marriage is considered part of the microsystem as parent relationships affect the development of their children (Luster & Okagaki, 2006). Marital relationships often determine parental decisions, attitudes and practices, and can be a factor in the parent-child relationships.

Education. Research by Bronfenbrenner (1981) found that student home environments are important to a child's development and educational outcomes. Schools are part of the student and parent environments which have an influence on the development and practices of these

individuals. This is one reason Bronfenbrenner believed in the importance of early childhood education as a means of adding value to society and the family (Hayes et al., 2017). He was one of the original founders of the Head Start program, which offers early childcare programs to low-income parents (Wardle, 2009). These types of programs were developed to provide interventions for students, as the studies found if a child from a lower-class home attended a school with higher class students, the child had better educational outcomes; however, if all the students were from lower class homes, then all the students had poorer educational outcomes (Hayes et al., 2017). The ecological systems theory supports the instruction of early childhood education in that the students and teachers in these settings must create mutual relationships for the student to develop (Hayes et al., 2017).

Children with disabilities. A study by Algood and Hong (2013) found that there are many aspects throughout Bronfenbrenner's system of environments that can influence the effectiveness of parenting for those who care for children with disabilities. While circumstances such as lack of adequate insurance, low socioeconomic status, or the inability to access community resources can negatively impact parenting, family dynamics and environmental components also play a part (Algood & Hong, 2013). Sontag (1996) found that the functioning of the family as well as community factors influence how students with disabilities develop, as well as their academic achievement. At the microsystem level of the ecological systems theory, parenting practices and the relationships between the child and parent can affect how a child with a disability is cared for (Algood & Hong, 2013). For example, studies cited by Algood and Hong (2013) found that parents who had extended family support demonstrated greater parenting success with children with disabilities. Given the emphasis in ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1981) on parenting practices and relationships that influence them, it provides

a beneficial lens for this study when it comes to understanding how mothers of students with a disability ascribe meaning to school discipline.

Self-Efficacy Theory

Albert Bandura (2018) theorized that individuals purposefully shape their own functioning and life situations by being agents of change or having agency. Self-efficacy provides individuals with the belief and motivation necessary to carry out those actions. Self-efficacy stems from four sources (Wachs et al., 2020). For individuals, these sources include remarkable incidents such as their past achievements, secondhand experiences such as observational modeling, societal and vocal encouragements from friends and family, and finally, emotive and functional conditions such as stress, temperament, lethargy, and anxiety (Wachs, et al., 2020). Bandura (2018) wrote that self-efficacy determines if an individual will be able to cope and expend effort when challenges and obstacles arise. Individuals with high self-efficacy are able to envision successful outcomes as well as rehearse good solutions to problems in their minds (Newman & Newman, 2016). Self-efficacy is also domain specific, with an individual having varying degrees of efficacy depending on the field of knowledge (Babel & Trusz, 2016). According to self-efficacy theory, individuals make judgments that affect their thoughts, actions, and mood (Bandura, 1986). These judgements influence an individual's choices, effort, and thoughts that may help or hinder them.

Parenting. The self-efficacy beliefs of parents influence how parents perceive themselves as proficient in the role as a parent (Mouton et al., 2015). These viewpoints are crucial to explaining children's and parents' behavior. Self-efficacy of parenting can explain how well mothers and fathers adapt to being parents, as well as the quality of the conditions the parents provide for their children (Coleman & Karraker, 1998). The self-efficacy of parents

refers to how confident parents are in their ability to successfully raise their children (Wittkowski, Garrett, Calam, & Weisburg, 2017). Jones and Prinz (2005) reported that there are ecological situations that may influence the self-efficacy of parents. For example, living in a low-income neighborhood or having low socioeconomic status may cause parents to have lower self-efficacy. Glatz and Buchanan (2015) cited studies that found that high self-efficacy in parents promoted positive behavior in children and adolescents. In a recent study by Albanese, Russo, and Geller (2019), higher self-efficacy in parents was also connected to more open parenting, successful child supervision strategies, and more supportive parenting practices.

Parenting children with disabilities. Parents who have high self-efficacy can help their children successfully optimize their age-related outcomes (Hohlfeld, Harty, & Engel, 2018). Chung, Lee, Lee, and Lee (2015) cited research studies which reported higher academic, social, and psychological outcomes for students whose mothers had higher self-efficacy. However, other research studies have found reports of low self-efficacy among parents of students who have various behavioral challenges (Coleman & Karraker, 1998). There are factors specific to this subgroup of parents that can affect their self-efficacy. In a report by Weiss, Tint, Paquette-Smith, and Lunsky (2016), demographic factors, factors that encourage or impede access to services, and the level of the child's needs influence a parent's perceived self-efficacy. For example, the self-efficacy of parents of children with disabilities can be worsened by the tasks of finding and acquiring health and community services needed by their children (Benzies, Trute, & Worthington, 2013). Parents of children with a disability may also have lower self-efficacy if they lack support from family or friends. Some studies have shown that parenting a child diagnosed with a disability may limit social networks for the parents and influence sensitivities to low self-efficacy (Bloomfield, Kendall, & Fortuna, 2010). A study by Sanders and Woolley

(2005) found mothers with high self-efficacy exhibited characteristics of sensitivity and warmth, even to their children with conduct issues. That same study found that mothers with low self-efficacy were either overreactive in terms of discipline, or lax and inconsistent (Sanders & Woolley, 2005). Given the emphasis in self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) on how self-efficacy influences personal behavior including parenting practices, it provides a beneficial lens to understanding how mothers of students with a disability ascribe meaning to school discipline.

Social Model of Disability

The social model of disability distinguishes impairment from a disability. An impairment is a mental or physical difference, while a disability is the constraints placed upon the individual due to his or her impairments that causes exclusion (Kavanaugh, 2018). The social model of disability has its roots in 1972 from the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), which supported integrating individuals with disabilities into society and providing more supports for that integration to be successful (Berghs, Atkin, Hatton, & Thomas, 2019). This movement for equal rights for individuals with disabilities led to the passage of many legislative acts in the United Kingdom to provide protections and equal access for such individuals. In the United States, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1972 (ADA) created a definition of a disability that was much in line with UPIAS. The ADA's definition stated that a disability is an impairment that limits major life activities (Houtrow, et al., 2018). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention included in its definition that individuals with disabilities are limited in their activities as well as in the ability to participate (Houtrow et al., 2018). The social model of disability supports removing barriers and changing attitudes about disabilities (Berghs et al., 2019). It is seen as a tool to shift attention from the restrictions an individual with a

disability may have and focus on the environments, obstacles, or norms that may be prohibitive to these individuals (Watson & Vehmas, 2020).

Social model of disability in schools. In many of today's classrooms, educators prescribe to the medical model of disability (Naraiah, & Schlessinger, 2017). The student's disability is seen as a problem that needs to be diagnosed and treated so that the student and classroom environment can be deemed "normal" (Naraiah, & Schlessinger, 2017). To change this way of thinking, educators must see a student's disability as an obstacle that has been placed in front of the student and prevents the student from accessing the curriculum in the same way as other students (Naraiah, & Schlessinger, 2017). While many educators have accepted the need to differentiate instruction, during assessments, individuals with disabilities are still assigned labels according to the category of their disability (Peer & Reid, 2016). Most schools have inclusive education policies that afford students with disabilities the opportunity to be educated with nondisabled peers (Naraiah, & Schlessinger, 2017). Peer and Reid (2016) found that prior to them becoming ten years old, teachers see students with disabilities as an individual with unique learning needs. This changes as students age and teachers face greater accountability. In a report by Houtrow et al. (2018), findings suggested that a student's disability is a result of his or her interaction with the environment coupled with the impairment as well as the demands and expectations placed upon the student.

Students with a disability. Many students with disabilities face challenges in their classrooms that their nondisabled peers do not, which are examples of the obstacles placed upon them due to their impairments. For example, Spektor-Levy, Spektor-Levy, Yifrach, and Yifrach (2019) discovered that while many science teachers have a positive attitude about the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classrooms, they feel they are unable or incapable of making

the necessary changes or accommodations to their curriculum to meet the needs of the students. Watson and Vehmas (2020) reported that learning difficulties in students have been socially constructed and point to studies with examples of flawed IQ tests and the improper use of labels. Inclusion is an essential standard of the social model of disability and students with disabilities (Corcoran et al., 2015). According to the theory, all school environments are to be made accessible to all students regardless of their physical or cognitive impairments due to the benefits that inclusion provides (Corcoran et al., 2015). Watson (2012) reported that there are numerous studies that suggest students with disabilities and their families undergo continuing difficulties. These disadvantages can cause social barriers for these individuals. The experiences that students with disabilities have in childhood can have an impact on their social class, mental health, and poverty level in adulthood (Watson, 2012). The act of labeling a student with a disability becomes a subjective tool for these disadvantages (Corcoran et al., 2015). Gabel and Connor (2014) propose that the increasing numbers of students labeled with a disability indicate educators' need to identify and then relocate students who are not "normal" according to predetermined standards.

School discipline. Exclusionary discipline policies and procedures further disable students with impairments. Haegele, Haegele, and Hodge (2016) reported that advocates of the social model of disability contend that isolation and exclusion inflict disabling conditions upon an individual and demonstrate a reluctance to remove environmental hindrances that would make individuals with disabilities more successful. This theory promotes inclusive, evidence-based practices that use behavioral interventions which focus on the strengths and needs of the student (Hornby, 2015). However, current evidence demonstrates that students with disabilities are excluded from instruction for disciplinary reasons twice as often as their nondisabled peers (Raj,

2018). This is in spite of legislation from the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) that requests each state have a plan to reduce exclusionary discipline practices (Adler-Greene, 2019). Due to societal norms and rules, students and their families must prove that student behavior is a factor of his or her disability and then school administrators must be able to judge if this is so (Raj, 2018). Because the standard of connecting the cause of the behavior to the disability is so high, the likelihood that students with a disability will be excluded from instruction as a disciplinary practice is also very high. Given the focus in the social model of disability (Oliver, 1983) on barriers placed upon individuals due to their impairments, it provides a beneficial lens for this study when it comes to understanding how mothers of students with a disability ascribe meaning to school discipline. Considering the attention given to parenting practices in ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1981), individual behaviors such as parenting practices influenced by self-efficacy in Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1997), and challenges of individuals with disabilities in the social model of disability (Oliver, 1983), these theories provided a valuable viewpoint for this study when it comes to understanding how mothers of students with a disability ascribe meaning to school discipline.

Related Literature

Administrators, teachers, and parents alike are faced with the problems of student discipline. School administrators must maintain a safe and orderly educational environment and use the resources available to them to prevent violence (Fenning & Jenkins, 2018). In the classroom, teachers manage behaviors that are disruptive, defiant, and disrespectful. Students who display such behaviors are referred to the administrative staff for a consequence. According to research data, in the 2015-2016 school year, over one and a half million students were suspended from school in the United States (Whitford et al., 2019). Students with disabilities are

disproportionately suspended from school when compared to peers who are not identified with a disability (Raj, 2018). Because there are negative outcomes associated with school suspension, schools are working to implement alternatives to improve the behavior climate of their schools (Green et al., 2018). The following sections provide a synopsis of current literature regarding exclusionary discipline and its impact on students with disabilities as well as alternative avenues for school discipline.

Exclusionary Discipline

Exclusionary discipline in schools is used to take the student who has misbehaved out of the learning environment. This includes school suspension or expulsion, which removes the student from academic instruction. Exclusionary discipline is considered a punitive response to behaviors that can also include arrest or a referral to an alternative school (Kupchik & Farina 2016). School and student safety have always been advertised as the purpose for the need of exclusionary consequences such as school suspension and expulsion (Morgan et al., 2019). Advocates of such methods suggest that removing students who cause major disturbances or break certain school rules will improve the educational environment and student achievement for other students (Kennedy, Murphy, & Jordan, 2017). Many school administrators see exclusionary consequences as a deterrent for other students to participate in unruly behavior (Kennedy et al., 2017). Fenning and Jenkins (2018) found that superintendents believe that exclusionary discipline practices improve the school climate by removing disruptive students. Other researchers suggest that the opposite is true, reporting that school suspensions predict future suspensions and do not reduce inappropriate school behaviors (Green et al., 2018). Misunderstandings about exclusionary consequences often lead school leaders and administrators to continue using them. One such misconception is that students who receive

such consequences will change their behavior once they return to school (Green, et al., 2018). However, researchers have found that the use of widespread out-of-school suspensions do not deter misbehavior or improve the safety of the school (Hinze-Pifer & Sartain, 2018). School administrators often use exclusionary discipline to involve parents and caregivers or to draw their attention to the problems their children are having at school (Green, et al., 2018). While many teachers recognize that school suspension may be an ineffective practice, they still support its use to provide respite in their classrooms (Wadhwa, 2016).

Over the past two decades, the number of suspensions and expulsions in U.S. schools have greatly increased, not because of an increase of more serious student behaviors, but because schools have expanded the types of behaviors that require suspension (Fedders, 2018). Research has shown that schools with higher suspension rates have lower scores on state achievement tests, which may support the concept that exclusionary consequences negatively impact the entire school population (Noltemeyer, et al., 2015). Due to state mandates, schools across the country are beginning to look at the school-wide student discipline data and to disaggregate the number of exclusionary consequences assigned to students each year. Schools primarily focus on minority students and students with disabilities as these students have been identified as receiving these consequences at inequitable rates as compared to other students (Green, et al., 2019).

Zero-tolerance policies. Many schools started applying zero-tolerance policies in the 1990s for behaviors that presented dangers for student populations. These policies integrated a one and done belief that if students present a threat, they would be given an exclusionary consequence. Zero-tolerance policies prescribed a mandatory punishment for students when they committed certain offenses (Losinski, Katsiyannis, & Baughan, 2014). These policies became

compulsory with the passage of the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 which forced a one-year expulsion for any student who brought a gun to school (Rodríguez Ruiz, 2017). Schools that did not comply with the regulations would lose federal funding under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Losinski, et al., 2014). Approval of zero-tolerance policies rose as parents became more concerned about the violence that occurred in schools. However, as the nation adopted zero tolerance policies, there was a pronounced increase in the number of students who were suspended or expelled from school and the number of students who were arrested (Nussbaum, 2018). This was particularly true for low-income students, minority students, and students with disabilities.

Although zero-tolerance policies were originally meant for violent offences or the presence of drugs or a weapon, administrators often gave automatic suspensions for behaviors such as insubordination, skipping class, violating the dress code, or showing disrespect (Nussbaum, 2018). Students identified with emotional disturbance (ED) or learning disabilities (LD) may demonstrate behaviors that are beyond their control but predispose them to suspension or expulsion due to the mandates of the zero tolerance policies (Alnaim, 2018). Studies indicated that these policies were detrimental to student outcomes as they contributed to students dropping out of school, having lower academic achievement, and expanding the achievement gap amongst certain student subgroups (Curran, 2016).

While historically, zero tolerance initiated the growing use of exclusionary discipline for severe student behaviors, recent policy reforms in many school districts aim to reduce the use of school suspension for nonviolent behavioral infractions (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018). Supporters of school discipline reform argue that zero tolerance policies produce inequitable outcomes for some students due to predefined consequences that can intensify discipline gaps (Curran, 2016).

There is also concern about how the harsh consequences may not fit the misconduct they address (Rodriguez Ruiz, 2017). For example, zero tolerance policies were instilled for issues such as truancy (Armour, 2016), which meant mandatory suspensions for students who were chronically absent. These policies were created to have clear, prescribed rules, with a method to quickly correct student misbehaviors (Rodriguez Ruiz, 2017).

In recent years, due to school discipline reform, school discipline policies have reflected a revision in zero tolerance policies to limit the use of suspensions for less violent offenses (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018). However, a study conducted by Baker-Smith (2018) found that although schools reduced suspensions because of policy changes, students are more likely to receive an exclusionary consequence once they receive the first one with no evidence of improved student behavior. Alnaim (2018) found that students with emotional disturbances were over seven times more likely to receive a suspension due to zero tolerance policies when compared to students without a disability, and students with an intellectual disability (ID) are two and a half times more likely. This is because the policies do not consider the cause behind the student's actions and the inflexibility of zero-tolerance can prevent the administrator from making a different decision.

School-to-prison pipeline. The school-to-prison pipeline describes the tendency for school consequences to increase the likelihood that students will enter the criminal justice system (Rodriguez-Ruiz, 2017). With a focus on school policies, there are increasingly punitive measures that are pushing students out of school (Justice, 2018), despite research that shows a decrease in juvenile crime rates over the last three decades (Thompson, 2016). When students experience suspension or expulsion from school, it can lead to an accumulation of behavioral consequences that increase that student's likelihood of becoming involved with law enforcement

(Barnes & Motz, 2018). Zero tolerance policies mandate that school districts make a referral to law enforcement agencies for some acts of violence (Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015). Schools are also progressively suspending students for typical adolescent behavior such as truancy, fighting, disobedience, or acting out in class (Mallet 2016). When students are not in school, this increases their chances of being caught up in an unstructured environment at home or in the community with the ability to participate in unruly behavior (Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015). In the 1990's, as a part of zero-tolerance and anti-violence policies, schools began hiring school resource officers to provide order and safety within the school for staff and students and to positively interact with students (Owens, 2017). These officers work in tandem with law enforcement officials to provide consequences to students who break zero-tolerance policies.

Recent data about the school-to-prison pipeline is very concerning. In a report by Counts et al. (2018), data from the 2015 and 2016 school year showed over 200,000 students were subjected to criminal punishment for school-related offenses. Over 82,000 of those students were identified with a disability. Some studies have found that students who have been suspended in high school are five times as likely to commit a violent crime as an adult (Rocque & Snellings, 2018). These results may indicate the long-term impact of school discipline and ineffectiveness of school discipline policies in terms of remediation. Students with disabilities represent between 30- 70% of the youth in the school-to-prison pipeline (Rocque & Snellings, 2018). In the majority of those cases, the students' disabilities were not considered prior to the consequence being initiated. In addition to being a student with a disability, students with certain characteristics have an increased risk of becoming involved with the juvenile justice system. Mallet (2016) reported that students who have been abused or neglected are more likely to participate in offending behaviors. Poverty may cause the family environment to become

unstable for students, causing them to participate in criminal activities. It is important to note that there are higher numbers of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds identified with disabilities in schools (Sullivan & Bal, 2013).

Because students of color are overidentified as students with disabilities, they are likewise overrepresented in the juvenile justice system (Raj, 2018). While there is growing recognition that rehabilitation decreases the likelihood of youth repeating offenses and increases safety within the community, detention centers continue to use punitive measures (Mallet, 2016). Time spent in a juvenile justice facility can be harmful for students. These stays can often worsen the student's social, emotional, and educational challenges (Mallet, 2016). The Violent Crime Control and Enforcement Act of 1994 provided schools with funding to have school resource officers in schools (Kupchik & Farina, 2016). These trained police officers could then respond to student behavior such as fights and provide consequences as needed. Mallet (2016) reported that nearly 48% of all schools have a school resource officer on staff and their presence has increased student arrests at schools by 200%. The goal of placing law enforcement on school campuses is to discourage student violence and misbehavior (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). Their purpose is to build rapport and trust with students so that if there is an issue, students feel comfortable reporting it to them. Due to this purpose, the idealized role of the school resource officer is to not just take on the role of law enforcement, but also function as an educator and a coach or mentor (Javdani, 2019). Conversely, Morgan, Salomon, Plotkin, and Cohen (2014) found that at times, a greater police presence in schools had unintended consequences and created an atmosphere that is less beneficial to learning.

Student outcomes. There is a growing body of research that outlines the detrimental outcomes associated with exclusionary consequences. Many of these outcomes can affect the

students for a lifetime. School suspension impacts the social climate of the school, and the benefits students achieve from peer relationships and interactions (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2019). A study completed by Quin and Hemphill (2014), showed social bonds in school, especially the relationships with teachers are important for positive academic outcomes. Achievement gaps can be created by missed learning opportunities (Morris & Perry, 2016). Engagement in classroom instruction is one of the most important predictors of academic success; however, exclusion impedes this by breaking the ties students have with school, making students less invested in school rules and work, and decreasing the motivation students have to achieve success (Gregory et al., 2018). Exclusionary discipline is linked with an assortment of harmful social and educational outcomes, including future disciplinary violations, repeated suspensions, and school detachment (Sullivan et al., 2014). Students begin to feel less connected to school, have issues with self-esteem, and begin to feel embarrassed or branded, which may lead them to participate in antisocial behaviors (Nussbaum, 2018). These exclusionary discipline practices have been found to be ineffective at producing positive behavioral changes in students, but also increase academic failure and dropout rates (Noltemeyer, et al., 2015). Suspensions have been linked to poor grades and poor performance on assessments as students become disengaged and angry. As students miss instructional time and have less time to prepare for tests and assessments, their grades suffer (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018). One study found that 31% of students who receive one or more exclusionary disciplinary consequences have repeated a grade level at least once (Armour, 2016). Zero tolerance policies have been linked to higher high school dropout rates as well as a future reliance on government assistance (Bell, 2015). Ruiz (2017) reported that students who drop out of school are three and a half times more likely to be arrested and that 82% of the prison population is comprised of high school dropouts. School

suspension can also increase anger in students, lead them to feel alienated, and increase antisocial behaviors (Dembo & LaFleur, 2019).

