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The Student Experience of In School and Out of School Suspension

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Acknowledgments

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand the student experience of in school and/or out of school suspension. It was a qualitative phenomenological study. The researcher individually interviewed high school students who have had experience with suspension. Each interview was audio-recorded in order for transcriptions to be completed for data to be analyzed and coded. Inquiries were made to help the researcher understand what the experiences of students were, the overall impact of suspension in students' lives, what motivated their behaviors, and the experience of the disciplinary process at the school. A number of patterns emerged within the responses. A theme that emerged across the interviews was the importance of students feeling engaged in the classroom. Some discrepancies were identified as well, including the impact that suspension has on a student's life. Based on the student responses, recommendations were made to change the suspension program.

The Student Experience of In School Suspension and/or Out of School Suspension

Suspension is a consequence utilized in schools to address inappropriate or unsafe behaviors in the classroom. The consequence removes students from the classroom or from the school all together for a period of time. This method of punishment has long been examined for its effectiveness and impact on students' overall well-being (Dickinson & Miller, 2006; Goran & Gage, 2011; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). This practice has become increasingly concerning with the ever changing rigor of the education system. The implementation of standardized testing, followed by the Common Core curriculum, has significantly impacted the rigor of high school academics and the need to keep students in the classroom is perhaps more crucial than it had been in recent years. With all of this considered, the researcher thought it pertinent to study the student experience of in school and out of school suspension, specifically inquiring about their experience, the impact these experiences have had on their lives, the behavior motivators, and their perception of the discipline system overall. Understanding the students' perspectives on these topics may help to inform educators as to how best to help students stay in the classroom and be engaged in the subject matter.

As noted above, the researcher was interested in understanding the student experience, thus a qualitative phenomenological approach was used. The importance of using this approach was further supported after a review of the literature. Much of the literature is quantitative in nature, considering numbers and statistics rather than human experience. Recent research, for example, has considered topics such as the impact suspension has on student achievement or self-esteem, alternative programming, and characteristics of students who get suspended (Dickinson & Miller, 2006; Marrison et al., 2001; Massey, Boroughs, & Armstrong, 2007; Mendez, 2003; Spaulding et al., 2010). Little to no research has considered the student

experience of suspension through a qualitative approach, seeking to understand the human experience through the lens of the student. The researcher used individual interviews of students for this study; the method will be discussed in greater depth in the method section later in the paper.

Some key terms are essential to clarify. In school suspension indicates the consequence in which students are to remain in a specific room for the school day as a result of negative behaviors in school or the classroom. This term may be referred to as ISS later in the paper. Out of school suspension refers to the consequence that removes students from the school building for a period of time. Often the behaviors that lead to this consequence are far more severe and disruptive than those that warrant in school suspension. This term may be referred to as OSS at points later in the paper.

The purpose of this study is to understand the student experience of in school and/or out of school suspension. Understanding the student perspective may add to the literature to help determine the best way to help students stay in the classroom and get the support that they need. The remainder of this manuscript includes an in depth review of the literature, method section describing how the study was carried out, analysis of the findings, and discussion section that addresses limitations of the study, implications for the counseling profession, recommendations for future research, and conclusion.

Review of the Literature

The evolution of education in the 21st century has led schools to consider how all aspects of the environment impact student learning. School safety and discipline are two of those aspects that have been scrutinized in recent years as a result of tragic events that have occurred in

schools. These two concepts, safety and discipline, are related in the school setting. When a student behaves in a way that threatens the safety or order of the school, the resolution has often been punishment. Removing the student from the classroom or school, depending on the severity of the behavior, has often been the practice. This has become widely recognized as the consequence known as suspension.

Concerns have been raised regarding schools' disciplinary measures (Dickinson & Miller, 2006). The use of suspension, despite evidence that the measure is ineffective, is one of those concerns (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Students who are assigned suspension are often repeat offenders, which mean that they have been assigned suspension for the same action on more than one occasion. Committing the same offenses repeatedly implies that the students may not be learning from the consequence. Physically or emotionally aggressive behavior impacts the safety of the school, which creates disruption in the learning environment. Curbing disruptive behaviors is perhaps now more important than the years before standardized testing.

The implementation of the standardized testing and the Common Core have changed the information that teachers must provide to students in order for them to be successful in the classroom. Educators have a significant amount of information to cover in a small window of time in order to prepare students for standardized testing. Therefore, every possible minute of instruction needs to be effectively used. Maintaining safety and order in the classroom are essential to using instruction time effectively. The less time a teacher has to spend disciplining a student for misbehaving, the more time they have to continue teaching. Educators are not only concerned with covering all the necessary material, they are also concerned with how students perform on the state exams. State exam performance is now critical to the evaluation of the teacher's performance and professional competency. New curriculum development and

standardization has led to teacher effectiveness being partially based in student performance. If the environment is often disruptive and not conducive to learning, this could impact the class of students as well as the teacher. The assignment of suspension is a concern for the student being punished. Taking the student out of the classroom or the school for an extended period of time often results in the student falling behind academically (Goran & Gage, 2011). Education reform has made it crucial for students to be in the classroom consistently.

Increased recognition of the concerns regarding the impact and effectiveness of suspension has led to attempts at changing the disciplinary system. Pilot programs aimed at curtailing disruptive behavior have been effective (Brown, 2006). These programs often take a holistic approach. Holistic programs use a combination of counseling services, consequences for behaviors and possibly other interventions that will remain in place beyond the intervention in order to best serve the student. Overall, holistic approaches consider all the elements in the student's life that could be contributing to the student behaving the way they are rather than just trying to extinguish the behavior. For example, Morris and Howard (2003) suggest that a combination of counseling services and behavioral consequences could improve the effectiveness of suspension programs. Nabors, Reynolds and Weist (2000) found that students utilizing mental health services within the school showed positive outcomes. Students felt more connected to their school and were able to learn new coping skills including; anger and stress management. Both Morris and Howard (2003) and Nabors, Reynolds and Weist (2000) imply that the model of ISS/OSS that strictly punishes the negative behavior is not as effective as the holistic approach. Because students are the consumers, or those who are impacted by the consequences of their decisions, it is important to consider their overall experiences in ISS/OSS. Therefore, working to understand insights and needs may be helpful in informing district policy

on discipline. The following review will discuss student behavior, impact of the school climate on student behavior, school suspension/expulsion, characteristics of suspended students, cultural considerations, Impact of ISS/OSS on Student Achievement, punitive measures ineffective and alternative programming in relation to the research problem.

Adolescent Development and Behavior

Students engaging in risk behaviors impact the safety and learning environment of the school. Risk taking behaviors are a concern for schools. Often in their search to find out who they are, adolescents will experiment with alcohol or other drugs, violence, and sexuality. Adolescents' participation in risk behaviors have been a concern for many years. As a result, schools must look to try to reduce the behaviors (Wilson, Lipsey & Derzon, 2007). These risk behaviors in adolescence will inevitably impact the school at some level, as teens spend at least seven hours out of their day at school. Engaging in violence in school is one risk behavior that schools hope to curtail through programs such as ISS or OSS. ISS and OSS both remove the problem from the classroom, hopefully creating a safer environment.

Developmental theories help to identify key reasons adolescents behave the way they do and thus help to inform what may be effective in aiding their growth and development. Erik Erikson's developmental theory consists of a series of life stages beginning at birth spanning through death. Identity development is a part of the life stage that is associated with adolescence (Santrock, 2011). Erikson asserts that during adolescence, youth are in the identity versus role confusion stage. During this stage adolescents are working to determine who they are as individuals, they're developing their identity. According to Erikson, adolescents are trying to determine where they fit in, how do they want to be and one way they determine this is through

the reactions of others to their behaviors and actions. Eriksonian theorists explored the idea of crisis and how it impacts the development of identity (Santrock, 2011). Crisis is part of the identity development process. Adolescents experiment with alternatives during a period of crisis to help them determine what parts of their identity they have committed to and which parts are still flexible. Adolescence is a formative time period in a person's life. The experiences one encounters in the adolescent years could shape who that person becomes as they develop into adulthood. This is important to understand because adolescents spend a majority of their days in school, meaning many of those experiences that contribute to who they become as adults happen in school.