Recent research examined the impact exclusionary discipline has on peers and found that while there may be a temporary benefit to removing disruptive students, there are negative consequences from attending schools with high rates of suspension (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018). For example, one study found that schools that had a high use of suspension had a decline in the achievement of students who were not suspended and students who reported feeling unsafe at school (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018). This suggests that although the disruptions had been removed from the school environment, the learning environment did not improve, and neither did the school climate. There are also disproportionate discipline practices for certain student subgroups that increase the likelihood that they will receive exclusionary consequences. Anyon et al. (2016) found that students with disabilities, students of color, and students of low socioeconomic status were more likely to receive an office discipline referral (ODR) and to receive a school suspension, expulsion, or a referral to law enforcement for the behavior. Dembo and LaFleur (2019) found that out-of-school suspension can cause students with disabilities to become angry, alienated, and antisocial in addition to exacerbating their academic performance. Christiani et al. (2015) also reported that suspension and expulsion negatively impact the community because unsupervised students participate in situations that may lead to injury, property damage, or a circumstance that needs police involvement. Suspension increases the number of days a student spends unsupervised in the community, increasing opportunities for the student to participate in delinquent activities (Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015).

In-school suspension. In-school suspension is an exclusionary consequence for student behavior that allows students to attend school in a separate location from other students

(Cholewa, et al., 2018). Many school districts are turning to in-school suspension (ISS) to help decrease their numbers of out-of-school suspensions. While participating in this type of exclusionary consequence, the student remains responsible for all classwork and with a goal that the student will realize inappropriate behaviors are not an avenue for work avoidance (Meyer & Evans, 2016). The original thoughts behind the use of in-school suspension models were that they could provide positive supports for students who are demonstrating behavior difficulties in the classroom (Blomberg, 2004). However, for students to receive these types of supports, in-school suspension rooms must have the space, resources, and staff available to meet the needs of the students who have been assigned these consequences (Meyer & Evans, 2016). One study in a report by Blomberg (2004) showed how interventions provided to students during in-school suspension can reduce the number of repeat offenders in the suspension room, but there has been little evidence on the effect of using this method as a discipline consequence. Meyer and Evans (2016) have found that in-school suspension rooms must develop policies and guidelines for teachers and students to follow. Cholewa et al. (2017) found that male students are more likely to be assigned in-school suspension than female students. These researchers also found that minority students and students with special education status are more likely to be referred to the in-school suspension room (Cholewa et al., 2017). Even though in-school suspension is seen as a less severe and more favorable consequence, there are still negative student outcomes associated with the exclusionary practice (Cholewa et al., 2017). These students have lower grade point averages, and an increased likelihood of dropping out of school. These practices also have a negative impact on student achievement (Noltemeyer et al., 2015).

Expulsion. Students who are expelled from school are removed from the classroom setting for an extended period. The use of expulsions as exclusionary consequences has been

rooted in zero tolerance policies that require automatic expulsions for students who bring weapons onto the school campus (Wahda, 2016). Most educators concur that expulsions should be utilized as a last course of action and reserved for the most severe behaviors (Thompson, 2015). Coleman (2015) found that being expelled from school can have an array of negative outcomes for students that may extend into adulthood. This includes having long-term social exclusion, and an increased likelihood of dropping out of high school. These exclusionary consequences can reduce a student's ability to become employed and to participate in the community (Wahda, 2016). Students who have been expelled from school also experience lower academic achievement and are at an increased risk to become involved in the criminal justice system (Skiba et al., 2014). Research conducted by Skiba et al. (2014) found that expulsion is used in about one in 1000 office referrals as it is reserved for violent or criminal behaviors.

Alternative schools. Alternative schools became popular in the 1960's as a part of the Civil Rights movement (Weissman, 2015). Freedom Schools, as they were called then, were meant to provide more educational opportunities for African American students as well as an alternative for students who were being expelled from regular public schools. Today, alternative education programs have been designed for students who have experienced repeated difficulties in the general education setting and have been assigned various forms of exclusionary consequences (Pennacchia, Thomson, Mills, & McGregor, 2016). These programs allow students to continue their education in a less punitive setting with the intention of the students' eventual return to the regular school setting (Fedders, 2018). Some urban school districts are dealing with an increasing number of students who are at risk for dropping out of school and are turning to alternative schools for the solution (Perzigian, 2018). Behavior-focused and academic remediation alternative schools require a referral from a student's home district. Many of these

alternative schools are in a location separate from the typical public school, presenting a basic program, with students secluded from their peers (Dunning-Lozano, 2016).

There are unique features associated with these alternative education placements which include small classroom sizes and an off-campus location. About 37% of these alternative educational placements are housed in schools and the rest are placed in other types of buildings (Fedders, 2018). These settings vary in their structure, operation, and effectiveness, as well as their quality of instruction (Morgan et al., 2014). There are poor outcomes for students associated with placement in an alternative education setting. For example, although the goal of placement is to transition back into the regular school location, transitioning is often difficult (Perzigian, 2018), which may be attributed to research that suggests that alternative schools make little improvement towards students' academic and behavioral issues (Wilkerson, et al., 2016). Students placed in alternative settings earn fewer credits, have lower attendance rates, and have lower achievement on state standardized reading and math assessments (Perzigian, 2018). There is also growing concern that many alternative schools are becoming warehouses for students that have been suspended or expelled from public schools (Weissman, 2015). In these types of settings there may be lower standards for behavior or learning to ensure that students keep passing to the next grade level. Fedders (2018) reported that students with disabilities are more likely to be assigned to an alternative educational placement and be required to attend longer than their non-identified peers. While the design of these schools is to provide students with more one-to-one instruction and to service students who are at-risk, Wilkerson et al. (2016) reported that enrollment in such an educational entity increases a student's risk for dropping out of school.

Students with a Disability

The National Center for Educational Statistics reported that in the 2015-2016 school year, 6.7 million students between the ages of three and twenty-one qualified for special education services in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). According to the same data, 35% of these students received accommodations under the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act of 2004 for a specific learning disability, which is higher than any other disability category (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). IDEA (2004) defines a specific learning disability as a condition in which one or more of the essential psychological means involved in comprehending or utilizing language, impedes the ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or work out math problems (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). These students often avoid academic work and will become disruptive when presented with difficult tasks, which increases their risk of being suspended (Brobbe, 2018). Students identified with disabilities often have difficulty with academics and maintaining relationships in the school setting. Cumming, Marsh, and Higgins (2017) reported that students with disabilities are often impulsive and misread social cues which leads to misbehaviors and poor outcomes. For this reason, the students are often subjected to exclusionary practices and consequences despite the research that supports the use of inclusion as it benefits both students with and without disabilities (Sakiz, 2018). There are factors in a student's life that increase the risk of being identified as needing special education services. Mallet (2016) reported that growing up in poverty increases a child's likelihood of entering school behind his or her peers academically as well as the risk of repeating a grade. These students also are at increased risk of being suspended or expelled and entering the school-to-prison pipeline. Students who have been abused or

neglected are also at risk for special education disabilities (Mallet, 2016). These students often have poor academic outcomes and decreased cognitive abilities.

School discipline and students with disabilities. Students with disabilities often have behavioral needs that must be addressed as part of their disability. School leaders must keep this in mind when assigning consequences to these students when they misbehave or break the rules (Smith, 2016). According to federal law, while administrators have the right to keep their schools safe, students with disabilities also have the right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) (Raj, 2018). This means that disciplinary involvements or consequences cannot keep students from receiving their education. Schools must ensure that several steps have been taken prior to removing a student from the educational environment for behavior, and there are a limited number of days that students can be excluded when provided special education services (Smith, 2016). While there remains concern about keeping schools safe, there has been a shift from the zero-tolerance attitudes of the past. Policymakers and educational leaders are looking to create alternatives that will foster healthy learning environments without keeping students from learning opportunities (Skiba & Losen, 2015). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 mandates that schools use the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework to provide early identification and supports to students who are struggling academically or behaviorally in the classroom before they are referred for special education services (Bradley Williams et al., 2017). As part of IDEA (2004), a school district is required to hold a manifestation determination review (MDR) before a student with a disability can be suspended for more than 10 days during a school year (Lewis, 2017). This process ensures that students with a disability are not given an exclusionary consequence for behavior that is directly caused by their disabilities. During the MDR, the IEP team must determine if the school was following

the IEP, and if the student was appropriately placed with correct supplementary aides and behavioral interventions being followed during the time the behavior subject to the disciplinary consequence occurred (Lewis, 2017). The IEP team must also determine if the student's disability may have impaired his or her ability to determine the consequences of the behavior or his or her ability to control the behavior subject to the disciplinary consequence (Lewis, 2017). If the district determines behaviors are not a manifestation of a disability and decides to suspend a student with a disability, the parents then have the right to appeal the decision to the person in charge of the review (Lewis, 2017). If it is determined that the behavior is related to the student's disability, then the IEP team is required to complete a functional behavior assessment (FBA) and then create a behavioral intervention plan (BIP) so the student can be returned to the educational setting with the proper supports in place.

Response to Intervention. The Response to Intervention model provides interventions to specific students who are exhibiting academic or behavioral challenges. These supports are provided in the general education classroom by the general education classroom teacher with the goal of reducing the likelihood that the student will need to be referred for special education services. A goal of this model is to customize the intervention to the student: if a student does not respond positively to a given intervention, then a more intensive intervention is put in place (Steinberg & Lacoé, 2017). The Response to Intervention process encourages teachers to implement interventions early so that special education services will not be needed. Thus, the Response to Intervention model is more of a prevention model. Bernhardt and Hebert (2017) proposed helping staff understand Response to Intervention as a way to design processes and supports to ensure successful performance for each student instead of a way to test students into special education. Teachers can assess and then monitor the progress of a student for behavioral

issues. Once the teacher has collected data about the student's behavior, then the teacher can implement a universal strategy to address the behavior and again collect data on the effectiveness of the strategy. A key component of the Response to Intervention process is having a team that is dedicated to review the student data associated with the interventions implemented by the teacher. Successful Response to Intervention programs have four components that include effective instruction, frequent assessments, immediate response to challenges, and collaboration with home (Abou-Rjaily & Stoddard, 2017). Schools that use the Response to Intervention process for behavior show an improvement in the amount of time teachers can spend on classroom instruction (Bohanon, Goodman, and McIntosh, 2018).

Response to Intervention procedures are scientifically based, systematic, and objective, so that those collecting data know that it is valid and reliable (Abou-Rjaily & Stoddard, 2017). Classroom teachers are to implement tiers of interventions, even for students who exhibit challenging behaviors. If one tier does not provide enough support for the student after six to eight weeks of consistent data collection, then the teacher adds another tier of supports and begins the process again (Abou-Rjaily & Stoddard, 2017). Tier one represents universal interventions that are offered to every student in the classroom (Hart et al., 2017). During this tier, the teacher provides positive behavioral supports, teaches classroom expectations, and uses consequences and rewards for behaviors. Tier two is applied when students are at risk and need more intensive behavioral or academic interventions (Hart et al., 2017). After a teacher completes a functional behavior assessment, targeted interventions are put in place according to the needs of the student and data collection methods that will be used to review the student's progress (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). Tier three represents individual, intensive interventions

that are implemented when tiers one and two have not helped the student become successful (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016).

While these interventions have the potential to reduce exclusionary consequences, and evidence of successful reduction of disruptive and unsafe behaviors (Abou-Rjaily & Stoddard, 2017), there are system related failures that keep RTI from being used to its full potential (Turse & Albrecht, 2015). First, there is a lack of consistency among states in the RTI frameworks and among school districts (Turse & Albrecht, 2015). This creates frustration amongst teachers as well as students who may move to another state and receive services based on recommendations from No Child Left Behind (2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004).

Suspension disparities for students with disabilities and various races. Recent discipline approaches, especially exclusionary discipline, are not effective methods to assist students with special needs in learning suitable school behaviors (Bergh & Cowell, 2013). Civil rights data shows that 20% of Black, male students identified with a disability received one or more out-of-school suspensions compared to ten percent of White male students identified with a disability (Green, et al., 2018). While students identified with an emotional disturbance have the highest rates of suspensions, students identified with learning disabilities have the next highest risk of suspension (Brobbe, 2018). Students with disabilities are protected legally from receiving disciplinary consequences for behaviors that are correlated with their disability. Justice (2018) reported that researchers have consistently found evidence of disparities in office discipline referrals and exclusionary consequences for students with disabilities, including referrals and consequences for behaviors correlated with their disabilities. When the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was reauthorized in 2004, Congress defined racial disproportionality in special education as one of the highest three priorities (Green et al., 2018).

There has been some debate whether unbalanced, exclusionary discipline procedures have led to a disparate representation of minorities in special education. States are now required to monitor IDEA (2004) disability categories for a disproportionate representation of minorities and the exclusionary discipline consequences given for students with disabilities (Green, 2018). Despite this, general education teachers report having feelings of indifference or rejection towards students with disabilities in their classrooms which can contribute to the disproportionality in the data (Morgan et al., 2019).

Impact of Exclusionary Discipline

Several research studies have documented the negative outcomes and consequences that students face when they are given an exclusionary discipline consequence for behavior. One such study completed by Noltemeyer et al. (2015) used meta-analysis of multiple studies to find a relationship between school suspension and student achievement outcomes. They found that students receiving school suspension miss academic instruction, have poor academic achievement and are at a greater risk of dropping out of school (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). While researchers analyzed 34 different studies, the study was limited in that they did not obtain information from students involved in the studies. The researchers cite one limitation was there were no controls for behavioral or academic difficulties that may have been occurring prior to suspensions (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). Lacoé and Steinberg (2019) found similar results in a quantitative study using student discipline data for grades three through twelve as well as achievement percentages in English/Language Arts and Math. Using a fixed effects model, researchers used data from a panel of students and found that students who were suspended from school have lower scores on standardized achievement tests (Lacoé & Steinberg, 2019). While statistical analysis also showed an increase in student disengagement and absences after

suspension, a gap in research persists as researchers did not examine the experiences of students who were part of the panel of participants in the study. Chu and Ready (2018) found that students who had been suspended were less likely to attend school, complete assigned courses and less likely to graduate in four or five years. This study used administrative longitudinal data and descriptive statistics with logistic regressions to determine the relationship between student outcomes and suspension (Chu & Ready, 2018). Using quantitative data collection and analysis measures, researchers did not account for the lived experiences of the individuals represented by data sample, leaving a gap in research.

Social outcomes. School suspension can have a negative social impact on students that lasts even into adulthood. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent and Adult Health of 1994-1995, Rosenbaum (2018) used standard factor analysis procedures to determine the outcomes for those who have been suspended. Students who had been suspended had lower grade point averages and had more experience with drugs and violence. Adults who had reported being suspended were less likely to have graduated from high school and more likely to be arrested (Rosenbaum, 2018). In a similar study using the same data, Wolf and Kupchik (2017) used descriptive statistics to determine the effects of school suspension in adulthood. They found that adults who had been suspended were more likely to be victimized as adults, to be a criminal, and to be incarcerated (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). While both studies used self-report data for individuals who had been suspended from school, there is a gap in research as neither study accounts for the lived experiences of those individuals. In 2016, Dembo and LaFleur completed a study to determine if schools located in medically underserved areas had higher percentages of school suspensions. Their findings were that the percentages were significantly higher than in areas where health services were readily available (Dembo &

LaFleur, 2016). Poor resources in these neighborhoods increase the likelihood of behavior problems in students. There is a gap of knowledge in the study, as it fails to detail the lived experiences of those who have been suspended in the medically underserved neighborhoods that were analyzed in the research.

Students with a disability. Students with disabilities experience academic challenges that make school attendance necessary (Brobbeey, 2018). Unfortunately, school suspensions increase these challenges and can deepen deficits in learning. A recent case study by Haight, Kayama, and Gibson (2016) studied the challenges of four African American students with disabilities who were assigned out-of-school suspensions. Using case study analysis, the researchers investigated the meaning and experience of each disciplinary event from the perspective of the student, the caregivers, and the educators (Haight et al., 2016). The study found that at times, a student's Individualized Education Plan was not adhered to in terms of behavior and that depending on the adult in the behavior related situation, the response differed. While this study focused on four individual cases and provided perspectives of the students, caregivers and their educators, the research is limited in that meaning was not ascribed to exclusionary discipline by the mothers through the lens of their lived experience.

Alternatives to Exclusionary Discipline

Many schools have been pursuing alternatives to suspension to decrease their numbers of suspension, help students improve inappropriate behaviors, and to avoid the negative outcomes associated with exclusionary discipline. The American Academy of Pediatrics has a policy statement from pediatricians that discourages exclusionary consequences for students (Owen, Wettach, & Hoffman, 2015). Their research found that school suspension does not decrease the offensive behavior and can make the educational environment less safe. Schools are moving

away from zero-tolerance and toward policies that have goals to keep students in the classroom while improving the safety and behavior of all students (Thompson, 2015). The commitment to improve school discipline systems includes the implementation of various programs and initiatives that are meant to teach and reward student behaviors and provide interventions to students, as necessary. The reality of school discipline as using school suspension is an inexpensive response to discipline difficulties. For schools to implement effective discipline reform with suitable replacements to suspensions with necessary behavior interventions, they will need numerous resources as well as the funding and professional development to execute those strategies successfully (Skiba et al., 2015).

School discipline reform. Government leaders have begun supporting school discipline reform and have taken steps to create initiatives that encourage schools to divert from using exclusionary discipline. While states are under increased scrutiny to decrease their number of suspensions each year, all states mandate suspension or expulsion for certain behaviors (Morgan et al., 2014). In 2014, the United States Department of Education and Department of Justice released the Dear Colleague letter to local educational organizations clarifying the impact of racial disparities in school discipline (Steinberg & Lacoë, 2017). Recommendations were made to school leaders to revise their discipline policies and procedures, provide their teachers with classroom management training, analyze discipline data that is disaggregated into subgroups of students, and provide individualized behavioral interventions to students as needed (Wiley, et al., 2018). Many states across the country have passed laws limiting the use of exclusionary discipline, and many school districts have rewritten their student codes of conduct (Steinberg & Lacoë, 2017). Advocates for school discipline reform maintain that school suspensions are given using unfair measures due to data that shows that students with disabilities and minority students

are suspended from school at disproportional rates (Anyon et al., 2016). School districts realize that using exclusionary discipline policies without providing behavioral interventions will not improve academic and behavioral outcomes but will put students at further risk (Henderson & Guy, 2017). The school discipline reform movement supports using restorative justice to reduce suspensions and to improve the school climate for all students. Researchers find that schools with higher suspension rates have little to no reduction in school violence (Ritter, 2018). Findings also show that in these schools, there is a higher staff resignation rate and reports of students and teachers feeling less safe than in schools with lower suspension rates (Steinberg & Lacoé, 2017). Champions of school discipline reform place a high importance on creating a school culture which reflects a priority on preventing conflict (Wiley, et al., 2018). Exclusionary consequences are ineffectual because they do not tackle the cause of behaviors. Reforms try to implement strategies to keep students in school, focusing on initiatives that not only improve the school culture, but also provide school staff with skills in behavior management and discipline (Welsh & Little, 2018). Current research reported by González, Etow, and De La Vega (2019) pointed to a health crisis created by the lack of school discipline reform. In this report, the authors stated that individuals who can complete a high school degree by age 25 can expect to live between eleven and fifteen years longer than those who do not have a degree (González et al., 2019). Because exclusionary discipline practices hinder a student's educational opportunities and decreases the likelihood of high school completion, there is a direct effect on a person's life expectancy. González et al. (2019) found that exclusionary discipline practices put students at risk for social and economic volatility and chronic disease as well as intensify health iniquities.