Adolescent behaviors are impacted by internal experiences. This means that processes, such as developmental ability, thoughts and/or emotions can impact an adolescent's behavior. Erikson's theory explains the importance of trying on different behaviors in the growth process from adolescence to adulthood. Determining which behaviors fit and which do not is an essential part of the growth process as well. Adolescents could learn from the consequences of the behaviors. If used effectively, ISS/OSS could be a helpful part of the growth process. In school and out of school suspension are used as punishment, and punishment is not often conducive to learning. This knowledge seems to imply that change to the ISS/OSS practices in schools is necessary.

Impact of School Climate on Student Behavior

The previous section discussed internal factors that impact student behavior. The following section will consider some external factors that influence student behavior. These factors are teacher wellness, the school environment and perception of organizational health. The

environment the adolescent is in at any time can affect how they respond or behave in certain situations. An environment that adolescents spend more than half their day in is school. School climate can impact students' behavior. Adolescents do not just make choices as individuals they are influenced by their environment. The school climate can be defined as the environment that is created and perpetuated by the administration and faculty throughout the school. At times, this environment can exacerbate student misbehaviors (Bevans, Bradshaw, Miech & Leaf, 2007). Some of the phenomena that contribute to the school climate include teacher burnout, faculty preparedness to handle student misbehavior, pressures of high stakes testing initiatives and ambiguity of school rules.

Teacher wellness is another key component that can impact student behavior. For example, teacher burn-out has been shown to impact student behavior issues (Pas, Bradshaw, Hershfeldt, & Leaf, 2010). Teacher burn-out refers to the emotional exhaustion that occurs as a result of stressors in the work environment. When teachers experience burn-out they become less emotionally invested in their jobs and their students. This can result in a less effectively managed classroom that causes disorder that the teacher is no longer capable of diffusing effectively. The emotional fatigue, which is a symptom of burnout, can also lead to reactivity. An example of a teacher being reactive to a situation is when they quickly decide to send a student out of the room or raise their voice at the student without taking a step back to consider the whole situation. Essentially their patience has worn thin and they respond to a situation without thinking. Confronting student behaviors is often a delicate process. Depending on the approach, the confrontation has been shown to exacerbate the disruption rather than alleviate it (Pas et al., 2010). When a teacher is reactive to a situation, the problem behavior often does not stop or even increases. This decrease in management efficacy correlates with increased student

referrals for behavior issues, which often result in suspension. Due to teacher burn-out, moments that could be capitalized on to teach a student about their behavior is lost. Kennedy (2011) identified teacher-student rapport and relationship as key in aiding students to manage their behavior. An emotionally exhausted faculty member is likely to react quickly, pass judgment and miss the opportunity to help the struggling student (Christle, Nelson, & Jolivette, 2004). Teachers who are emotionally invested in their work may be more effective at diffusing a situation. Thus, teacher wellness impacts the overall health of the school climate.

Perceptions of organizational health have been shown to impact student behavior (Bevans et al., 2007). School environment has received increased attention as the pressure to perform has increased. Student performance, absenteeism, rates of suspensions, academic achievement and student satisfaction are all correlated with faculty perception of organizational health (Bevans et al., 2007). Poor organizational health has an impact on the attitudes of those working within the environment. Employees could become less dedicated to their work, which can also impact student behavior.

Another aspect of organizational health that impacts student behavior is the ambiguity of school rules (Varvus, 2002). If school rules and regulations are unclear, they are likely to be subjectively interpreted which can lead to miscommunication between students and staff. A student may interpret a rule one way and behave accordingly; essentially the student would believe that they are following the rules. If the same rule is interpreted by faculty in another way, the student may be perceived as misbehaving. This leads to controversy when the student is confronted on their behavior by the faculty member. Often the situation is miscommunicated on both sides. The student does not believe he/she has done anything wrong and the faculty trying to maintain order in the classroom does not have time to understand what the student is

missing (Varvus, 2002). If the student does not understand what he/she has done wrong, it is not likely he/she would be able to learn from it, especially if the rules were unclear initially. In this way, the school climate has an impact on student behavior.