Restorative justice programs. One targeted program that has been used in recent years to decrease suspensions is restorative justice. Restorative justice programs use diplomatic

methods to deal with misbehavior and resolve problems in school (Steinberg & Lacoé, 2017). Young offenders are given the opportunity to take responsibility and then make amends for their misbehavior in order to restore the relationships that have suffered due to the misbehavior. These programs focus on prevention and intervention and seek to change how adults and students interact with one another, thus creating a more positive school climate (González et al., 2019). Restorative schools teach students and teachers conflict resolution skills, impulse control, and personal accountability for their actions (Nussbaum, 2018). Restorative approaches have students who have office discipline referrals, and those affected by the misbehavior, meet to determine how the referred student's incident disturbed the classroom (Anyon, et al., 2016). Members of this meeting use problem solving strategies to develop a course of action that could be taken in the future to prevent further discipline referrals as well as what the student can do to repair the harm that was caused by his or her misbehavior. Restorative justice sessions can help to resolve any hurt feelings or fear of retribution (Owen, et al., 2015). The focus when implementing restorative justice programs is on relationships. The facilitator of the meetings works to help the student and teacher repair and then maintain the relationships that may have been harmed during a behavior infraction (Wadhwa, 2016). The facilitator of the program becomes a mediator between the offender and the other students or staff members. Anyon et al. (2016) reported that restorative discipline can be used as a proactive and preventative measure that can help reduce behavior incidents and reduce the need for exclusionary consequences. Students are given an opportunity to learn from their mistakes while building social and emotional skills.

Restorative practices are a whole school approach to discipline that includes all staff, teachers, administrators, counselors and even school resource officers (Nussbaum, 2018). In

schools that have implemented restorative discipline practices, there have been positive student results, such as fewer office referrals for discipline or out-of-school suspensions (Anyon, et al., 2016). The restorative curriculum is specifically designed to help students recognize and own their behavior. Students learn how to make amends with those affected by their behavior, either directly or indirectly and then are incorporated back into their classrooms (Higgins & Tyler, 2017). When these programs are implemented, instead of using exclusion as a punishment, students participate in conflict resolution and learn about how their harmful actions can hurt or affect other people (Nussbaum, 2018).

Research studies about schools that have implemented restorative methods to respond to student disobedience show a decrease in student suspensions, ODRs, and truancies and increase in student achievement (Payne & Welsh, 2018). Schools have also reported a decrease in police referrals and an increase in student academic outcomes, as well as their social and emotional proficiencies (Nussbaum, 2018). Despite the success of this alternative, schools continue to use punitive measures for school discipline. Using restorative approaches to discipline shifts the mindset about discipline from a one-size fits all approach to one that realizes that discipline must be considered on a case-by-case basis (Kline, 2016). For this reason, restorative justice responds to student diversity and allows each student to share his or her perspective (Mayworm, Sharkey, Hunnicutt, & Shiedel, 2016).

Social emotional learning skills. It is important to understand the impact of a student's lack of social skills on his or her chances of receiving an out-of-school consequence for behaviors related to those skills (Duran, 2013). To address the disparities that are present in discipline data, many districts are using social emotional learning practices (SEL) (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). These skills involve self-management, peer relationships, academic skills, being

assertive, and learning to comply (Duran, 2013). When social emotional learning opportunities are implemented within the school day, students obtain and then learn to apply information, skills, and mindsets that will improve their personal development, behavior, and social relationships (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). Students with weak social skills have difficulty creating friendships and solving problems. West et al. (2018) found that during the adolescent period, students have less of an ability to use self-management skills. This limitation hinders students' capacity to maintain attention or control their responses. This can increase a student's undesirable behaviors in the classroom that teachers feel need to be referred for consequences. Considering this information, some districts have begun to create policies, practices, and procedures that provide students with social and emotional learning skills in an effort to reform their discipline policies. For example, some school districts have revised their student codes of conduct to include measures that support the use of social and emotional learning practices as interventions for student behaviors and the use of exclusionary discipline as a last resort (Gregory & Fergus, 2017).

School-wide positive behavior interventions and supports. With the original intent of supporting students in special education, School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, often referred to as SWPBIS, or PBIS, is a program that teaches students the expected behaviors in various learning environments. These programs support the social behavior development of students, even students with challenging behaviors (George, Cox, Minch, & Sandomierski, 2018). Schools that implement these programs have a focus on clearly and consistently stated behavior expectations, and a team consisting of staff, community, and family members who review the school's discipline data and policies. The team develops a matrix of rules and procedures for common areas which permits collection and analysis of school-wide

discipline and improvements made to school climate (Owen, et al., 2015). PBIS promotes positive behavior because it provides three levels of support: the school-wide level which has common rules, routines, and procedures; the classroom level; and the individual level (Wadhwa, 2016). There is a reward system at each level to reinforce positive behaviors and consequences for misbehavior. Schools report positive outcomes from the use of PBIS as it changes the behavioral climate within the school (Wadhwa, 2016). Schools that effectively implement PBIS convey improved student achievement and fewer office discipline referrals, including out of school suspensions (Green, et al., 2018). This improvement in school climate is due to teachers explicitly teaching behavioral expectations using examples and nonexamples and then allowing students to practice. Students are then given positive reinforcement when they demonstrate the correct behavior. The success of PBIS programs is attributed to the fact that they promote social and academic aptitude in students and engage students, staff, and families (Nocera, Whitbread, & Nocera, 2014). Successful implementation of these programs also includes ongoing training for staff members and the use of evidence-based interventions. Recent studies show that for SWPBIS to be productive, there are features of the framework that are crucial, such as rewards for positive behavior, responding to student behavior consistently, using data teams and discipline data to inform decision-making, and involving stakeholders in all steps of the process (Nocera, et al., 2014). These proactive, positive behavior programs reduce office discipline referrals and help teachers begin to understand the function of student behaviors. This is due to how the framework helps to enable disciplinary reliability across classrooms.

Consistency across classrooms and learning environments is key to the success of PBIS programs. Studies have shown that schools that implement these programs with fidelity have lower rates of suspension, higher academic achievement, and lower dropout rates (Owen et al.,

2015). Programs that reduce exclusionary consequences are needed as studies showed that in even though a reduction had occurred, in the 2013-2014 school year, 2.8 million students were suspended from school (Green et al., 2018). Schools that use PBIS must methodically collect and analyze data about behavioral outcomes of the program to guide the decision-making processes (Wahda, 2016). One research study found that to be effective, these programs must also engage all stakeholders in the process while providing ongoing professional development to staff (Nocera et al., 2014). Without the necessary resources and supports, there will not be a decrease in ineffective discipline procedures.

Teacher professional development. Providing professional training for teachers about classroom management and the use of behavioral interventions can reduce school suspensions and improve academic instruction. The United States Department of Education has emphasized the need to help teachers develop the skills and commitment necessary to build positive relationships with their students and to teach conflict resolution and social emotional skills (Flynn et al., 2016). Classroom climate plays an important role in influencing disciplinary results, which can vary greatly depending on the teacher. Morgan et al. (2014) found that effective professional development for teachers in classroom management and school climate leads to increased safety, instructional time, and staff retention. However, when teachers do not have the appropriate training, the result can be increased discipline referrals and lower academic achievement for students. For example, Mayworm et al. (2016) found that it is critical for teachers to have professional training about restorative justice approaches and strategies for the program to be implemented with fidelity. For the School-wide Positive Behavior Support Intervention program to be successful, teachers must be trained to set up and then teach behavioral expectations with a system of rewards and consequences that will be consistently

implemented with a goal of reducing disruptive behavior (Pas, Ryoo, Musci, & Bradshaw, 2019). One professional development program, “My Teacher Partner,” is a coaching-based professional development model that partners a teacher with a coach to increase the teacher’s awareness and skills associated with teacher-student relationships and communications (Gregory et al., 2017). When these interactions are improved, student engagement is enriched while decreasing behavioral problems. During the program, teachers are taught to use positive interactions to create an emotionally positive classroom so they can become sensitive to the students’ individual needs (Gregory et al., 2014).

Summary

This literature review examined the social model of disability, ecological systems theory, self-efficacy theory and current discipline policies and procedures used in school districts. Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory proposes that self-belief motivates individuals to act and persevere. Oliver’s (1983) social model of disability proposes that while individuals may have impairments, society disables these individuals with barriers and limitations (Berghs et al., 2019). Bronfenbrenner’s (1981) ecological systems theory suggests that characteristics of individuals and the environments they are embedded in interact with one another to shape and develop the individual (Hayes et al., 2017). While there is little to no research on the positive outcomes of exclusionary discipline, there were many studies associated with the negative outcomes of this type of consequence for students with disabilities. Students identified with a disability have disability protections under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 that permit for behavioral accommodations in the education setting and place limits on exclusionary discipline measures (Raj, 2018). In an effort to reduce school suspension and to respond to state and national mandates, schools are implementing alternatives

to exclusionary consequences, such as the School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports programs to teach appropriate behaviors and reward students (Nussbaum, 2018); using the Response to Intervention model to identify students who are at risk prior to needing special education (Bradley Williams et al., 2017); or restorative justice to enable students to rebuild relationships, problem solve, and pay restitution for their misbehaviors (Anyon et al., 2016). Schools are also offering social emotional learning opportunities as an intervention for students to reduce their reliance on exclusionary discipline (Gregory & Fergus, 2017) and providing teachers with professional development opportunities on how positive relationships with their students are important for their classroom environment (Flynn et al., 2016). Current discipline data shows a disproportionality in school discipline for students with disabilities. For example, in the United States, about 11% of the student population are suspended from school yearly. However, this data includes 15% of students with disabilities, and the number increases every year (Sullivan et al., 2014). Researchers have also found that the overuse of school suspension as a consequence for students with disabilities has a direct relationship with their overrepresentation in the youth criminal justice system (Counts et al., 2018). Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990, students identified with a disability are afforded specific protections. Before a school can assign a consequence for students with an Individualized Education Plan, the school is required to determine if the misbehavior is a manifestation of the student's disability (Raj, 2018). The problem is that while current studies have provided evidence of negative student outcomes associated with the practice of exclusionary discipline (Pyne, 2019; Raj, 2018; Noltemeyer et al., 2015) and the disproportionate rate of suspensions for students with disabilities compared to typical peers (Welsh & Little, 2018; Green et al., 2018), meaning has not been assigned to school discipline by mothers of

students with a disability. A gap in research exists as studies have not yet included the lived experiences of these individuals.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand what school discipline means to mothers of students with a disability who have been subjects of school discipline policies and procedures at various school districts in Ohio, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Michigan. School discipline was defined as procedures and practices followed by school staff that aims to prevent undesirable conduct perpetuated by the students (Baumann & Krskova, 2016). The theories guiding this study are Oliver's (1983) social model of disability, Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, and Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological systems theory. This chapter provides a description of the methods used to conduct this study, including a discussion of the research design, participants, procedures and data collection and analysis methods. This chapter concludes with an explanation of the steps that were implemented to increase trustworthiness and ensure all ethical considerations were addressed.

Design

A qualitative study was appropriate for this research because its goal was to function inside the framework of human experiences and to form knowledge or meaning out of those incidents (Bhattacharya, 2017). Qualitative research studies take place in natural settings as the researcher attempts to make sense of phenomena that occur in those settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research study takes place within Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Virginia, and the participants represent various school districts within those states. Using data collection methods such as interviews, timelines, and focus groups, this researcher obtained knowledge about how study participants experience the world (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012). For example, in this study, this researcher used multiple methods to acquire knowledge about how

mothers of students with a disability in various grades experience the school discipline of their children with a disability. In these types of research designs, the researcher acknowledges the complexities of human conduct and thought and how the two influence and contribute to life (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

Phenomenology was an appropriate choice for this qualitative design because the purpose of the study was to explore what the meaning of an occurrence is for the subjects who have experienced a shared phenomenon (Bhattacharya, 2017). Phenomenology focuses on how people make sense of what they have experienced and how that experience is converted into consciousness (Patton, 2015; Moustakas, 1994). Data collection methods center on how people perceive, remember, and judge the experience. For example, in this study, in-depth interviews of mothers of students with a disability who have directly experienced school discipline were conducted to gather firsthand, lived descriptions of the common phenomenon (Patton, 2015). In phenomenological studies, the researcher provides descriptions of experiences rather than evaluations (Moustakas, 1994). In this phenomenological study, data collection methods centered on participant interviews and data analysis methods used verbatim transcriptions of those interviews.

Transcendental phenomenology was chosen for the design of the study because this type of phenomenology emphasizes descriptions of experiences that highlight the primary meaning of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Edmund Husserl, a twentieth-century philosopher, claimed that important parts of experiences are subjectively established (Käufer & Chemero, 2015). Transcendental phenomenology seeks to describe the essence of the experience without clarifying or conjecturing (Van Manen, 2016). As it stresses determining the real meaning of the experiences, transcendental phenomenology also provides a logical method for obtaining

knowledge about phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). In transcendental phenomenology, the researcher uses Epochè, by staying away from judgment and bracketing out personal experiences, but also, according to Husserl, the instinct to be conscious of what the participants are describing (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, to ensure Epochè was used, this researcher kept a reflective journal and wrote reflexive memos throughout the research process to ensure any preconceived notions, assumptions, or judgments were acknowledged and purposefully set aside (i.e. bracketed). Transcendental phenomenology studies encumber the key principles of intentionality or consciousness and intuition (Moustakas, 1994). As related to this study, the mothers were conscious of the acts of school discipline of their children as well as their individual, personal experiences of that phenomenon. Using intuition and reflection, knowledge was obtained about their experiences with school discipline policies and procedures (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

Central Question

How do mothers of students with a disability experience the school discipline policies and procedures of their children?

Sub-questions

How have school discipline experiences shaped the relationships within the microsystem for mothers of students with a disability?

How do mothers of students with a disability ascribe meaning to school discipline?

How do mothers of students with a disability describe self-efficacy and factors of agency that contribute to their experiences with school discipline policies and procedures?

Setting

This transcendental phenomenological study was conducted via Zoom with interviews and focus groups being recorded. The rationale for choosing this type of setting is based on its ability to provide a diverse sample of students and their mothers who meet the research criteria (Bhattacharya, 2017). The study included participants from Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia from schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas. According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities (2017), 12% of students in Michigan receive special education services with a 67% graduation rate among those students. Data from the Ohio Report Card (2019) showed that 15% of students were enrolled in special education services with a graduation rate of 70%. The Pennsylvania Department of Education (2020) reported that 20% of their students are enrolled in special education with a 70% graduation rate for students with disabilities. In Virginia, 14% of students receive special education services (Virginia Department of Education, 2020) and only 61% of those students will graduate from high school.

Participants

Qualitative research includes human participants as the primary source of data (Savin-Baden & Major, 2010). Sampling procedures focus on small samples to allow for in-depth research and understanding (Patton, 2015). In this transcendental phenomenological study, this researcher used purposive sampling as a measure to portray the diversity within the sample (Patton, 2015). When using a purposeful sample, the participants are likely to have an abundance of information in relation to the focus of the research study (Gall et al., 2007). In this study, it was necessary to have a purposefully selected sample of a group of mothers who were best able to inform the research problem. The mothers were able to provide detailed insight into the central phenomenon of school discipline for students with a disability. The sampling

consisted of 13 participants. Criterion sampling was also used to select participants based on the criteria as a mother with a student has been diagnosed with a disability and is receiving special education services with an IEP in place. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), criterion sampling strategies are appropriate for phenomenological studies to research participants who have lived through the same phenomena. This type of sampling ensures that the study has the appropriate participants who fulfill the necessary criteria. Maximum variation was also used to ensure diversity amongst the sample and to help identify any commonalities that exist within the sample (Patton, 2015). Table 1 identifies the demographics of the participants using pseudonyms as well as their children's special education designation according to IDEA.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

*Participant	Marital Status	Ethnicity	Employment Status	Income	IDEA Designation
Angela	Married	Caucasian	Full-Time	<100,000	Autism, OHI** Speech & Language
Samantha	Married	Black/African	Stay-at Home	30,000-49,000	Autism, Speech & Language
Elizabeth	Married	Black/African	Part-Time	<100,000	Autism
Julia	Married	Caucasian	Full Time	<100,000	Autism, OHI Speech & Language
Ann	Married	Caucasian	Full Time	<100,000	Autism
Betty	Single	Caucasian	Unemployed	>29,999	Autism, OHI
Rose	Married	Caucasian	Full Time	75,000-99,999	Autism, OHI
Molly	Married	Caucasian	Full Time	<100,000	OHI
Dorothy	Married	Caucasian	Full Time	75,000-99,999	Multiple Disabilities
Rachel	Married	Caucasian	Full Time	75,000-99,999	OHI
Diane	Married	Caucasian	Stay-at-Home	<100,000	Autism, OHI, Speech & Language
Nicole	Married	Caucasian	Full Time	75,000-99,999	OHI, Hearing Impairment

*Pseudonyms

**Other health impairments

Procedures

The first step of this study was the submission of the proposal to the dissertation committee for review and approval. Once approval was obtained, the appropriate forms and information were completed and then submitted to the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). It is important to note that no data collection for the study began until approval was received from the IRB. Liberty University has an ethics review process which utilizes an Institutional Review Board, which is a committee that evaluates research proposals and supervises and authorizes research studies that involve human participants (Patten & Newhart, 2017). The IRB application and required documents were submitted to a committee comprised of five or more members who represent different academic disciplines (Yin, 2016). The proposal included information about the risks and benefits to the participants of the research study and how they were provided informed consent and the procedures for withdrawal (Patten & Newhart, 2017). The submitted application expressed how the researcher addressed confidentiality and sampling (Yin, 2016). Once the application was completed, it was submitted with all created consent letters, interview protocols, and data collection documents to the review committee. Once IRB approval was obtained (see Appendix A), potential participants were contacted, and the process of informed consent was explained (see Appendix B). The focus group interview sessions were then scheduled. During the focus group interview sessions, the study was explained to the participants and how to complete the timeline (see Appendix E).

These focus group interviews were scheduled and recorded using the Zoom application due to the Coronavirus epidemic which allowed all participants to follow social distancing guidelines. Following the focus groups, the participants were individually contacted to schedule the personal, face-to-face interview. These interviews were also conducted and recorded via the

Zoom application due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Each interview took about 60 minutes to complete. An interview guide was used for each interview, field notes were kept as necessary, and follow-up questions were asked when needed (See Appendix C). The completed timelines were also used to prompt additional interview questions.

After completing the data collection process, all data were analyzed using the modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of anything phenomenological (Moustakas, 1994). The use of clustering and reduction allowed for the creation of textural-structural description of the meanings of school discipline for each participant and then a composite representative textural-structural description. Content analysis using themes and codes were completed for each set of documents. Data were then triangulated to search for similarities and differences. In qualitative research, it is necessary to use triangulation to assess how different sources of data support each other to help further the understanding of the topic (Lapan et al., 2012). Triangulation helps the researcher increase the assurance that the data has been analyzed correctly (Stake 2010). In this transcendental phenomenological study, data from interviews, focus groups and timelines were triangulated to search for similarities to validate the outcomes.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher in a qualitative study is considered the human instrument, or the data collection tool (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher views actions and environments and plays a personal role in the study; however, the researcher collects data empirically (Stake, 2010). This researcher has had an etic perspective as an outside researcher completing interviews and an emic perspective as a researcher who believes that each person has a viewpoint that can be understood whether or not this researcher had the same viewpoint (Lapan et al.,

2012). These perspectives contribute to the behaviors and lifestyles people have. This allowed for data collection in the field as closely to the participants as possible, which generated an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied; however, it is important to note this type of closeness can increase the ethical concerns of unbiased data collection and analysis (Roller & Lavraka, 2015). The research was based on the epistemological assumption, which presumes that knowledge is gained through personal experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While writing the transcendental phenomenology, the research presented the different perspectives of the mothers of students with a disability who have experienced various discipline practices, policies, and procedures. This researcher was familiar with a few of the participants in the study as well as their children. While this researcher had not taught or led their children in a school setting, she had observed their children in social settings and understood, at a basic level, the terms of their disabilities. Bias and assumptions were bracketed, which arose due to familiarity with these participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a former assistant principal and as a lifetime educator, this researcher supports inclusive education, which involves culturally responsive educational practices that do not support using exclusionary discipline consequences. During this research study, it was necessary to bracket out these beliefs so that this researcher could approach the participants, their stories, and school discipline from a fresh perspective (Moustakas, 1994). It was also necessary to keep a reflective research journal during the entire study so that this researcher could be transparent and reflective during the process. This type of process helped in clarifying the research outcomes, eliminating biases, and revealing the choices made during the research process (Ortlipp, 2008).

Data Collection

Data collection in qualitative research has a goal of allowing for empirical analysis of the phenomenon that is being studied (Flick, 2018). It is necessary to collect data about human experiences in phenomenological studies because the process allows the researcher to become more experienced (Van Manen, 2015). Because qualitative researchers are interested in studying experiences, exchanges, and texts in their normal settings, data collection often takes place in the field (Flick, 2018). Data collection began after permission was granted from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board as well as other necessary permissions and consents from participants. The purpose of data collection in this transcendental phenomenological study was to gather data so an empirical analysis could be completed of how mothers of students with a disability ascribe meaning to school discipline. The three methods for data collection included personal interviews, focus groups, and timeline mapping.

Interviews

One of the primary means of data collection in phenomenological research is the face-to-face interview (Moustakas, 1994). This is a data collection method that gives the researcher access to individual, in-depth information about the studied phenomenon (Lapan et al., 2012). This is the rationale for the first type of data collection that was used in this transcendental phenomenological study. The interview is a collaborative procedure with open-ended questions that allow participants to give a thorough account of their experience of the studied phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). According to Van Manen (2016), phenomenological questions ask what the human experience is like. In phenomenology, the researcher focuses on language and conversations, as well as a person's historical context and understanding, which makes interviews a viable data collection method (Bhattacharya, 2017). Interviews were conducted

with the participants from the sample and scheduled at a time that was convenient for them. These interviews were conducted through video, and audio recorded for accuracy purposes. Due to the current Coronavirus epidemic, interviews were conducted using the Zoom computer application which provided recording capabilities and allowed for the interviewer and participants to follow the social distancing regulations of state and local officials. Brinkmann (2013) highlighted that when interviewing individuals, it is necessary for the researcher to remember that people are personal and sensitive respondents who have certain rights during an interview. The interviews followed a semi-structured framework (see Appendix C) that started with an interview protocol with the following open-ended questions that allowed for flexibility for follow-up questions (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015) (see Appendix C).

Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about your child.
2. How would you characterize your son/daughter?
3. What were his/her early school experiences like?
4. Can you share about when and how your child was identified with a disability?
5. Can you share the nature of your child's disability?
6. What has it been like for your child to be disciplined at school?
7. What was it like the first time your child was disciplined at school?
8. Tell me about your most memorable experience with your child's school discipline.
9. What were your feelings during that most memorable experience?
10. What is it like when your child is excluded from school?
11. What happens between you and the school when your child receives a disciplinary consequence?

12. What are things like at home when your child receives school discipline?
13. Explain the support you receive as a mother when your child receives school discipline.
14. How have schools supported you and your child in terms of school discipline?
15. How have school discipline practices helped or hindered your child?
16. In your experience, how has your child's school helped to improve the behavior of your child?
17. What has been the most encouraging thing about your child's school discipline policies, practices, and procedures?
18. What has been the most discouraging thing about your child's school discipline policies, practices, and procedures?
19. As a mother, what is the most difficult thing about school discipline?
20. Describe the feelings you have had when your child has received a disciplinary consequence from school.
21. What is the most difficult part about being a parent of a child with a disability?
22. Explain the obstacles you have faced when improving the discipline of your child.
23. How has the disruption of the school environment due to the Coronavirus influenced your parenting practices?
24. Is there anything else on this topic that you wish to share or feel I should know?

Questions one through five gathered data about the participant's child. It is important to build knowledge about the child's background and disability. Portier-Le Cocq (2019) stated society scrutinizes mothers of children with disability and historically has blamed the mother for the child's disability. This line of questioning seeks to understand the diagnosis and the true nature of the child's disability. Heiman (2002) found parents of students with a disability

characterized their children as having bright futures, while being realistic about the challenges their disabilities presented.

Questions six through eleven collected data to answer the central research question about the participant's experience with school discipline. Van Manen (2016) suggested that phenomenological questions that seek to understand the human experience ask what those experiences are like. The questions were adjusted as necessary for each participant. The questions central to phenomenological research focus on the significance, composition, and essence of the experience (Bhattacharya, 2017). This first set of questions allowed the researcher to obtain a richer understanding of the experiences that have contributed to how the participants define school discipline (Friedensen, McCrae, & Kimball, 2017).

Questions 12 through 16 gathered data about the ecological factors that influence the mothers' experiences. A study by Yoo (2019) cited ecological factors such as socioeconomic status, family structure, and the community in which the family resides as influences to parenting. These factors can affect the quality and experiences of parenting. In a study by Rudasill et al. (2018), the author used Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological systems theory to demonstrate if parents and teachers agree or disagree about behavioral expectations as part of the mesosystem of the child. The mesosystem is made of two microsystems, and in this specific case they can either work together or oppose each other, which can impact the experience of the parent. Mothers of children with disabilities have reported better parenting experiences and well-being when they have systems of support (Kuhn et al., 2018).

Questions 17-19 collected evidence of how ideas, policies, and practices within society can either help or hinder individuals categorized as having a disability. Research by Morgan et al. (2019) found that students with disabilities are suspended more than their nondisabled peers and

are more likely to experience juvenile delinquency, lower academic achievement, poor school attendance or be involved in the criminal justice system. While there are student predictors that contribute to these disparities, Welsh and Little (2018) reported that school level policies and practices contribute to explaining and predicting disciplinary outcomes. Data collected from general education teachers demonstrated attitudes of rejection, indifference, and concern for students with disabilities who are included in their classrooms (Morgan et al., 2019).

Questions 20-24 collected data about how self-efficacy of the mothers impacted their experiences with school discipline. When students are part of the formal education system, mothers are required to develop parent-school relationships which involves new roles and new stress (Shinhong Min, 2018). A mother's self-efficacy determines how she will manage these relationships and resolve new conflicts. According to Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, parent self-efficacy is the self-belief in the ability to confidently persuade the child's conduct and development as well as his or her education. (Tazouti & Jarlégan, 2019). With the recent changes to school environments, procedures, and routines due to the Coronavirus, parenting practices have also changed. These changes may impact the efficacy of parents. It has been reported that self-efficacy contributes to functioning, performance, and motivation (Bandura & Locke, 2003).

Focus Groups

In phenomenological research, interviews are the main method of data collection (Moustakas, 1994). Focus groups provide another avenue to interview research participants. The rationale to using focus group interviews is that they provide research participants with the opportunity to hear answers from other participants and make additional remarks or contribute additional information from the initial face-to-face interview (Patton, 2015). Focus groups were

created using the entire participant sample with each group comprised of no more than six members. It is important that these interviews are planned carefully, and that the environment is encouraging and comfortable (Patton, 2015). During a focus group, qualitative data is produced when group members interact as they share and compare experiences (Flick, 2018). The advantage of using focus groups as a qualitative data source is the diversity of viewpoints and how the conversations support one another (Patton, 2015). The focus group interviews were conducted using the Zoom computer application to meet the social distancing requirements of state and local governments. Each group was asked the same interview questions (see Appendix D) and each interview was audio and video recorded.

Open-Ended Group Interview Questions

1. What are the ways you have appreciated teachers and/or administrators addressing your child's behavior in school?
2. What have been some unhelpful or harmful ways that teachers and/or administrators have addressed your child's behavior?
3. What do you wish school administrators knew about what it is like to parent a child with a disability?
4. What influence has the IEP process had on your child's school discipline?
5. What recommendations do you have for school leaders?
6. What recommendations do you have for a parent whose child has just been diagnosed with a disability?
7. What supports do mothers of students with a disability need from schools?
8. Describe the efforts schools have made to support you and your child during the coronavirus shutdown.

Focus group interviews allow the researcher to observe participants' interactions while collecting data about their behaviors as they discuss the studied topic (Morgan, 1997). Van Manen (2017) reported inquiry related to phenomenological research requires looking at what counts in the lived experience. Lived experiences refer to everyday, ordinary events, or in this study, school disciplinary events (Van Manen, 2017). Questions one and two asked the mothers to describe their experiences with school discipline. In research cited by Mowen (2017), formal school discipline may cause families to face financial burdens because of days off work. This type of experience with school discipline negatively contributes to their perception of school discipline.

Question 3 gathered data about how school discipline influences the mothers' self-efficacy of parenting. A parent's self-efficacy provides the motivation for involvement in a child's education and can be a positive influence toward the child's behavioral functioning (Jensen & Minke, 2017). A recent study by Bell (2020) reported that Black mothers whose children received formal disciplinary consequences such as school suspension were likely to experience depression and feel hopeless about the future of their children. Depression and hopelessness are emotions that can cause an individual to have low self-efficacy. For parents of students with disabilities, self-efficacy helps to give parents coping mechanisms when dealing with their children's impairments (Hajihashemi, Mazaheri, & Hasanzadeh, 2019).

Questions four and five gathered data about how the social model of disability may be a factor in school discipline. Some discipline policies may present obstacles to parents in marginalized groups and cause social disparities (Mowen, 2017). School officials and teachers often use suspensions and expulsions as a response to student misbehavior and to ensure that the school environment is safe (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2019). Perry & Morris (2014) found that an

overzealous use of exclusionary punishment can alienate students and decrease student bonds and cohesion. In the educational environment, labeling students with persistent behaviors is prevalent (Glass, 2014). Research from Cuellar and Markowitz (2015) found that once students have been removed from the school setting due to exclusionary consequences, they are increasingly alienated by peers, have more frequent conflicts with adults, and may engage in more delinquent behaviors. Pyne (2019) has found that exclusionary consequences can be stigmatizing events for students that can lead to labeling the students who have been excluded. This type of action may also lead to further stereotyping which can change how the students feel about themselves.

Questions six, seven, and eight collected data about ecological factors that may shape the definition of school discipline for mothers of children with a disability. There are ecological factors that may influence parenting behaviors. For example, the size of the family, its socioeconomic status, or where the family resides can impact the experiences the parents have or the choices the parents make (Yoo, 2019). School discipline outcomes can also change ecological factors for families. Mowen (2017) cited studies which found that formal school discipline can weaken family relationships and social networks. The change in ecological factors caused by the Coronavirus may impact parenting behaviors. Researchers proposed that environments for children need to be stable and structured so that the development of their proximal processes remain stabilized (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Timelines

Timelines are visual methods that supplement open-ended interviews in qualitative research (Kolar, Ahmad, Chan, & Erickson, 2015). By creating a timeline, participants can recall details that are most important to the topic in chronological order (Guest, Namey, &

Mitchell, 2013). Timelines also provide participants with a method of sharing their lived experiences in their own manner (Pell et al., 2020). Van Manen (2015) describes phenomenology as an activity that is written and requires one to be attentive to details of the lived experience. In this study, the use of the timeline was used as a written activity to recall specific events or behaviors (Guest et al., 2013). Combining this visual method with interviewing allowed this researcher to discover past and present experiences that were represented through discussion (Sheridan, Chamberlain, & Dupuis, 2011) (see Appendix E).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is meant to turn data into outcomes while there are guidelines and frameworks in place to guide the process (Patton, 2015). After completing the data collection process, data from all data collection methods were analyzed using the modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994). Qualitative data analysis takes place by focusing on the interrelated aspects of the study instead of breaking it into separate parts (Bachman, Schutt, & Plass, 2017). Data collection and data analysis occurred in close relation to each other as this researcher wrote anecdotes, field notes, and memos about the meaning of data as collection occurred.

Analysis Method

This researcher's role in the transcendental phenomenological interviews was to discover the participants' beliefs by questioning them and urging them to relive the experience in the interview (Flick, Metzler, Scott, 2014). Each interview was transcribed verbatim with utterances deleted that were not associated with the topic (Flick et al., 2014). However, field notes were included about significant body language cues which were exhibited during the interview. After all interviews were transcribed verbatim, it was necessary to first read the transcripts to become

aware of the entire collection of this type of data (Vagle, 2016). The next step was to read each line of the transcript and mark excerpts that appear to exhibit meanings of the phenomenon of school discipline as experienced by mothers of students with disabilities. During the third line-by-line reading, data was analyzed using the modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of analysis of phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994). As the process began, Epochè was used to view the data from a fresh perspective and to set aside all previous assumptions (Moustakas, 1994). For this method of analysis, each statement in the verbatim transcript was considered equally in terms of relevance in describing the studied phenomenon. All noteworthy and significant statements were listed and clustered into themes, with overlapping statements removed (Moustakas, 1994).

These themes were used to create a textural description of the experience of school discipline (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These textural descriptions stated what the participants experienced (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using imaginative or eidetic variation, the textual descriptions were used to create a structural description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). These descriptions were created from the setting or context that influenced how the participants experienced and then defined school discipline (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using different frames of reference, school discipline was approached from different perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). This allowed this researcher to describe the fundamental structures of the phenomenon and how it came into existence. The steps in imaginative variation began by varying possible meanings such as opposite meanings or roles (Moustakas, 1994). The process required intuition and imagination to consider the relationships between the themes. A list was then created from the structural features of the experience, which were grouped into themes. These themes were used to create individual textural descriptions of the experience as it related to the phenomenon. They

were then used to write structural descriptions or how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The next step was to synthesize a textural-structural description of the definition of school discipline for each mother of a student with a disability. Once this was completed, the individual descriptions were combined into a universal account that speaks for the entire group (Moustakas, 1994).

From the individual textural-structural descriptions, it was necessary to determine the essence of school discipline for mothers of students with a disability. This means to establish the commonality in experiences of all mothers and write a composite definition (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While the experiences of the mothers were different, they were analyzed and compared so that the defining characteristics of how they ascribed meaning to school discipline could be gleaned into overarching themes to provide one description of the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Triangulation of data was used to ensure that the data that was been collected and analyzed in this study was valid and reliable. In this transcendental, phenomenological study, this researcher used multiple data collection methods which included personal interviews, focus group interviews, and timelines, multiple theories which included Oliver's social model of disability (1983), Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1981), and Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1997), as well as multiple participants to collect evidence of how mothers ascribe meaning to school discipline (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation helped to test for consistencies across the data (Patton, 2015).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the level of assurance in the data and techniques used to safeguard the quality of a research study (Connelly, 2016). Criteria to establish trustworthiness include credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. These terms are equivalent

to establishing internal and external validity as well as objectivity and reliability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These criteria are applied by researchers to convince others that the conclusions of their study are worthwhile (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Trustworthiness also refers to the value of the study, the accuracy of the organization, and whether the readers have confidence in the results of the study (Leavy, 2017). Trustworthiness is accentuated by being unbiased, impartial, and attentive when accounting for multiple viewpoints, experiences, and realities such as those studied in this transcendental phenomenology (Patton, 2015). In qualitative research, it is necessary to use various methods to increase trustworthiness of the data.

Credibility

Credibility of a study is the extent to which the findings of the study are internally valid (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Credibility addresses the participants' views and how the researcher describes them (Nowell et al., 2017). Credibility in this study was established first by triangulation of three data sources and extended engagement in the field. Another method for maintaining credibility for the study was monitoring personal self-perceptions through a reflective journal that included personal beliefs and perceptions to remain aware of biases that needed to be bracketed. Because a goal of transcendental phenomenology is to reduce researcher bias (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015) and emphasize description over interpretation during peer debriefing, the contents of the journal were discussed to process these biases and perceptions (Lapan, et al., 2012). This procedure demonstrated that Epochè had been assured and that prejudices and assumptions had been removed (Patton, 2015). Member checking of transcripts and final analysis and representation of findings were utilized to ensure the findings were consistent with participants' reports and intended meanings (Nowell et al., 2017).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability in a qualitative study is important for allowing replication of the study, which is increased when the research process is clearly recorded (Nowell et al., 2017).

Dependability is comparable to reliability and refers to consistency (Lapan, et al., 2012). A dependability audit trail was completed to check for changes that may have occurred in the research (Lapan, et al., 2012). The audit trail provided evidence of decisions that were made about theoretical and organizational concerns during the research process (Nowell et al., 2017). This meant keeping records of field notes, transcripts, raw data, and a reflective journal so that other researchers could cross reference data. In this transcendental phenomenological research study, dependability was increased through member checking. Participants could evaluate and confirm the truthfulness of transcripts to allow for correct data analysis (Patten & Newhart, 2018).

In a qualitative study, confirmability relates to impartiality and is supported by the series of evidence provided in the research (Lapan, et al., 2012). To ensure confirmability in this study, appendixes are provided to include evidence, sources of data, and examples to rule out researcher bias. During data collection, reflexive memos were included in the document and accounted for this researcher's position during the research process (Leavy, 2017). The use of an audit trail was useful as it also provided evidence about the decisions made throughout the research process and in the reflective journal (Baillie, 2015).

Transferability

According to Leavy (2017), transferability is making research findings valuable and applicable in other contexts. Transferability is equivalent to external validity (Lapan, et al., 2012). To increase the transferability of the knowledge and results of this study, thick

descriptions about the participants were provided, as well as abundant details about the phenomenon being researched (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). This thick description supports an audit trail that provides a transparent explanation of the sampling techniques used and the determinations made so other researchers could determine if these are logical (Baillie, 2015). Maximum variation sampling was used in this study to increase the diversity within the participant sample (Patton, 2015). During recruitment procedures, individuals completed a demographic survey that asked about their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, child's disability, and marital and employment status (see Appendix F). This procedure increased the transferability of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues can arise at various stages during the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To address these concerns, it is necessary to consider the possibilities of the types of issues that may arise. It is necessary to ensure that research meets ethical principles to protect research participants from harm (Patten & Newhart, 2017). Prior to initializing the study, it was necessary to seek all appropriate approvals from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board, dissertation committee members, and adult participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data were not collected until the Liberty IRB approval was given.

As the study began, informed consent from the participants of the study was acquired. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study and that participation was voluntary. As a part of the ethical principal of beneficence, the participants were informed that the risks of participation were minimal (Patten & Newhart, 2017). Referencing the ethical principal of respect, all participants were informed of the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences (Lapan et al., 2012). During the study, the ethical principal of the

right to privacy was applied during all stages of the research (Patten & Newhart, 2017). To address this principle, all interviews were conducted in a private room where others could not easily overhear, and timelines were only read by the researcher. All electronic data was stored on a password protected computer and will remain there for three years as required by federal regulations and then deleted. All paper data was stored in a locked file cabinet and will remain there for five years.

During data collection, open-ended, non-leading questions were used during the interview process. Personal information about participants, including their children, school sites, teachers, and administrators was not disclosed, and pseudonyms were used throughout the research report (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The purpose of all data was discussed with all participants of the study. After data were analyzed, all perspectives, results, and conclusions were reported to all participants. The research used appropriate citations to give credit to authors who have contributed to the research.

Summary

The problem presented in this transcendental phenomenological study was there is no prior research that collects data about the school discipline experiences of mothers of students with a disability. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how mothers of a student with a disability define school discipline. The qualitative research design of transcendental phenomenology was chosen for this research study because it allows the researcher to bracket out personal experiences, then uses the process of reduction, textural and then structural descriptions to communicate the fundamental nature of school discipline for mothers of students with a disability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This researcher analyzed the data collected of how the participants described and defined their own experiences as they related to

the school discipline using the modifications of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method (Moustakas, 1994). A criterion sample was used in the study to ensure that the purposeful sample met the criteria of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were mothers who had a child who had been placed on an Individualized Education Plan that had experience with school discipline.

In this transcendental phenomenology, the researcher was the research instrument (Patton, 2015), operating from the lens of the epistemological assumption. Interviews, focus groups, and timelines were used as data collection methods. During the interview, a semi-structured interview protocol (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015) was used that allowed for follow-up questions, as necessary. All interviews were recorded to increase accuracy. Each method was analyzed and clustered for themes. The themes were used to develop textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon of school discipline for students with a disability from the perspective of a mother. These descriptions were used to create a write-up to explain the essence of school discipline. Credibility in this study was established by triangulation of three data sources and extended engagement in the field (Patton, 2015). Dependability and confirmability were determined by performing audit trail checks and member checks. Transferability was increased by providing thick descriptions and details throughout the study. Ethical principles were applied throughout this research study which were reviewed by Liberty University's Institutional Review Board prior to the beginning of data collection to ensure minimal risks to the participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand what school discipline means to mothers of students with a disability at various school districts in Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. Data were collected from 13 mothers of students with a disability using focus groups, personal interviews, and timelines. Using transcripts, this researcher analyzed the data using the modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi Keen method of data analysis (Moustakas, 1994.) During the data collection process, as well as the data analysis process, this researcher bracketed personal feelings and thoughts by keeping a reflective journal, then discussed these thoughts and feelings with a colleague who is not associated with the study. This chapter provides a description of the participants, the descriptions created after horizontalization, and the themes that surfaced during data analysis. The chapter then presents the research question responses and a summary.

Participants

Thirteen mothers of students with a disability participated in this transcendental phenomenological study. In the purposive sample, there were seven participants from Ohio, three from Pennsylvania, two from Virginia, and one from Michigan who were recruited from social media recruitment posts. Two of the participants were Black and eleven of the participants were Caucasian. All participants signed and submitted informed consent forms. Because all data collections methods were conducted online, participants printed the forms, signed them, and then scanned and emailed them back. Each focus group interview and personal interview was videoed and recorded on the Zoom application and then transcribed verbatim. After personal interviews were transcribed, member checking was completed. The verbatim

transcript was emailed to each participant with instructions for each to check for accuracy. One participant did request an addition be made to her transcript and it was added. Below is a table of the participants' demographics demonstrating data from the demographic surveys completed by each mother. Following the table is a thick description which introduces each participant.