Each individual the student comes in contact with throughout the school day can inform their behavior in some way. Teachers who are feeling exhausted and stressed can react to a student, which could in turn exacerbate disruptive behavior. As shown in the above paragraphs, students feed off negative attitudes or energies expressed by faculty members. School climate can impact student behaviors that lead to the assignment of ISS or OSS in any given situation.

Beyond the Behaviors

Considering that a student's behavior may be a result of something beyond their control is important in determining the appropriate consequence for the student's action. Adolescents are impacted by a number of emotions throughout their day and how effective they are in coping with those emotions can dictate their behavior. School with high academic standards and rigorous testing, is already a stressful environment for a student. The addition of stress from the student's outside life can result in negative behaviors if the student does not have effective coping mechanisms. The various roles students fulfill, individual capabilities, and personal understanding of expectations can all impact how a student may behave in school.

Adjustment refers to an individual's ability to cope with change or stress in his/her life. When a student is not prepared to cope with a situation, they may act out or behave in a way that is unacceptable in school (Boon, 2011). This is a result of their effort to manage the emotions that they are feeling, but not doing so effectively. Students who have moved often or recently moved to a new school district often face this challenge (Boon, 2011). Boon (2011) found a

correlation between academic achievement and behavior in students who have moved, and it is suggested that they may need more support after moving. The issues for students that are related to moving are also correlated with suspension. There are a number of situations that could trigger behaviors that are a result of adjustment issues for students, moving to a new home and/or a new school is one of them. Overall it is evident that students who are not well equipped to cope with change or stress could find themselves suspended for exhibiting inappropriate behaviors.

One group of students that need consideration when attempting to understand student behavior is the special education population. These students' behaviors and emotional management skills are often inhibited by their classifications or diagnoses. The IDEA legislature outlines that when assigning suspension for a classified student, for a period of time longer than 10 days, the symptoms of the student's disability must be considered (Goran & Gage, 2011). There is not a clear outline for the team considering the student's prolonged suspension to determine whether or not the behavior is related to their disability. Parents will often argue that the behavior is a result of the disability. Thus, fairness is often called to question. Another layer that has been noted to be on the rise in the special needs population is emotional disturbance (Eklund et al., 2009). The numbers of students who are identified to be at risk for emotional struggles are on the rise, and this disability is correlated with suspension in school (Eklund et al., 2009). These students often also learn differently than others, so a consequence that may help one student learn may not be effective for a student with special learning needs. For students with disabilities, there are often processing and/or language deficits associated with their classification, which implies that their understanding of expectations may be different (Goran & Gage, 2011). A student with special needs may act out if he/she does not understand why they

are getting in trouble. Looking beyond the negative behaviors may help students learn from their mistakes in the future.

Recognizing that a student may not be intentionally inappropriate as a result of their culture is necessary to consider when assigning consequences. For example, there is a correlation between a student's cultural background and likelihood of being suspended (Mendez, 2003). Mendez (2003) identifies that minority students such as, African Americans and Hispanic Americans have a higher likelihood of suspension than Caucasian students. This phenomenon may be explained by cultural misunderstandings of expectations between the student and the teacher or school. Rules and expectations are often written out in a code of conduct that has been distributed to stakeholders with the intention that it is understood universally. However, certain cultural norms that teachers, students or the school as a whole may expect everyone to follow are unwritten rules (Varvus, 2002). For example, raising hands or talking in turns is an expectation in the Anglo-Saxon culture. In contrast, in the African American or Latino culture shouting out or speaking out of turn is culturally acceptable. In an Anglo Saxon cultured classroom, this could be considered disruptive and inappropriate behavior and could result in being removed from the classroom. The ambiguity between the teacher's thinking and the students' thinking is a cultural difference which may now impact the student negatively. Taking time to be sure that all students understand all expectations is important in avoiding such scenarios. Cultural barriers are another aspect that impact student behaviors and understanding of behavior expectations.

Students do not behave in a way that disrupts the classroom, just to be disruptive. They may misunderstand rules due to language barriers, developmental abilities or cultural differences. They may also have a number of struggles in their personal lives that impact their

ability to regulate themselves emotionally in school. Overall students' behaviors are a result of a combination of occurrences.