Angela

Angela was from a suburb in Northeast Ohio and was a Caucasian mother of two children with disabilities. Her 16-year-old daughter was diagnosed with autism and ADHD and her 12-year-old son was diagnosed with autism and ADD. Angela was married and her and her husband worked full-time outside of the home. Her children attended a suburban school district that served lower to middle socioeconomic families. Angela had a supportive network of family, friends, and church members who were accepting of her children. She described the most difficult part of being a parent of children with disabilities as the “stress in choosing the child’s school setting, extra curriculums, therapies etc., because if you don’t make the right choice, you may be limiting their potential.”

Samantha

Samantha was a Black, married, stay-at-home mother of three children, all of whom had been diagnosed with a disability. While living in a suburban school district in Northeast Ohio that services middle and lower socioeconomic families, two of Samantha’s children were serviced on IEPs and one was serviced on a 504 plan. Her 15-year-old daughter was diagnosed with ADD, her 10-year-old daughter was diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia, and her seven-year-old son was diagnosed with autism. Samantha’s husband worked full-time outside of the home and Samantha left her full-time job to return to school to become a teacher. While Samantha described her children as being smart, well-liked, and creative, she also expressed

concerns about being a brown person and dealing with school discipline issues. She expressed that the help and support she received from her son's teacher and her daughter's intervention specialist were extremely helpful.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth was a Black grandmother who was the custodial guardian of an 11-year-old grandson with autism. His mother also had an autism diagnosis. They all resided in an affluent, suburban school district in Northeast Ohio. Once retired, Elizabeth was working part-time for her former employer. She was married and was very involved in her church and community. While her grandson had some school discipline incidents over the years in school, she stated that “part of what has happened is that his behaviors have become a little less troublesome or problematic over the years.” She expressed concern that her grandson was not always challenged at the correct academic level. She felt that she was less of a disciplinarian for her grandson, but more of someone who could give him direction and guidance.

Julia

Julia was a Caucasian mother of a 12-year-old son with autism. Working as a full-time teacher, she lived in suburban community of residents with middle to upper socioeconomic status in Northwest Ohio. She was married and had a typically developing child. She sang on her church's praise team and received much of her support from her church family. Her son was born premature with a one-pound tumor attached to his heart and lungs. Julia advocated for communication about her son but stated most of what she hears is negative. She stated, “It always just lets you know how bad he was today, like a tattletale.” Julia had chosen to send her son to a school that specialized in serving students with autism because of his lack of success in the traditional public schools.

Ann

Ann was a Caucasian mother of a 12-year-old daughter with autism. They resided in an affluent suburban neighborhood outside of Columbus, Ohio. Ann was married and both her and her husband worked full-time outside of the home. Ann described her daughter as an extrovert who loved people and tried hard to please others. Ann dedicated much of her time to helping her daughter be successful academically, socially, and emotionally. She said, "I cut down on my job. She has a classroom that I set up that has doors on it so we can work together." Ann ensured that her daughter had related services such as speech therapy and occupational therapy as well as a counselor.

Sarah

Sarah was a Caucasian mother of two daughters; one who graduated from high school and the other who was 16 years old and in the tenth grade. Her 16-year-old daughter was diagnosed primarily with ADHD, but also with anxiety and an adolescent mood disorder. She was married and resided in an affluent Jewish community in Northeast Ohio. Sarah was a special education teacher herself and her husband also worked full-time outside of the home. Sarah described the struggles her daughter experienced this year with remote learning due to the coronavirus pandemic. She became quite emotional when discussing the apathy her daughter had developed for school and how her daughter "voiced not wanting to return to school in the Fall. She's actually voiced...about wanting to drop out of school altogether."

Betty

Betty was a single, Caucasian mother of a nine-year-old adopted son with autism, oppositional defiance disorder, ADHD, and post-traumatic stress disorder. She was currently unemployed and had a young toddler who was her biological son. They resided outside of a

large city in Virginia and her son attended an urban school. Betty's only support with her children was her brother. She stated that although she was currently unemployed, if it were not for her brother, she would have probably lost her job months before. Betty had spent much of her time trying to coordinate supports for her son and ensuring that his school district was following his IEP.

Rose

Rose was a Caucasian mother of a 15-year-old freshman with autism, ADHD, and anxiety. Rose was married and resided in a suburban community in Michigan with other residents of middle socioeconomic status. Her and her husband were employed full-time outside of the home. She explained that her son recently transitioned back into the traditional public school but had been attending a more specialized autism program through the local educational service center. Rose described her son as being "very inquisitive...he definitely cares about his family and he's a people pleaser." Rose was a proponent of restorative discipline practices.

Molly

Molly was a Caucasian mother of a 13-year-old adopted son who was in the seventh grade. Molly and her husband had already adopted his half-sister, and on Christmas Eve, they received a son. Molly and her family lived in a rural community in southeast Ohio. Most of the residents in this area had lower socioeconomic status. Molly's son was diagnosed with ADHD, oppositional defiance disorder, and intermittent explosive disorder. At the time of the interview, her son was waiting for an interview for more psychological testing. Due to the area where Molly lived, she explained the obstacles she faced is having access to resources to help her son. "We're going back to a psychologist, but that's 45 minutes away...We tried to get him into the children's hospital that's here and the waiting list is four months."

Dorothy

Dorothy was a Caucasian mother with a ten-year-old son with Down's Syndrome. She was married and both her and her husband worked full-time outside of the home. They also had two adult daughters who lived outside of the home. Her son's official diagnosis was Trisomy 21. He had been fully included in the general education population at an elementary school in western Pennsylvania, and until this year had a full-time aide accompany him to classes. They resided in a suburban community where the median income was around \$75,000 per household. Dorothy expressed strong emotions when she spoke of the current school year as the school district was unable to employ a full-time aide for her son. His behaviors had seen a sharp incline.

Rachel

Rachel was a Caucasian mother of a 14-year-old son diagnosed with ADHD and a sensory processing disorder as well as a neurotypical daughter. They lived in an upper socioeconomic community outside of Philadelphia in Pennsylvania. She was employed full-time outside of the home for the school district in which her son attended. She was married and her husband traveled for work throughout the week and was only home on the weekends. She expressed that this made it harder because "he doesn't always follow through. We have a system; we have routine...I have a certain level of expectation...He doesn't always hold that up on the weekends."

Diane

Diane was a stay-at-home mother of five children with a degree in psychology and biology. Her twelve-year-old son was diagnosed with ADHD combined with dyslexia. Diane's husband worked full-time outside of the home, and they resided in a large county in Virginia

where residents have various socioeconomic status. Diane volunteered in her children's schools. "I make it a point to make connections with teachers...I think it opens the path of communication between the teachers and the parents." Diane's two youngest children received speech services through an IEP as well.

Nicole

Nicole was a single mother of a 17-year-old daughter in the eleventh grade. The daughter was diagnosed with ADHD and an auditory processing disorder. They resided on a farm in a rural area in the northeast part of Pennsylvania close to New York State. Nicole was a teacher in New York while her daughter attended school in Pennsylvania. She also had an older daughter diagnosed with anxiety. Nicole stated she wished teachers were more flexible. "There's more than one way to learn. There is more than one way to do everything. To put kids into cookie cutter roles...it just doesn't work."

Results

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand what school discipline means to mothers of students with a disability. Data were from focus groups, personal interviews, and timelines and then analyzed using the modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi Keen method of qualitative data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). This section of the chapter presents the steps taken during data analysis, the themes that emerged during this analysis, and the responses to the research questions.

Theme Development

After the informed consent documents were received, data were collected from the participants about their lived experiences in relation to school discipline from their personal interviews, the focus group interviews, and through written timelines that chronologically

outlined each mother's experiences with school discipline. Once horizontalization was completed for each of the interviews and the timelines, the data were triangulated to ensure that relevant statements and themes that were beginning to be identified could be verified. As quotes from the mothers' personal interview transcripts and experiences from their timelines were recorded, evidence of like experiences between participants were evident. It was necessary to spend time immersed in the focus group transcripts to compare this data to the personal interviews and the timeline interviews. This permitted full triangulation of the data to confirm what the mothers had revealed personally matched what was revealed within a group setting. At the same time, this researcher was completing the process of Epochè, by recording personal reflections, feelings, and attitudes in a reflective journal. Moustakas (1994) described this process as having the ability to clear our minds so that we can allow new understandings to enter. This researcher spoke with a colleague about what was written in the reflective journal to bracket out predispositions or preconceived ideas about the study topic. The statements were categorized into codes and the codes were used to create themes. These themes and the statements were used to write a textural description of school discipline for each participant (see Appendix H). A textural description is what the mothers of students with disabilities experienced about the school discipline policies and procedures of their children (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Next, using imaginative variation and the textural description, a structural description of school discipline was created for each participant. A structural description tells how the mothers of students with disabilities experienced the school discipline policy and procedures of their children (see Appendix H). These two descriptions were then combined to write a composite textural-structural description of school discipline. The composite textural-structural description is meant

to give the essence of the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018), as it explains the qualities and nature of the experience. Below is a table of the codes and how they aligned with the themes.

Table 2

Codes and Themes

Themes	Codes
Conduct of Administration	Grade Retention Characterization of Brown students Stereotyping Inflexibility Response to student behavior Police and court intervention Ignoring parent requests
Special Education Compliance	Refusing to test despite parent request Refusing IEP despite outside agency testing Manifestation Determination Behavior Intervention Plan IEP Accommodations
Conduct of Teachers	Replacement of classroom materials Modifications for students with disabilities Relationships with students Triggering student behaviors Classroom control
Disciplinary Consequences	Exclusion Restraint Loss of recess Unacceptance of late work Isolation/Seclusion Office referral Lunch detention
School Communication	Phone calls and texting Emails about behavior Arguments about administration Negative comments/tattletale Behavior Intervention Plan

Conduct of administration. One theme that developed as a result of data analysis was the day-to-day conduct of school administration. Principals of schools have the power to choose the type of discipline a student receives in each behavior incident when a student is referred to the office. This response to student behavior is why Julia, who had a son with autism, listed several instances on her timeline where the principal called her while she was at work to pick her son up because the school was unable to manage his behavior when he was in first grade. She wrote on her timeline, “The principal called me and asked me to come pick my son up. He got out of his classroom and wandered into the gym. He started running around and scratching the students and staff.” Rachel had similar experiences when her son with ADHD was in preschool. Rachel indicated on her timeline because her son had difficulty sitting still in morning circle, he was isolated in a chair outside of the circle. He also did not say good morning to his teacher, and he began to chew on his clothing. His teacher would send him to the administrator who would call Rachel every day to pick him up. In her personal interview she stated, “I was like I can’t pick him up at twenty after nine. I dropped him off at 9 o’clock. I went in and they had him in a different classroom and he was just sobbing and chewing on his shirt.” Some participants discussed how school administrators are trying to implement more restorative practices so students can learn from their behaviors and restore relationships. Betty whose nine-year-old son was diagnosed with autism, oppositional defiance disorder, ADHD, and PTSD, liked it when the principal or administrative staff tried to figure out the reasons for her son’s behaviors. One day her son was having a terrible day. During a focus group she related, “So he came down to her office and she (the principal) was like ‘I want him to stay here the rest of the day. He’s going to stay here in the office with me and he’s going to do paperwork, but he’s not allowed to come to school tomorrow.’ She actually took the time to understand what was going on.” Despite her son

having negative discipline experiences in middle school, Rose was encouraged by the restorative discipline the principal at her son's school had been using. During her interview she said, "He had to repair the harm of what he did...that I feel was a little more meaningful...giving him an opportunity to learn from it."

Some of the participants described the conduct of administration based on their interactions with them. Dorothy experienced negative interactions with administration when she was called to assist with her 10-year-old son with Down Syndrome and was fully included in a regular classroom. During her personal interview she said, "Our recent experiences and interactions with the school administration have led me to believe they either have no idea what they are doing or are trying to hide something at the school." Molly found that the principal's interactions with her son was a trigger for her son's behavior. During a focus group she commented, "She is one of the people who would scream at him incessantly." Conduct of administration can also be described as the willingness to include police and law enforcement in the disciplinary decisions for students with disabilities. Molly described a variety of negative experiences with school administration in terms of involvement of the police and court systems on her timeline. When he was 11-years old, her son with ADHD, oppositional defiant disorder, and intermittent explosive disorder asked to go home because he was sick. He was told he could not go home and to go to the resource room to calm down. On his way there he threw a book at a teacher who was following him. They had called the police. The police had him on a crash mat, on the ground restrained with a spit hood over his head. Administration did not tell the police about his disabilities or anything about him. The district filed charges and they got the

teacher to file charges against him for throwing the book and called that assault and we ended up in court.

During her interview, Sarah described an experience with police and her 17-year-old daughter with anxiety who was involved in a back-and-forth writing squabble with some other girls in which she finally got angry and wrote “I’m gonna kill you.” Sarah recalled, “The police showed up at my house that night because they thought my daughter was threatening people. So, I had to take off work and go to a hearing.”

Participants also disclosed how their children had been stereotyped and characterized either by their disability or by the color of their skin and their disability. During a focus group, Elizabeth whose 12-year-old grandson was diagnosed with autism stated, “school leaders need to be trained on the full range of issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity and focus on students with disabilities. There’s a lot of stereotyping that goes with kids if they have a disability.” When it comes to discipline issues and administration, Samantha said during her interview, “as a brown person I feel like I have to seek out if this matter is something I need to heavily burden myself with. Unfortunately, with brown kids...I absolutely cannot have anything going. Their records are staying on their records.” Samantha had a 10-year-old daughter with ADHD and dyslexia and a seven-year-old son with autism.

Special education compliance. Another theme that stemmed from data analysis was the difficulties with the Individualized Education Program (IEP) that participants experienced. One of the difficulties some of the mothers discussed was getting their children tested even after

several requests to their school district. Samantha said this about her 10-year-old daughter in her interview:

They are saying she must repeat kindergarten and I am saying she knows stuff, there's something different with the way she learns. Something is just different. And they were like no, no, no. We think she just needs to take more time and repeat...They fought tooth and nail and did not want to give her an IEP...and it was like she was being admonished for being all over the place.

Samantha explained in her timeline it took her from kindergarten until the end of second grade for the district to finally approve her daughter for special education services under the specific learning disability category as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Similarly, Nicole's daughter had a hearing loss, auditory processing disorder and ADHD. She repeated kindergarten and Nicole requested in second grade that her daughter be tested to receive special education services. She commented during a focus group, "They did a full panel testing, and she didn't qualify because she didn't hit the low marks low enough and her grades were too high for them to consider any kind of intervention." Data from her timeline indicated Nicole sought outside agency testing and the results indicated her daughter was eligible for special education services under the specific learning disability category. However, the school district continued to refuse services. In a focus group, Nicole expressed her distaste for the administration at her daughter's school and their views about special education.

They really don't recognize special ed as an important thing that they need to follow or an IEP and they just kind of make up their own rules. Unfortunately, most administration, including right up to the top, does not recognize disabilities, does not try

to equalize the playing field, and if a kid gets in trouble enough, they're convinced to drop out.

Following the accommodations written in the IEP is an important part of special education compliance as described by the participants in the study. Betty said in a focus group, "One of his teachers took away his books and wouldn't let him go to the back of the classroom for quiet which is directly in his IEP." Diane stated in all three data sources that the teachers had been lax about providing her son's accommodations especially during the shutdown with the Coronavirus pandemic. "I've had to remind teachers about extended time or copies of notes." In Dorothy's case, as was written in her timeline, according to her son's IEP, he was supposed to have a full-time paraprofessional to assist him in his full inclusion classes daily. She said this during a focus group: "Recently they have been having some staffing issues since the beginning of the year and he does not have a full-time aide. His behavior has definitely declined." Molly felt that many of her son's behaviors were a manifestation of his disability. In her personal interview she said,

It's his oppositional defiance disorder. That is one that he really struggles with. Where he used to be disruptive in class and break things, pencils, and throw paper when he didn't want to do something, now he just sits there and refuses to do it. What they haven't got about him is you just have to leave him be and he'll eventually come back and do what he needs to do. But if you continually tell him and prompt him, it's just no good.

Students with disabilities often have a behavior intervention plan (BIP) included in their IEP to help them reach behavior goals. Teachers and administrators must follow the BIP in order to meet the criteria of special education compliance. Julia discussed in her timeline and then again in her personal interview how her son's behavior intervention plan (BIP) was implemented to

help manage his behaviors but was used as a negative control measure in the classroom. “One of the schools he was at, the teacher there, she wanted control over her classroom, which is understandable. But her method of control over the classroom, instead of using the behavior intervention plan to help my son, it was used to kind of control him.” Molly also described a negative experience with the implementation of her son’s BIP in her personal interview.

I get a daily behavior report on my child now because on his BIP he has a scale they are trying to achieve. I do see it daily and we are struggling right now with the report because of the data they are collecting. I am posing questions and I can see that it’s not being applied consistently.

Conduct of teachers. This theme emerged as the participants shared their experiences about their daily interactions with teachers. Some of the mothers discussed the flexibility of teaching staff. Nicole explained having issues with inflexible teachers during a focus group interview and then again during her personal interview. She had a daughter with anxiety and when she was in eleventh grade, she had an assignment to make a presentation in front of the class. Nicole spoke to the teacher to see if her daughter could just present to the teacher. “She made me get a doctor’s note that she had anxiety before she would say yes to that...You know there’s a difference between trying to get away with something and making mods [modifications] for kids that have issues.” Diane discussed during a focus group and then again during her personal interview when her son was in kindergarten it was very frustrating because the teacher would give her very little information. “Like there was some behavioral stuff but the most the teacher would ever say was you know we’re worried about your son...There wasn’t any suggestion of maybe you need to get him tested.” Angela explained in her interview that her experience with a strict teacher caused her to move her son to a different classroom. “We really

felt that this strict teacher gave him no leeway whatsoever to just be a kid... Some of it was oh my gosh, he's a boy. Some of this is typical for just boys in general not that he's got issues." When it comes to the conduct of teachers she's interacted with, Julia explained during a focus group, "I think they're always trying to control the situation. They want to control the behavior. They focus on stopping whatever is impeding them from doing what they need to do instead of addressing why the behavior is occurring." During a focus group, Ann discussed a situation with one of her daughter's teachers when recess was taken away: "when she was there, she has very limited space where she was allowed to have recess, but the teacher was looking out the window the whole time telling her 'No you can't do this and get up and play with your friends.'"

Some of the mothers discussed how positive relationships between students and teachers can influence student behavior. Samantha spoke of her son's teacher during a focus group, highlighting "he develops a personal connection and he got to know my son very well...to the point of he knows my son's ticks. He knows my son's things that would get him directly upset versus things that shouldn't get him upset." Diane had also had positive experiences with the teachers. In a focus group she said, "The teachers are very supportive. They're very engaging with the kids. They really become friends with the kids."

Disciplinary consequences. The types of disciplinary consequences their children receive arose as a theme as the participants discussed the disciplinary procedures their children's schools used. On her timeline, Dorothy explained the "horror" she felt when she found her son excluded from the class. "Recently I arrived at the school and my son was in a six foot by eight-foot room with an aide and another administrative person and had been in that room all day." She felt that the school was not helping with his behaviors, but actually causing them. In some circumstances, teachers used restraint and seclusion as methods of control for Julia's son, but she

saw these as forms of abuse as indicated in all three data sources. Julia witnessed a teacher strapping her son into a chair so that he could not wonder around the room. In her interview she said, “Like he would sit down, they would strap him in it and then they would pick him up... and put him in the circle and he could walk just fine”. When her son swung his arms and hit the aide who was sitting next to him

She unbuckled him...walked him around to the back of the room...she had to physically pick him up three times. They took him into the side bathroom and set a timer. They ended up putting him in an adult sized Rifton chair and buckled him in around the waist and around the chest. They wheeled this old chalkboard in front of the doorway and turned the lights off.

A Rifton chair can be made of wood or plastic and the back of the chair is adjustable so it can be angled (Kahng, Boscoe, & Byrne, 2013). The chair is also equipped with a seatbelt and adjustable footrests. Molly described an incident during her interview where she felt her son was restrained unnecessarily. Her son told staff that someone was throwing food at him in the cafeteria, and he was told to ignore it. Instead, her son punched the student in the head and was sent to the office. Molly received a call to pick her son up.

I saw him throw his lunchbox on the ground and the next thing I see is the intervention specialist restraining him, which there was no reason for the restraint. And so, he broke free. I got in there, we followed him back down the hallway. The teacher was there again trying to restrain him again from behind...so, he took his head and threw it back and hit the teacher in the face. They moved to a sit-down restraint where they had me on one

side and the teacher on the other side with the arm positioning. The special ed coordinator came in and grabbed his one arm and put it up to the middle of his back.

Conversely, a few of the mothers talked about how their children get preferential treatment because teachers like them. Angela discussed in a focus group how in her experience, “sometimes the consequences seem too forgiving making it likely they would make the same mistake again.” For example, when her daughter was in middle school “she was caught cheating on a test. The administrator, the teacher, and the principal said, well we’re willing to give her another chance to take the test.” Angela felt this was something that would not have been done for a typical student. When referring to her 10-year-old daughter, Samantha wrote on her timeline, “She kind of received a lot of preferential treatment because the teachers liked her.”

Many of the mothers discussed their experiences with exclusion as a disciplinary consequence. When discussing her grandson, Elizabeth explained on her timeline “there were a couple of times when he did not get to participate in something at school because he did not meet the behavioral expectations. I did not like it but understood the rationale for it.” When a new girl came to school who also received special education services, Ann’s daughter became jealous and was physically and verbally aggressive toward the new girl. Ann stated during her interview, “she really got singled out by the teacher as far as recess was taken away, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension.” In a situation with Rose’s son, he was excluded from an activity that was not a reward. Although he spent the day in the office for in-school suspension, he was sent back to the room and the class was receiving cupcakes for a student’s birthday. He was told he could not have any because he was in the office all day. During her interview she said through tears, “Then he took and shoved all the books off the shelf onto the floor...Of course he had in-

school suspension the next day because he did that. I felt like he was getting set up to fail and then failed and got punished for it.”

School communication. School communication, especially about their children’s behavior and disciplinary incidents also emerged as a theme during data analysis. Rose explained that it was very stressful when her son received an exclusionary consequence. The communication was never timely. During her interview she stated, “I would get a phone call from the assistant principals saying, ‘hey just so you know this happened yesterday at school so he’s going to serve an in-school suspension today or an out-of-school suspension today.’” Many of the participants discussed how school communication about their children, whether it was from administration or from teachers, was almost always negative. Dorothy said in a focus group, “As a parent one of the things I find disheartening is it’s almost all negative, the interaction between parents and teachers. You don’t get a lot of positive feedback.” She said, “I receive a daily tattletale sheet from the school of every little thing he did wrong that day.” Julia explained in her interview that she used to get daily emails from her son’s teacher about how his day was. “It’s always just lets you know how bad he was today, like a tattle tale.” Angela stated in a focus group, “We had a horrible experience in fourth grade with my son. There was no communication back and forth about how he was doing or where he needed help.” Many of the participants discussed the difficulties they had with communication during the Coronavirus pandemic. Ann expressed during the focus group, “all communication has come in the form of email from the intervention specialist. There has been no communication from the teachers.” Diane expressed frustration with the reports she was getting from teachers and the information that was presented online because of COVID. In a focus group and then again in her interview she commented, “They’re like reporting no missing homework and I’m like but if you look at his

online account, he's got a lot of missing homework." Rachel kept in constant communication with her son's teachers so that her son stayed focused and on track. During a focus group she said, "I have that open communication with his teachers, and they cc me on all the emails they send to him...It's just like that little check and balance."

Unrelated Themes

Throughout the data analysis process, two themes unrelated to the topic of school discipline were identified. While the themes are unrelated to school discipline, they have important implications for stakeholders, teachers, and administrators. The first theme that was identified was parent support and resources, and the second theme was issues caused by the Coronavirus shutdown.

Parent support and resources. One theme that arose from the research that was unrelated to school discipline was parent support and resources. Most of the participants described a need for more support either from the school district or within the community to help improve the behavior of their children with disabilities. In her interview, Rose revealed, "we have a lot of resources in our town and so, I think just making sure finding the right connections for parents and finding the right community supports. You know the school's not necessarily going to offer that because I don't feel like schools necessarily understand it all." Ann felt that her 12-year-old daughter's autism diagnosis kept her socially isolated from her peers. In a focus group she said, "We don't have connections for other parents of special needs kids in the school district...There should be, I'm not saying necessarily a support group but a way of these kids connecting." Angela also commented during a focus group, "It would be great if along with a PTA in every school there was a PTA for parents with children of disabilities." Molly disclosed, "Especially for kids with behavior, we don't have the resources. The staff doesn't have the

training.” Dorothy also was vocal about her issues with staff training. During a focus group she said, “I would think as a parent the school system could be some kind of resource to help you as the parent, parent your child. And what I’m finding is they don’t have much training. They don’t have the skill set I would expect them to have of understanding children with disabilities.”

Issues caused by the Coronavirus shutdown. Another theme that arose from the research was issues caused by the Coronavirus shutdown. Most participants had experienced problems with school communication, completing assignments, or participating in instruction during the Coronavirus shutdown. Samantha discussed the difficulty of having three children in her interview. “For a mom with three kids, it’s not easy to constantly look over the Schoology and then the Progressbook. And then sometimes you have to look into some other resources to try to figure out what their grades are.” In Molly’s community, there were issues with internet access. During a focus group she said, “We had a whole lot of problems with internet here and access to lessons and access to his services...we were running off hotspots and we couldn’t do any Zooms or anything like that.” During her interview, Julia described her interaction with the behavior specialist and the implementation of her son’s IEP goals during the Coronavirus shutdown. “During COVID it’s been rough because I really feel like everything has been on us.” Rachel said that being a parent has been harder with the Coronavirus shutdown. In her interview she said, “It’s one thing when you’re a mom at home and you’re like you gotta set the table, put your shoes away and clean up the laundry. But now, I’m like mom, and teacher, and I was working all day.” Sarah and Betty had difficulty getting their children to participate in virtual learning due to their disabilities. Sarah’s daughter was diagnosed with ADHD, anxiety, and a mood disorder, while Betty’s son was diagnosed with autism, ADHD, PTSD, and oppositional defiance disorder. Betty referenced her difficulties in her timeline and then said in her interview

“Some days my son is just not capable of doing virtual learning...I was like I will login for him. I will make sure he gets attendance credit, but I’m not forcing him to do anything.” Discouraged by her inability to get information, Diane stated in a focus group, “We are trying to get information and even the case manager is like ‘I don’t know them all.’ And my son hasn’t even met them in person.” Dorothy spoke of how much work was given to her son daily, relating during a focus group,

The virtual learning definitely was a fiasco here. I think the expectations were grand of parents who have no experience of being an educator...Like art, music, gym, I mean some of the things they were expecting parents to do were a little over the top. We struggled just to get through reading and math. Then they piled more on top.

After data were analyzed, coding led to the development of five major themes relating to the research topic and two unrelated themes. The conduct of administration and teachers had an essential influence of the experiences of the participants in the study. These experiences were also impacted by the disciplinary consequences chosen for their children, difficulties with specialties with the special education process and the communication the participants received.

Research Question Responses

The central research question of this study was, “How do mothers of students with a disability experience the school discipline policies and procedures of their children?” The answer to the central research question is mothers of students with disabilities experienced school discipline policies and procedures through the conduct of school administration and teachers, the

compliance with special education mandates, the application of various disciplinary consequences for their children, and through the communication with school staff.

Sub-question One

Sub-question one of the study was, “How have school discipline experiences shaped the relationships within the microsystem for mothers of students with disabilities?” The answer to sub-question one is the relationships within the school microsystem have been impacted by the participants’ school discipline experiences due to the conduct of and communication with school staff.

Conduct of teachers and administration. Rachel and Julia’s school discipline experiences created different relationships within their school microsystems. Rachel said she worked at her son’s elementary school and lived right next door to it. Rachel said in her interview the first time her son forgot his homework “I made him go in. I also work there. I have a swipe badge. He had to apologize for not bringing his things home and for not packing up when he was supposed to.” When discussing a meeting Julia had with her son’s principal during her interview she said, “It was tough for me as well because I’m the bad guy. But I also work for the district. We had a sit-down meeting with the overhead specialist, and I had asked for an advocate to come with me.” For Ann, Sarah, and Betty, the conduct of the teachers defined their experiences with school discipline and thus molded their relationships within their school microsystems. Ann talked about a time her daughter was having some issues with aggression in her personal interview. “I was disappointed in the teacher...I found it became very personal for the teacher to watch everything she (the daughter) was doing.” Sarah has been bothered by the conduct of the special education teacher and how she would address her daughter’s behavior. In her interview she commented, “My daughter would take out her fidgets

during class and it was always the special ed teacher complaining that it was disruptive in class, and we were very careful to pick out the fidgets.” Elizabeth and Rose talked about experiences they had with the conduct of school administration that shaped their experiences with school discipline. Elizabeth explained in her interview, “administration doesn’t always handle problematic behavior correctly, and in one instance my grandson who is on the autistic spectrum and has ADHD was told to ignore a person who was picking on him. I felt that was putting all the onus on my grandson to always handle the situation.” Since going to the high school, Rose liked the restorative discipline they had been using because it gave her son a chance to learn about his mistakes. Rose shared during her interview, “I feel like the movement more toward restorative practices have definitely been more beneficial for my children.”

Communication with school staff. Participants shared details about their experiences with school staff that have shaped their relationships within the school microsystem. In second grade, Molly had difficulty involving her son’s teacher in communication about her son’s experiences. She referred to this experience on her timeline and during her interview she said,

This was a brand-new teacher to the school, so I wanted to engage in conversations with her about what we had been experiencing. And his first-grade teacher was wonderful, so I asked her to write up some things...Unfortunately the second grade teacher, her philosophy was I don’t want to know anything about any of them. I’ll learn about it just

by having him in here...And we just saw his anxiety and his frustrations were getting more and more.

Dorothy explained her frustration with the communication and conduct of administration and staff of her son's school when she was called to help calm him down. During a focus group she said,

I asked an aide what happened, and she would not look at me and looked scared. She looked at the school principal and would not answer me. The principal informed me that the aides were not allowed to speak to parents directly. They had to go through his teacher or the principal.

On the other hand, Ann explained how the communication with school staff was very beneficial when it came to school discipline. During a focus group she said, "The communication with the intervention specialist has been outstanding when there's any kind of misunderstanding on my daughter's part of things that happened through the day." Samantha felt ignored by district officials when trying to obtain special education service for her daughter over a three-year period. In her interview she commented,

I found it to be a heavy hindrance. The social worker who was assessing over and over kept telling me constantly how she doesn't need an IEP, nothing's wrong. So, let's just say it's ADHD and you know, she is kind of all over so it's ADHD. And I'm like you guys are focusing on the wrong thing.

Angela, Samantha, Diane, Rachel, and Julia related how communication was extremely important in building the relationships within the school microsystem. Julia said in her interview, "I guess multiple modes of communication are number one. I think before you even know what the school district needs from you, you need to be able to communicate in great

length.” Preferring frequent communication, Angela stated in a focus group, “there is no detail that’s too small. I’d rather have too much information and have to choose what I use than not have enough and end up missing an opportunity that could make a difference. If my son had a good day, send me a one line text saying my son did great today. Don’t just contact me when there are problems.” During a focus group interview Samantha stated, “my 10-year-old, her intervention specialist is really great. She sends me a rundown of the things she turned in and the things she still has missing.” Diane explained in her interview,

They [teachers] are trying to communicate with my son via email. But getting a seventh grader with ADHD to check his email isn’t a good way of communicating. So, I had to ask the teachers to please put me on the email. If they are sending something to my son, I want to know about it because he is not going to read it.”

For Rachel, frequent communication was a major school support as she related in a focus group, “they need to be able to listen to you, but you need to be able to listen to them too. That’s huge for me.” Dorothy described her interaction with administration as difficult in her interview. “They tend to be very guarded, and I get that in the legality world. But as parents we are just trying to have the best scenario we can for our kids.”

Findings for sub-question one which asks, “How have school discipline experiences shaped the relationships within the microsystem for mothers of students with disabilities?” indicated the conduct of and the communication with school staff shaped the relationships within the school microsystem for mothers of students with disabilities.

Sub-question Two

Sub-question two of the study was “How do mothers of students with disabilities ascribe meaning to school discipline?” The answer to sub-question two is mothers use their children’s

experiences with disciplinary consequences and their school's compliance with special education mandates to ascribe meaning to school discipline.

Disciplinary consequences. Participants conveyed how disciplinary consequences were essential to their experiences with school discipline. Nicole stated in her interview that her children did not get referred to the office for discipline very often.

But I said if you get in trouble, the first words out of your mouth is call my mom. And don't say anything else except call my mom until they call me, and I come in. The district has a bad reputation for rolling over kids' civil liberties and not following guidelines or even the Geneva Convention.

Julia discussed in her interview her difficulties with classroom management systems such as the red, yellow, and green chart.

You just get a color with no reasoning behind the color. I'm like what does this mean to you. I mean if you think he swung at a kid and hit him in the arm like that might be oh well, he's still on green because the rest of the day he was still good. I would put him on yellow. Green, yellow, and red doesn't mean anything to me unless there's some sort of note attached to let me know what your standards are.

During a focus group, and then again in her personal interview, Molly described disciplinary practices that were not beneficial to improving her son's behavior. "We'd find out things like while he was in crisis and sitting in an office rolling chair, they would try to roll him down the hallway to his next classroom." Angela discussed expectations and consequences at her children's school in a focus group. "Behavior expectations have always been clear and there are consequences when the rules are not followed. Sometimes the consequences seem too forgiving, making it likely that they would make the same mistake." Sarah experienced her daughters being

assigned afterschool study hours, detention, or Saturday school so they could finish incomplete homework. She wrote on her timeline, “I don’t believe in punishing students by forcing them to do more school.” Samantha discussed how her daughters received preferential treatment for behavior incidents that an average student may have been disciplined for. For example, when speaking of her 10-year-old daughter, she wrote on her timeline, “She literally in the middle of class would go under the desk and start purring like a cat and tell everyone she was a cat. So, there were sometimes she really should have been disciplined...where it was just kind of like oh well, you know go to the office and say hi to the secretary.”

Rose described the exclusionary consequences her son had received for discipline. During her interview, she said the most difficult thing about school discipline

is making sure that something is learned from it and it’s not just punitive. The most difficult part is when it’s so detached from the behavior that you’re not going to have to be at school or you get to miss that whole class that you didn’t want to be at anyways. So, I feel like sometimes it can be more reinforcing of the behaviors.

Julia, Betty and Molly each described experiences in which their children were expelled from school or aftercare. Betty simply said in her interview, “He was expelled from preschool. He was expelled from Kindergarten.” Julia wrote on her timeline:

My son didn’t even last a day. They told me he kept trying to run out of the room and was banging on the back of where they take the kids for recess. He also turned on the

water and climbed into the sink...They refunded me my down deposit of 70 dollars that day and told me he was not permitted to return.

Molly spoke about her son attending Catholic school, explaining during her interview, “They [school administration] felt a stricter structure and environment would fix him and it just got worse...And so the school said he can’t come back.”

Compliance with special education mandates. Many of the participants referenced their children’s special education documents when ascribing meaning to school discipline. During her interview, Betty said that when her son received a disciplinary consequence, she always investigated why and what led up to the event.

In a typical situation when the school calls me, I always like to know what happened, because if they didn’t catch something that we know is a trigger and that is documented in his IEP as a trigger, my son is still held responsible for his response. He is intelligent. He is capable. But the teachers also need to understand that there is a way to prevent a lot of it.”

Diane said in a focus group, “I’ve had to remind teachers about extended time or copies of notes.” Betty explained in a focus group, “One time he [the teacher] had him take a quiz by himself. He is supposed to have his tests and quizzes read aloud to him. He is supposed to be able to do it in the hall with no distractions or in the special education room with no distractions and they had him do it in the classroom. She didn’t repeat anything. I was like no wonder he failed.” Nicole referred to an incident on her timeline when her daughter lost a book the entire

class was reading, and the teacher would not give her another book. During her interview she said,

When she finally told me she didn't have a book to read from, I ordered it on Amazon, and she had it in two days. I said to the teacher, 'You have somebody with auditory processing and ADHD sitting and reading over somebody's shoulder during group work.' We had problems with that teacher.

In a focus group, Molly discussed difficulties with her son's school complying with his behavior intervention plan. "Until we got the behavior therapist, his behavior goals weren't even part of his IEP. That became problematic because the BIP is not a legal document, but the IEP is. We had to write the behavior goal into the IEP and force that situation."

The findings of sub-question three indicated that mothers of students with disabilities ascribed meaning to school discipline through the disciplinary consequences assigned to their children as well as their schools' compliance with special education mandates.

Sub-question Three

Sub-question three of the study was, "How do mothers of students with a disability describe self-efficacy and factors of agency that contribute to their experiences with school discipline policies and procedures?" The answer to question three is the mothers of students with disabilities described low self-efficacy and factors of agency that contribute to their experiences with school discipline policies and procedures. Participants described communication with school staff and disciplinary consequences as factors influencing self-efficacy.

Communication with school staff. Participants found that their communication with school staff and at times lack of communication produced low self-efficacy, especially during the

school shutdown because of the Coronavirus. This communication left these mothers feeling unsupported and unequipped. Diane said through tears in her interview,

Right now, it's just so difficult. Like I really feel like these kids are the kids that are just getting left behind this year. And people are like 'Oh well. You just want your child babysat.' I'm like, you have no understanding of what these kids need and what I am not able to give them. Obviously, they will listen to someone else better than they will listen to me. It's hard not to compare yourself to other people.

Rose felt a lack of support when it came to being a mother of a student with a disability which was triangulated in all three data sources. Through tears she said, "You know it's hard being a parent period...It would be nice to have more support from school or getting hooked up with the right resources." Ann wanted school staff and administration to know that she was an extension of school for her daughter. "I may not have the same education, but I am very motivated to help her." However, as stated in a focus group, Samantha wished teachers understood "sometimes as a parent that even though they are our kids...we don't know what they are thinking. We can't grasp the end of this. We can't teach our own kids." Dorothy explained how her interactions with school staff had troubled her. She said in a focus group, "I'm an accountant and I never went to school to be knowledgeable about special needs children...It seems like I tend to be the one to make suggestions. I tend to be the one offering advice and I would have expected it to go the other way." Sarah had experienced some of the same feelings due to her being employed in the field of education. She referred to these feelings in all three data sources and stated in her interview, "In my case, the administration tends to spend a lot of time leaning back on me as the expert when it comes to my child. Then I get the added dig 'well you're in the same field as we are so you should understand what it's like or maybe you could offer some strategies.' It's

probably almost condescending.” Betty had similar feelings of the other participants as she explained feeling judged by her son’s teacher. “She said I need to take charge, but I’m like that’s not how this works. It’s not about taking charge... This women does not get that I can’t punish him enough to make him care about his schoolwork.”

Disciplinary consequences. Some participants communicated how low self-efficacy and factors of agency relate to their experiences with their children’s disciplinary consequences. Molly described her feelings of always needing to be prepared and waiting for the next discipline incident at her son’s school. In her interview while crying, she related “because of my experiences, I’m always on edge...I’m like what’s next? What do I have to research? What do I have to prepare myself for? I feel like I always have to be on, and I never have that time to just feel like my kid is in good and safe hands.” In all three sources of data, Julia related she felt her 12-year-old son with autism was treated like an animal in the past.

They focused on stopping whatever was impeding them from doing what they needed to do instead of addressing why the behavior was occurring and then intervening before it got to that point. You know it made me feel like they treated my son like he was an animal.

Sarah discussed her feelings of failure with her daughter’s behavior. “The point is, they’re not focusing on the best supports for the ADHD. There has been failures to implement the IEP which led to the behaviors. We ask for adjustments then we get ignored. The discipline is not really discipline. It’s just chastising.”

When answering the third sub-question, “How do mothers of students with a disability describe self-efficacy and factors of agency that contribute to their experiences with school

discipline policies and procedures?” mothers described low self-efficacy and factors of agency that contributed to their experiences with school discipline policies and procedures.

Composite Textural-Structural Description

Mothers of students with disabilities felt that school discipline should be reserved for behaviors that needed to be addressed and not just given for behaviors that were typical for children. While communication between the school and home was beneficial in improving student discipline and behavior, it was rarely timely and the mothers of students with disabilities had rarely received positive comments about their children. Many mothers felt that the teachers were just giving a tattletale report on their children. Clear behavior expectations and consequences were needed in school discipline; however, the schools had been using in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, restraint, and seclusion when they could not manage the students. Teachers and administrators also had the opinion that stricter teachers and environments would help students with disabilities. However, this just increased the need for discipline. Mothers of students with disabilities faced challenges of testing for IEP accommodations, and then once the child received services ensuring that the teachers and administration applied the accommodations. Even when the behaviors of their children were manifestations of their disabilities, their children were still held accountable with disciplinary consequences. When their children were involved in a disciplinary situation, the mothers received texts, phone calls, and emails about the incidents. Some had been called from their jobs to help handle the situations. This had caused some of the mothers to quit their jobs or to cut back on the hours of their jobs. School administration had sought out support from the police

and court systems when dealing with student behavior without informing these supports about the students' disability status.

Summary

Chapter Four presented the findings of this phenomenological study which examined how mothers of students with disabilities experienced the school discipline policies and procedures of their children. Using purposive sampling, thirteen participants were chosen to complete timelines and to participate in personal interviews and focus groups. This data was collected and transcribed verbatim and then analyzed using the modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi Keen method of data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). After horizontalization and phenomenological reduction were completed, five major themes were identified in the data. These themes included a) the conduct of administration, b) special education compliance, c) the conduct of teachers, d) disciplinary consequences, and e) school communication. The central research question in this study was, "How do mothers of students with a disability experience the school discipline policies and procedures of their children?" The answer to the central research question is mothers of students with disabilities experience school discipline policies and procedures through the conduct of school administration and teachers, the compliance with special education mandates, the application of various disciplinary consequences for their children, and through the communication with school staff. Findings from this chapter are discussed in chapter five.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand what school discipline means to mothers of students with a disability. The study included 13 mothers of students with disabilities from Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Virginia who were chosen using purposive sampling. Data were collected and triangulated using timelines, focus groups and personal interviews and then analyzed using the modified Stevick-Colaizzi Keen method of data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). This chapter provides a summary of the findings from the data and discussion of these findings and their implications when the study's theories and current literature are taken into consideration. Methodological and practical implications of the study are discussed as well as the study's delimitations and limitations. Recommendations for further research are also made, followed by a short summary.

Summary of Findings

Thirteen female participants, two Black and eleven Caucasian, were purposefully chosen from Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Virginia using purposive sampling and data were triangulated using timelines, focus groups and personal interviews. All data were analyzed using the modified Stevick-Colaizzi Keen method of data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). This study was guided by one central research question and three sub-questions. The central research question in this study was, "How do mothers of students with a disability experience the school discipline policies and procedures of their children?" The answer to the central research question is mothers of students with disabilities experience school discipline policies and procedures through the conduct of school administration and teachers, the compliance with special education mandates, the application of various disciplinary consequences for their children, and through the

communication with school staff. Participants described how administration was often unequipped to manage the behaviors of their children. They found that school staff was often unknowledgeable or untrained in the management of behaviors of students with disabilities and instead requested help from the parents. Some participants described how schools were unwilling to provide special education services for their children, and then once their children have IEP paperwork, accommodations were not always given. The mothers experienced their children's school discipline due to a lack of manifestation determinations. The mothers discussed how the flexibility of teachers was important for the success of their children in terms of behavior and discipline. Many of the behaviors displayed by their children were a symptom of their impairments. The mothers experienced their children's school discipline through their teachers' responses to their behaviors. They described the behavior consequences received by their children which included being excluded from school activities, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, restraint, and seclusion. Their children had also been involved with the criminal and court systems because of their school behaviors. The participants experienced their children's school discipline through the communication they received from the school, such as the texts, phone calls, or emails that were most often negative. They received text messages, phone calls, and emails often at inopportune times about communicating the issues schools were having with their children.

Sub-question one was, "How have school discipline experiences shaped the relationships within the microsystem for mothers of students with disabilities?" The answer to sub-question one is the relationships within the school microsystem are impacted by the participants' school discipline experiences due to the conduct of and communication with school staff. Participants described feelings of frustration and anger when being ignored by administration or support staff

as the mothers tried to get support to improve the behaviors of their children. The participants found that schools had used behavior control methods instead of positive behavior supports that had been prescribed on their children's IEPs. Participants also described communication as the key to maintaining a positive relationship between school and home. However, this communication needed to help parents support their children.

Sub-question two was, "How do mothers of students with disabilities ascribe meaning to school discipline?" The answer to sub-question two is mothers use their children's experiences with disciplinary consequences and their school's compliance with special education mandates to ascribe meaning to school discipline. Participants discussed the use of exclusionary discipline practices from exclusion from school activities to expulsion even when behaviors were a manifestation of the disability. Teachers used classroom management systems meant for neurotypical students to manage behaviors that had minimal effect on behaviors of students with disabilities. Participants described difficulty in obtaining services or resources written in their children's IEPs that increased negative behaviors for their children. Support services communicated to the participants that although their students had been diagnosed with a learning disability, they did not need an IEP. Once students were placed on Individualized Education Programs, participants expressed the need to monitor the plans for compliance.

Sub-question three was, "How do mothers of students with a disability describe self-efficacy and factors of agency that contribute to their experiences with school discipline policies and procedures?" The answer to question three is the mothers of students with disabilities describe low self-efficacy and factors of agency that contribute to their experiences with school discipline policies and procedures. The participants expressed how school administrators and staff were untrained and unknowledgeable about students with disabilities and it had become

their job to provide the answers and information for their children. Some also described feelings of being pushed out because their children had disabilities and behaviors. The participants described needing more resources; however, they were seen to be the resource for the schools. The participants also described their issues with communication and education during the Coronavirus pandemic. Many described feeling overwhelmed with the amount of work they needed to ensure their children were completing, and unable to help their children complete the assignments due to the complicated virtual systems.

Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the study in connection to the literature presented in Chapter Two. The discussion is first based on the findings related to the theories that framed this study. The theories forming the framework guiding this transcendental phenomenological study are Oliver's (1983) social model of disability, Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological systems theory, and Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory. Next, the findings are discussed in association with the empirical literature pertaining to school discipline.

Theoretical

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Using Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological systems theory, Hoghghi and Long (2004) found studies using the ecological systems framework demonstrated that the practices of parents were impacted by the relationships of their own ecological systems. Findings in this study were similar, as the relationships between parents and school staff impacted the decisions mothers of students with disabilities made for their children. The decline in relationships with school staff caused Molly and Sarah to investigate different school settings for their children when full-time instruction begins in the Fall of 2021. Dorothy had withdrawn her son from school and was looking for a school that

specialized in dealing with students with disabilities. Julia decided to send her son to a special school for children with autism due to his difficulties in experiencing success in the traditional public schools. When communicating with schools, the mothers needed information that was helpful and supportive. Prior to her son's diagnosis of ADHD and dyslexia, Diane needed more information from the teachers about the behaviors they were seeing in class so she could help him improve. She was struggling to receive information due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Research by Bronfenbrenner (1981) found schools were part of the student and parent circumstances which had an influence on parental growth and practices. Participants in the study found schools to be a source of frustration when trying to obtain special education support for their children or when trying to work with teachers and administrators to improve the behaviors of their children. They felt ignored, pushed aside, and as if they had no place to go to get the right information. Diane, Samantha, and Nicole each had difficulties with obtaining special education support for their children. They explained having to argue and fight with school support staff to get the help their children needed. In 1996, Sontag found that community factors can influence the development and academic achievement of children with disabilities. Participants in this study found when interacting with school staff and administration, there is a lack of training, support, and resources when it comes to students with disabilities. These factors have influenced the development and academic achievement of their children with disabilities. Dorothy, Julia, Nicole, and Sarah discussed having to provide suggestions about accommodations or appropriate interventions for their children when the schools could not help them. Positive family support has been found to be a central element in successfully parenting a child with a disability (Algood et al., 2013). The participants in this study reported that they found school staff to be unknowledgeable or untrained about the behaviors of children with

disabilities and instead, the schools often ask the parents for help. Bronfenbrenner (1981) identified parental supports as the interpersonal relationships that can take on the role of support. However, professionals such as teachers are rarely included in this identification (Hoghghi & Long, 2004). The findings in this study contradict this research because the participants were looking for support, information and guidance from the teachers, staff and administration of schools that would help them be better parents.

When considering Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological systems theory, this study found the relationships between the mothers of students with disabilities and school staff impacted the decisions they made for their children. The participants needed helpful and supportive information to make the most accurate decisions for their children. Schools became a source of frustration as the participants sought out support for special education or for their children's behaviors. Participants looked to teachers and administration for information that could help them become better parents but found when interacting with school staff a lack of training and resources when it came to students with disabilities. Stanley (2015) found that as mothers of students with disabilities advocated for their children concerning school policies and procedures, communication with school staff remained a barrier in their advocacy efforts. Those findings are supported by this study as the participants reported the school administrators as being "guarded" or as "hiding something." A research study by Angell et al. (2009) found that when there was a lack of communication from school officials or a lack of knowledge about their children, mothers of students with a disability developed a lack of trust with the school officials. The results of this study support those findings as the participants reported a lack of trust in their children's administration and teaching staff, especially when it came to handling school discipline and their children's behaviors.

Oliver's social model of disability. Naraiam and Schlessinger (2017) found student disabilities are often seen as problems that need to be diagnosed and treated so the student can perform in a normal classroom setting. Findings in this study suggested participants had difficulties when working with teachers to modify assignments for their children. They also described difficulties when support services explained that although their children may have a disability, they did not need or qualify for an Individualized Education Program. Samantha and Nicole argued with officials in their districts for years about getting support for their children. Both of these mothers were told their children would be fine, even though outside agency testing was showing something different. When applying the social model of disability, a student's disability is caused by his or her interaction with the environment paired with the impairment as well as the demands that are placed upon the student (Houtrow et al., 2018). Participants shared that many of the behaviors exhibited by their children were manifestations of their disabilities which are documented in their IEPs; however, the schools still held them accountable with disciplinary consequences. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004, a manifestation determination review occurs a) to determine if the problem behavior was a manifestation or symptom of the student's disability and b) if the problem behavior requires a change of placement such as school suspension (Knudsen & Bethune, 2018). A committee must complete the review if this change of placement is going to exceed 10 days. If the committee determines the behavior under review is a manifestation of the student's disability, the team must complete a functional behavior assessment to determine interventions to help with the problem behavior (Knudsen & Bethune, 2018). Betty and Molly discussed how their children were held accountable for their behaviors even when those behaviors were documented in their IEPs and there were accommodations for those behaviors. A report by Haegele et al. (2016) stated that

supporters of the social model of disability asserted that isolation and exclusion imposed disabling circumstances upon an individual and showed an unwillingness to remove environmental obstructions that would make individuals with disabilities more successful. Findings in this study suggested that the children of the participants had been subjected to various types of exclusion, such as in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion. Students had also been subjected to seclusion and restraint as forms of discipline. In a report by Justice (2018,) researchers found evidence of inequalities in exclusionary consequences for students with disabilities, even with the behaviors related with their disabilities. Findings in this study supported this evidence as the participants reported their children receiving exclusionary consequences for behaviors that were documented on their IEPs. Rose expressed her disappointment in the use of exclusionary discipline with her son, especially in the middle school because it was a reinforcement for his behaviors. Julia discussed how her son was restrained and secluded for non-compliance.

Regarding Oliver's (1983) social model of disability, this study found teachers and administrators often applied a physical model of disability when working with students with disabilities as demonstrated with the mothers' inability to have work modified or to obtain accommodations. This study found when the mothers of students with disabilities obtained testing from outside agencies, school officials were hesitant to provide special education services on an Individualized Education Plan. Mothers of students with disabilities described their children having some behaviors that were manifestations of their disabilities, yet their children were held accountable with a consequence such as in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, or expulsion.

Self-efficacy theory. Mouton et al. (2015) found the self-efficacy of parents can influence their perception of how proficient they are at being a parent. The participants discussed having to provide solutions to their children's behavioral issues for schools and wishing the school personnel would be more of a resource to parents. Nicole discussed having to look at what the teachers were doing in classrooms and then trying to find something that would work for her daughter as an intervention. Because Sarah is a special education teacher, she spoke of having to help her daughter's intervention specialist write goals for her IEP. Findings also revealed participants' frustration with virtual learning during the Coronavirus pandemic and taking on the role as sole educator. All the mothers described a change in their parenting practices and noted their children having to complete too much schoolwork at home. Diane described the difficulties in helping her son communicate with his teachers and her feelings that he was falling behind. Dorothy discussed having to learn how to complete all the expectations the teachers had placed on her son. In research studies cited by Chung et al. (2015), mothers of students with disabilities with higher self-efficacy have children with higher academic, social, and psychological outcomes. These studies also pointed to a correlation between mothers with low self-efficacy and students who have various behavioral challenges. Molly felt that her son had been "traumatized" by his discipline incidents. Julia described her son as being "abused" during his disciplinary consequences. Bandura (1997) found that social encouragements can have an effect on an individual's self-efficacy. The participants in this study described how at times, the interactions they had with teachers and administrators were negative. The participants all described their children as smart or bright, creative, or intelligent. However, the participants all commented they received emails, texts and phone calls when their children had misbehaved, but no communication when their children had a good day. This confirms prior research by

Hargreaves (2000) which found teachers often pay more attention to troublesome and unacceptable behaviors than to suitable behaviors that are consistent with their expectations. Julia, Dorothy, and Sarah described the communication with teachers as the teachers being a “tattletale.” When speaking about their children and the negative communication, each participant became emotional to the point of tears. This negative communication had a negative impact on these mothers’ self-efficacy. Adding to this theory was the feelings the participants had of not being wanted because they had children with disabilities. Julia described how she believed a self-contained classroom in her son’s school district was closed so they would not have to service her son. She went on to say that she thought some schools looked at children with disabilities as a hurdle they must get past. Julia’s son’s school did not want to be too good handling their children with disabilities so they would not get more children with behaviors. Nicole described the administration at her daughter’s school as not recognizing disabilities; “if a kid gets in trouble they’re convinced to drop out.”

When applying Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory, this study found mothers of students with disabilities who have children with behavioral challenges have a low self-efficacy. The participants provided behavioral solutions to schools for their children’s problem behaviors. The study also found the participants received a plethora of communication for misbehavior, but very little communication concerning good things about their children. The participants expressed frustration with virtual learning and their abilities to be the sole educator.

Empirical

Exclusionary discipline impacts social bonds, especially relationships between the students and teachers (Quin & Hemphill, 2014). Findings in this study support this literature as some of the participants described how their children had a difficult time building relationships

with staff members. Molly described how her son had no relationship with his teaching assistant who had to travel to each class with him. Julia also discussed that her son's new school voiced concern about his inability to connect with teachers. She attributed this to his past disciplinary experiences. Rocque and Snellings (2018) found that students with disabilities represent between 30-70% of the adolescents in the school-to-prison pipeline and in many of those cases, the students' disabilities were not considered before the consequence was initiated. Molly felt her son's school was just trying to get rid of him and put him in jail. Molly and Sarah both described how their schools included the police in disciplinary incidents. In Molly's situation, the police were involved in restraining her son who was 12 years old at the time and school administration had not informed the police of his disabilities. Bergh and Cowell (2013) found that exclusionary discipline is not an effective method to help children with disabilities learn suitable school behaviors. Findings from the study confirm this finding with most of the mothers reporting their children received some sort of exclusionary consequence. Elizabeth's grandson was excluded from some school activities because he did not meet the behavioral requirements. Rose's son was not only excluded from class multiple times by in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension, but with great emotion described a time when he was excluded from classroom cupcakes for what she felt was no reason. Ann felt her daughter was "targeted" by the teacher when she received exclusionary consequences. Flynn et al. (2016) reported that the U.S. Department of Education has stressed the need for teachers to develop the skills required to build positive relationships with their students and to teach conflict resolution and social emotional skills. Participants felt teachers or administrators did not have the training or skills necessary to improve student behaviors. Elizabeth, Rose, Dorothy, Molly and Betty described instances when they felt school staff were unequipped or uneducated in methods to help their children.

Mayworm et al. (2016) found that it is essential for teachers to have professional development about restorative justice methods and strategies for the program to be employed with fidelity. Only two of the participants described restorative discipline in the study. Rose explained how since her son had moved to the high school, he had one disciplinary incident and she was pleased with the use of restorative discipline because it gave her son a chance to learn from his mistake and repair the damage he may have caused. Molly discussed how she encouraged her son's school to try restorative discipline, but it was a disaster. She commented that this was because the staff didn't know how to ask the students questions about their behavior which supports the literature about the need for professional development.

Implications

The findings of this transcendental phenomenological study of exploring what school discipline means to mothers of children with disabilities have theoretical, empirical, and practical implications for stakeholders, school administrators and teachers.

Theoretical

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. In Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological systems theory, the microsystem refers to the environments in which a person has daily interactions, with school being one of the most important microsystem in a person's life (Panopoulos & Drossinou-Korea, 2020). Especially for students with disabilities, the learning process, the school environment, and their relationships with peers and teachers influence their social, intellectual, and scholastic development (Panopoulos & Drossinou-Korea, 2020). There is strong evidence in this study to support relationships with teachers, and the school environment also influences the behavioral development of children with disabilities and is a contributor to how their mothers experience school discipline. Teachers and administrators need

to make a concerted effort to build positive relationships with parents as this will often translate into positive relationships with students. Purposeful, positive conversations about their children, or intentional invitations to school events enhances school-to-home relationships and helps parents feel supported. Hoghghi and Long (2004) found that professionals are rarely identified as individuals in a parent's microsystem who can provide support. The findings in this study show that the mothers are searching for answers and support for their children from teachers, administrators, and support services staff. The RTI and testing processes for the Individualized Education Program must be well communicated to parents in a manner that is easily understood. A checklist of the steps involved or a timeline of the processes from the school administration can help parents understand how the schools are supporting their children and where their children are in the process. There are implications for these individuals as the participants described staff being uneducated or untrained even though they recognized that working with their children has not always been easy. When mothers of students with disabilities find support or the right information, it shaped their experiences with school discipline in a positive manner.

Oliver's social model of disability. Oliver's (1983) social model of disability contends that disability is a social construct or something that is placed on an individual by society (Barton, 2006). Proponents of the social model of disability argue that the consequences of an impairment such as negative behaviors are caused by the barriers of the environment as well as the attitudes and prejudices of the non-disabled people in the environment (Woolfson, 2004). Findings in this study indicated that many behaviors of the children of the participants were documented on their Individualized Education Programs with some of the children having accommodations for those behaviors or behavior intervention plans. Participants described situations where school administration and teachers were unable to provide the behavior

accommodations or follow the behavior intervention plans, thus increasing undesirable behaviors. The implications from these findings in relationship to Oliver's (1983) social model of disability indicate a clear need for administration and teachers to analyze the behavior of students with disabilities through the lens of what meets the criteria of manifestation prior to determining a consequence. Implications for teachers indicate a need of training and knowledge about behavior interventions that work for students with disabilities and in addition to training on the consistent implementation of IEP accommodations. Teachers have become familiar with academic differentiation and there is a need for this type of differentiation when it comes to behavior as well.

Practical

The findings of this research study have practical implications not only for mothers of students with a disability, but for school administrators and teachers as well.

Conduct of administration. Findings in this study demonstrated interactions with school administration affected the decisions mothers of students with disabilities made for their children. School administrators are in a powerful position in terms of the culture they set up in their buildings and the relationships they create with parents. They have the power to choose the consequences for behaviors exhibited by students. There are two implications as a result. First, school administrators must be very careful to have positive interactions with parents even when a student has made poor behavior choices. Second, a school administrator must have the ability to differentiate consequences for students, especially students with disabilities. Behaviors that are symptoms of the disability need to be considered prior to a consequence being administered.

Special education compliance. Findings in this study showed instances when mothers of students with disabilities had difficulties getting their children's IEP accommodations, or

modifications for assignments without a note from a doctor. Individualized Education Programs are legal documents which must be followed by teachers, administrators, and support staff (Lewis, 2017). An implication of this finding is school staff including administrators need training concerning the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) as well as the implementation of an IEP. It is important that each person who may teach or interact with a student with a disability understands his or her role in guiding that student towards success. Whether the person is a bus driver who may need to understand behavior modifications, or the gym teacher who may need to understand accommodations, these persons need trainings that are required for all school staff. Findings in this study also showed parents are often frustrated by the testing process to obtain an Individualized Education Program for their children or when denied special education services even when outside agency testing shows their children qualify. Implications from this finding are schools need to be very transparent in all special education processes. Frequent and open communication with parents who are waiting for their children to receive special education services is necessary because parents are desperate for their children to be successful. In Rachel's school district, they created a special education alliance which holds monthly meetings to provide information to parents of children with disabilities. At these meetings, parents can ask questions about testing and the IEP process. This is something that needs to be implemented in all school districts, so parents are well informed and supported.

Conduct of teachers. Mothers of students with disabilities reported they had encountered inflexible teachers who were strict and at times would provide them with little information about the best way to help their children. They also reported in some instances they encountered teachers who did their best to create positive relationships with the students and in those years, their children were the most successful. Implications here are teachers need to

openly communicate with parents and try to build positive relationships with students to increase student success.

Disciplinary consequences. Mothers of students with disabilities in this study reported their children have been subjected to exclusionary consequences such as in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion. They have had other consequences administered such as restraint and seclusion. Given the research on the negative outcomes associated with these consequences, implications include decreasing the use of exclusionary consequences to limit the negative outcomes. However, that implication seems rather evident. The mothers in this study reported many of the behaviors that their children were receiving consequences for were written about in their IEPs, yet students were still receiving consequences for them. A notable implication therefore is for teachers, administrators, and resource staff to develop proactive strategies to manage student behaviors before they become problematic. One option is to create a plan that coincides with school and home, so everyone is on the same page and parents feel supported with behavior as well. Another implication is the positive reports from the participants on the use of restorative discipline. The mothers of students with disabilities in this study reported they liked how their children were able to learn from their mistakes and then repair the harm they may have made. Restorative discipline is beneficial, as it allows students to learn about their behavior, improves relationships, and often decreases the use of exclusionary discipline.

School communication. Each participant described the need for two-way communication as a factor to be able to make decisions for their children. Many participants described how communication was more of a barrier during the school shutdowns through the Coronavirus pandemic. The implications of this are communication has to be clear, transparent

and timely for the mothers of students with a disability to feel confident about the communication they are receiving. Parents want positive communication about their children, not just a liturgy about their negative behaviors. What this means for teachers is intentional communication with clear goals that ensure parents receive a true message about what the child does and needs in the classroom. Implications of these findings suggest that school officials need to ensure that communication efforts are completed in a way that ensures the trust of the parents. Another implication is schools need to have an emergency plan for instruction and communication with parents when schools must close. During the Coronavirus pandemic, assignments were placed online with directions on how to complete them, but it was difficult for the participants in the study to communicate with the teachers.

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitations in this qualitative, transcendental, phenomenological study are the limitations that this researcher has consciously put in place to narrow the focus and scope of the study. Delimitations include the boundaries of the study, the research questions, the theoretical background, and the study sample (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Phenomenology was chosen for this study instead of ethnography in order to describe the common meaning of school discipline for the study participants. In phenomenology, the researcher focuses on lived experiences of individuals and the commonality within those experiences, while ethnography focuses on the behaviors, beliefs, and language of a group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transcendental phenomenology was chosen so that the focus could be on the descriptions of these experiences and less on *interpretation*, which is more characteristic of hermeneutical phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The central research question of this study places a delimitation on the study as it limits the scope of the research to mothers of students with disabilities and how they experience the school discipline policies and procedures of their children. Several researchers have noted the discipline gap for students with disabilities and the negative outcomes associated with exclusionary discipline policies. Camacho and Krezmien (2020) found that students with disabilities are more likely to be suspended from school than their non-disabled peers and that this issue is worsening for some disability categories. Alnaim (2018) found that students with disabilities often present challenges to classroom management associated with their diagnoses, which cause them to be suspended or expelled.

In this study, the focus sample was mothers over the age of 18. Rationale supporting this choice began with this researcher's experience as an educator in education settings where mothers came to meetings, participated in school activities, attended to disciplinary issues, and were a part of the Individualized Education Program team for students with a disability. Mothers play a central role in the family as they help to communicate to family members what the expectations of the family are and can influence their children's academic choices (Genius et al., 2018). Coyl-Shepherd and Newland (2013) found that fathers are less likely to participate in their children's education than mothers. Lerner and Grolnick (2020) found that maternal involvement in a child's education plays a significant role in academic success.

Delimitations narrow the scope or focus of the study (Kornuta & Germaine, 2019). One delimitation of the study was the choice to include only mothers in the study. While this made the study unique, it also limited the capacity to collect data and to locate participants. Kornuta and Germaine (2019) describe limitations as boundaries on data. One limitation of the study was the choice to conduct a qualitative study, especially during the time of the Coronavirus

pandemic. This may impact the generalizability of the study due to the lack of availability of participants. Many mothers were unable to participate due to their children having to complete virtual school instruction and having the need to spend time working and helping their children complete their studies. Another delimitation of the study was to limit the scope of the participants to mothers of students with disabilities. This decision significantly narrowed the participant field in the study. There were only two minority participants in the study, which is a limitation due to the disproportionality rates of discipline between minority and non-minority populations. Another limitation worth noting is this study took place during the Coronavirus pandemic, and additional stress was placed on families, especially those of children with disabilities; because of this, it is likely that many significant participants were not able to participate.

Recommendations for Future Research

One recommendation for future research includes a transcendental, phenomenological study of Black and Latino mothers' experiences with school discipline policy procedures. Like students with disabilities, minority students are more likely to receive an exclusionary consequence for misbehavior than their White peers (Cholewa et al., 2018). Adding the voices of these mothers to the conversation can further inform the findings about exclusionary discipline consequences and bring about more beneficial discipline reform in schools. Bell (2020) reported Black mothers were likely to feel depressed and hopeless about the future of their children when they receive disciplinary consequences such as out-of-school suspension. A study about their experiences with school discipline policies and procedures could add to the empirical literature about the impact that these policies and procedures have on parental self-efficacy.

A second recommendation is to duplicate this transcendental, phenomenological study with the purpose of understanding what school discipline means to fathers of students with a disability. Pancsofar, Petroff, and Lewis (2017) reported fathers have changing roles from the past that are impacting how their children learn and grow in ways that are different from the mothers. Fathers have valuable insights into the experiences and needs of their children which can enhance their learning (Pancsofar et al., 2017). This information points to the need to inquire about the fathers' experiences with school discipline. In terms of communication, many times, teachers and administrators are not accustomed to speaking with the fathers and often give information about students to the mother. It is interesting to note that as this researcher was recruiting participants for this study, she was asked several times by men if they could participate and questioned about why fathers were being left out of the research. Some fathers explained that the schools and courts leave them out of their children's' lives all the time. Further research such as case studies involving students, teachers, parents, or administrators and their experience with school discipline would be beneficial to add to information gathered about exclusionary discipline as well as the best practices for classroom management for students with disabilities. Another recommendation for future research involves the training of educational aides and teachers in terms of the management and discipline of students with disabilities. This study found that the mothers of students with disabilities were concerned about the knowledge and training of the professionals they encountered who were working with their children. It is necessary to inquire about the level of knowledge these individuals actually have in order to create a plan to better serve students with disabilities.

Summary

Thirteen mothers of students of disabilities participated in this transcendental phenomenological study. The participants were chosen using criterion, purposive sampling. Data were triangulated using personal interviews, focus groups and timelines and analyzed using the modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi Keen method of phenomenological data analysis. After horizontalization and phenomenological reduction, five major themes emerged which included a) conduct of administration, b) special education compliance, c) disciplinary consequences, d) conduct of teachers and e) staff, and school communication. The central research question that guided this study was “How do mothers of students with a disability experience the school discipline policies and procedures of their children?” The answer to the central research question is mothers of students with disabilities experience school discipline policies and procedures through the communication with school staff, the use of disciplinary consequences for their children, the management of school administration and teachers and the observance with special education mandates. Findings indicated that the participants felt communication was the key to improving home and school relationships and improving student behaviors that were likely to create a disciplinary consequence. Findings also indicated with the right special education supports in place and support from schools about how parents can assist, students would have a decrease in undesirable behaviors. One major implication from this study is while schools are an environment included in a person’s microsystem, the professionals inside the schools are not considered social supports within the microsystem (Hoghughi & Long, 2004). However, parents expect schools to be a place where they can find individuals who can help support their children. They are looking to teachers and administrators and searching for information about their children’s disabilities. They want school staff to see the positive in their children and need

support when academics or behaviors become difficult. Another major implication in this study is the impact school communication has on how mothers of students with disabilities experience school discipline, how it shapes the relationships within the school microsystem, and impacts their self-efficacy and factors of agency. Most participants reported receiving only negative communication from schools and the desire for school officials to see good in their children. When their children had an issue, communication was difficult. The mothers described being ignored when trying to offer suggestions or when trying to explain their concerns. These factors weakened their self-beliefs (i.e., self-efficacy) in their ability to help their children be successful. When envisioning a mother of a student with a disability and her experience with school discipline policies and procedures, one should picture a woman who when the phone rings, she looks at the number to see if it is the school calling to tell her something bad about her child. When she sees the number is the school, she immediately becomes nervous. What are they going to tell her about her child now? Is she going to have to pick the child up? Is the child safe? Is the child in a crisis? She knows she must be a strong advocate for her child. For mothers of students with a disability this can be a daily occurrence. In a focus group, through tears Molly said, “My kid is a good kid. My kid is a sweet kid, and he doesn’t want to be like he is, but he can’t help it. He’s a kind kid and we struggle at home too.”

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Appendix A
IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

July 30, 2020

Mary Harris
Margaret Ackerman

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY19-20-456 Mothers of Students with a Disability: A Phenomenological Study of Experiences with School Discipline

Dear Mary Harris, Margaret Ackerman:

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the date of the IRB meeting at which the protocol was approved: July 30, 2020. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make modifications in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update submission to the IRB. These submissions can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.
Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B
Participant Consent

Title of the Project: Mothers of Students with a Disability: A Phenomenological Study of Experiences with School Discipline

Principal Investigator: Mary Harris, Doctoral Student Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a mother of a student with a disability who has been assigned a disciplinary consequence by his or her school. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is understand what school discipline means to mothers of students with disability. There have been numerous studies performed about the significance of school discipline for students with disabilities, however no studies have focused how mothers of students with a disability experience the school discipline policies and procedures of their children

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in one personal one-on-one interview. This interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes and will be video, and audio recorded. This interview will take place in your home.
2. Participate in one focus group interview with 5 to 6 other mothers. This interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes and will be video, and audio recorded. This interview will take place at a local church.
3. Complete a timeline, chronologically mapping important events or experiences relating to your child's disability or school discipline.
4. Complete an anonymous demographic survey

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include how developing an understanding of how mothers of students with a disability experience and then define school discipline becomes a basis for educators in closing a discipline gap for such students.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. :

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms/codes. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation..
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. Paper data will be kept in a locked file cabinet for five years.
- Interviews and focus group interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will receive a \$20 gift card for participating in this study. Email addresses will be requested for compensation purposes; however, they will be pulled and separated from your responses to maintain your anonymity.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address or phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Mary Harris. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] and/or mjharris2@liberty.edu You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Ackerman at mackerman@liberty.edu

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix C
Interview Guide

Name		Date	
Interview Location			
Question	Response	Field Notes/Follow-Up	
Please tell me about your child.			
How would you characterize your son/daughter?			
What were his/her early school experiences like?			

What were your feelings during that most memorable experience?		
What has it been like for you child to be disciplined at school?		
Can you share the nature of your child' s disability?		
Can you share about when and how your child was diagnosed with a disability?		

<p>What happens between you and the school when your child receives a disciplinary consequence?</p>		
<p>What is it like when your child is excluded from school?</p>		
<p>Tell me about your most memorable experience with your child's school discipline.</p>		
<p>What was it like the first time your child was disciplined at school?</p>		

<p>How have school discipline practices helped or hindered your child?</p>		
<p>How have schools supported you and your child in terms of school discipline?</p>		
<p>Explain the support you receive as a mother when your child receives school discipline.</p>		
<p>What are things like at home when your child receives school discipline?</p>		

<p>As a mother, what is the most difficult thing about school discipline?</p>	<p>What has been the most discouraging thing about your child's school discipline policies, practices, and procedures?</p>	<p>What has been the most encouraging thing about your child's school discipline policies, practices, and procedures?</p>	<p>In your experience, how has your child's school helped to improve the behavior of your child?</p>

<p>How has the disruption of the school environment due to the coronavirus influenced your parenting practices?</p>	<p>Explain the obstacles you have faced when improving the discipline of your child.</p>	<p>What is the most difficult part of being a parent of a child with a disability?</p>	<p>Describe the feelings you have had when your child has received a school disciplinary consequence from school.</p>

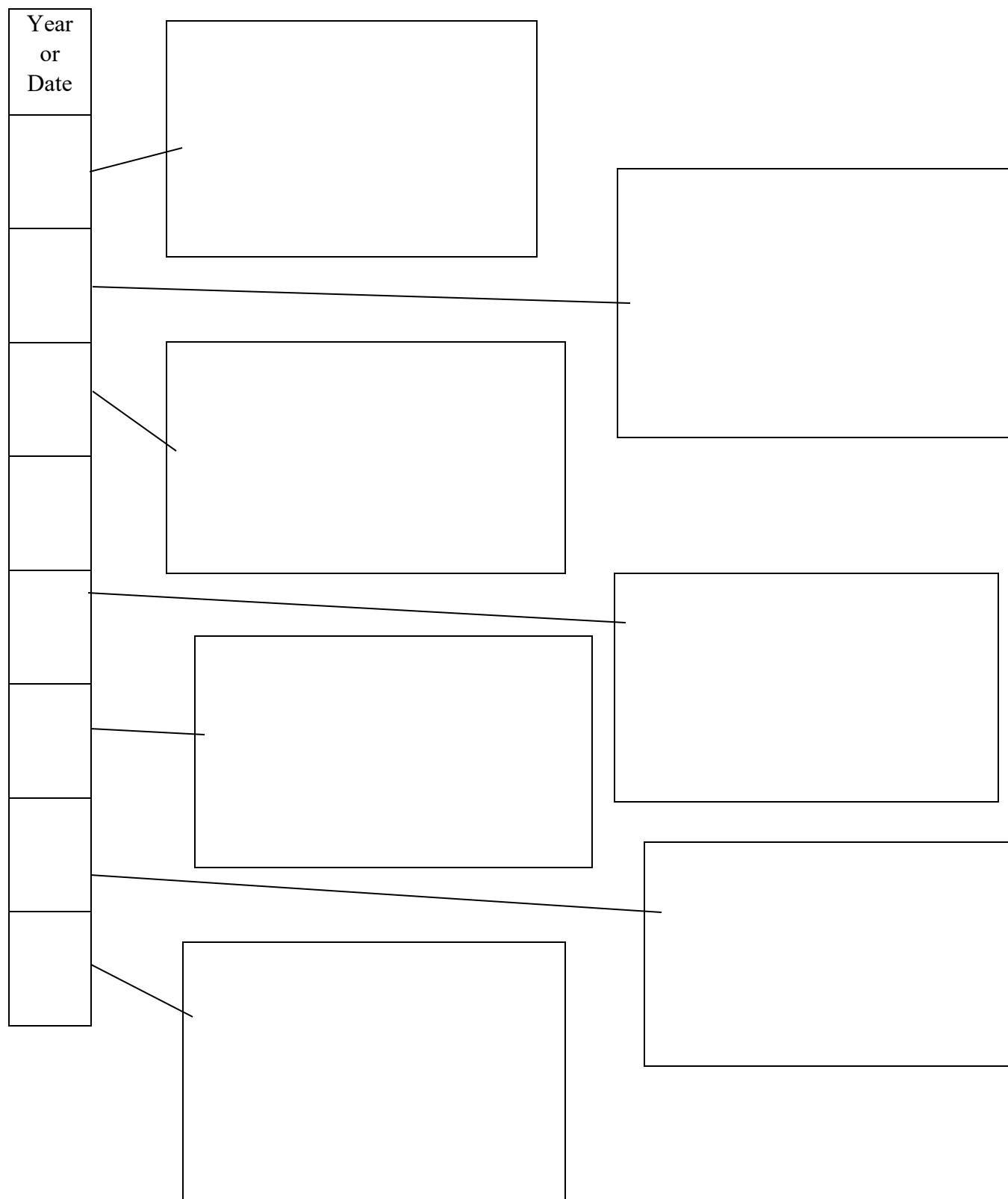
<p>Is there anything else on this topic that you wish to share or feel I should know?</p>		
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Appendix D
Focus Group Interview Guide

Date		Location	
Participants			
Question		Notes	
<p>What are ways you have appreciated teachers/administrators addressing your child' s behavior in school?</p>			
<p>What have been some unhelpful or harmful ways that teachers/administrators have addressed your child' s behavior?</p>			
<p>What do you wish school administrators knew about what it is like to parent a child with a disability?</p>			
<p>What impact has the IEP process had on your child' s school discipline?</p>			

<p>Describe the efforts schools have made to support you and your child during the coronavirus shutdown.</p>	
<p>What supports do mothers of students with a disability need from schools?</p>	
<p>What recommendations do you have for a parent whose child has just been diagnosed with a disability?</p>	
<p>What recommendations do you have for school leaders?</p>	

Appendix E Timeline Map



Appendix F
Participant Demographic Survey

Directions: Please complete this demographic survey as part of the research study about how mothers of students with a disability experience school discipline.

What is your marital status?

- Married
- Single/Never Married
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Separated

My current employment status is

- Part-time employed
- Full-time employed
- Unemployed
- Stay-at-home mother

I identify my ethnicity as:

- Asian
- Black /African
- Caucasian
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native American
- Mixed Race
- Other

What is your household income?

- Less than \$29,999
- \$30,000-\$49,999
- \$50,000-\$74,999
- \$75,000-\$99,999
- Over \$100,000

Which disability/disabilities under IDEA (2004) qualifies your child to receive special education services?

- Autism
- Deaf-Blindness
- Deafness
- Emotional Disturbance
- Hearing Impairment
- Intellectual Disability
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairments
- Specific Learning Disability
- Speech or Language Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment

Appendix G
Recruitment Letter

Date:

Recipient
Address 1
Address 2

Dear Recipient:

As a student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand what school discipline means to mothers of students with a disability, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study. Participants must be 18 years of age or older and a mother with a student has been diagnosed with a disability and receiving special education services with an IEP in place. Participants, if willing, will be asked to:

1. Participate in one personal one-on-one interview. This interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes and will be video, and audio recorded. This interview will take place in your home.
2. Participate in one focus group interview with 5 to 6 other mothers. This interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes and will be video, and audio recorded. This interview will take place at a local church.
3. Complete a timeline, chronologically mapping important events or experiences relating to your child's disability or school discipline. This procedure will take approximately one hour to complete.
4. Complete an anonymous demographic survey. This will take less than 15 minutes to complete.

Participants will also participate in member checking, which is a process to ensure the data and findings are consistent with participants' reports and intended meanings. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

In order to participate, complete the attached information card and return it by placing it in the provided self-addressed, stamped envelope. You can also contact me at [REDACTED] or mjharris2@liberty.edu to participate or for more information.

Once participation is confirmed, a consent document will be sent to you prior to the focus group. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me prior to the focus group.

Participants will receive a \$20 gift card.

Sincerely,

Mary
[REDACTED]
Mjharris2@liberty.edu

J.

Harris

Appendix H

Descriptions

Composite textural description. Teachers need to be able to differentiate which behaviors are just typical behaviors for children and which behaviors need to be addressed. Communication between the school and home is a key to helping with school discipline to know where the kids need help. However, communication from the school is not timely and often occurs when the mothers are working or unavailable. There needs to be clear behavior expectations and consequences when mistakes are made. Some teachers use practices such as making personal connections with the students to help with student behavior while others give preferential treatment even though the behavior is negative. Due to behavior expectations, students with disabilities are not able to participate in certain school activities. When faced with challenging situations, these students are also asked to deal with the situation and no one at the school advocates for the students. When IEP accommodations are not followed, the students have meltdowns and behavioral issues. At times teachers and school staff are inflexible and it is difficult to ensure that the students are getting the modifications necessary to be successful. The mothers have felt ignored and pushed aside when schools would not listen to their concerns about their children's learning or behavioral issues. Teachers with structure are more beneficial for students with disabilities. However, when the children exhibit behaviors associated with their disabilities, the schools seemed unequipped to handle the situations. Students are involved in school suspension, restraint, seclusion and even expulsion when teachers and administrators find they cannot control the children. Some of these consequences reinforce behaviors because often the students do not want to be in school or class.

Composite structural description. Student behavior is often communicated through texts, over the phone, or after school during pick up. When trying to work with the schools before agreeing to test for special education, their first response is often grade retention. It takes several meetings with district officials and sometimes outside testing for schools to agree to service the students with an IEP. This can take several years. School discipline involves expulsion from programs, grade levels, and schools. When teachers do not communicate the students plans with one another it leads to the students having a bad day. The mothers often receive texts, phone calls and emails about their children's negative behaviors and rarely receive any positive information. They are called away from their jobs to help intervene with their children's behaviors. Mothers have even experienced administration and school staff making negative comments about their children. When the police and court systems get involved in student discipline incidents, it has shaken the trust and the faith in schools for the mothers of students with disabilities. When interacting with school staff and administration the mothers have found that there is a lack of training, support and resources when it comes to students with disabilities. The characterization or stereotyping of children because of their disabilities is harmful and has been used as an avenue for exclusion.