Impact of ISS/OSS on Student Achievement/Life

The impact of being suspended - whether it is in school or out of school - on a student's academic success and self-perception are two concerns that are repeatedly addressed in the literature (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Marrison et al, 2001; Spaulding et al., 2008). Being removed from the classroom or from school for a long period of time will likely have consequences for the student (Marrison et al, 2001). The question is, how far is too far. The negative consequences for students have long lasting effects that can impact their futures. This is a major concern of all stakeholders involved, does the impact of suspension go too far is the ultimate question.

Being suspended from school indicates that the student is not allowed back on school property until the delineated time is served and the school deems that it is safe and appropriate for him/her to return to school. The idea that students are required to stay out of school is a concern for a number of reasons. Students who are suspended often spend their day home where they are likely unsupervised; thus it is questionable whether or not they are actually staying out of trouble (Taras et al., 2003). Students who are removed from school typically do find themselves in a situation where they are involved in juvenile delinquency (Menzies & Lane, 2011). In fact, regular suspensions from school can exacerbate student tendencies for crime and violence. Ultimately suspension can pave the path for a future of trouble (Breunlin, Cimmarusti, Bryant-Edwards & Hetherington, 2002). This is also evidenced through students who are considered repeat offenders, which further supports the argument that suspension is ineffective in

decreasing delinquent behavior in school. Suspension in some cases seems to perpetuate the cycle that schools are attempting to prevent.

Suspension for many students also means that they will suffer academically (Brown, 2006). This applies specifically to students assigned out of school suspension (Raffaele-Mendez, Knoff & Ferron, 2002). Teachers are not required to send the student's work to them while they are suspended, and suspension can last up to ten days before the school is required to provide alternative instruction (Dickinson & Miller, 2006). The experience of falling behind academically can be frustrating for many students and their families. This may explain the correlation between suspension and likelihood of dropping out (Christle et al., 2004). Students can develop a poor attitude towards school, particularly if they are repeatedly being suspended and falling further behind (Breunlin et al., 2002). This frustration may not only lead to dropping out, but could increase behavioral issues as well. As the cycle continues to repeat itself, students' self-perception can be affected. They may begin to see themselves as trouble makers and begin to believe that they will always be a trouble maker. As previously discussed, adolescence is a formative time period for any individual. Suspension decreases the opportunities that students have to learn appropriate behaviors and effective coping mechanisms. When students are out of school they are often not supervised and do not have the resources to help them learn from their problem behaviors. Based on this information, it seems that suspension often can add the negative situations in a student's life rather than help to decrease negative situations.

In summary, the negative impacts of suspension on students academically and socially seem to far exceed the benefits of being assigned such a consequence. The goal of punishing problem behaviors in school should be not just to keep the school safe, but to help students learn

from their mistakes. The research supports the notion that suspension is not effective for improving students' overall well-being.

Punitive Measures Ineffective

Theoretical foundations that were widely researched and used in the mid-20th century have shown difficulties in the use of punishment. B.F. Skinner developed the foundation for the counseling practice known as behavioral therapy (Gewirtz & Pelaez-Nogueras, 1992). Behaviorists believe that all behavior is learned, and Skinner developed a set of techniques for counselors to use when working with clients towards behavior change. One of the techniques that Skinner explored is punishment. Punishment is aimed to decrease unwanted behaviors (Elsevier Science Publishing Company, 1973). This is essentially the goal of suspension to decrease or eliminate problem behaviors for students. However, Skinner and subsequent researchers of his work found that punishment is not an avenue that teaches new behaviors, often because of the way that it is used and applied. Rather, punishment was often found to suppress behaviors for a time and would later re-surface. He did note that positive reinforcement is a much more effective way of helping individuals learn new behaviors. Punishment according to Skinner is an ineffective modality for behavior management.

Skinner's work regarding punishment's ineffectiveness is upheld today. For example, one of the markers of suspension's ineffectiveness is the number of repeated offenses by students who have previously faced consequences for certain behaviors (Massey et al., 2007). This demonstrates that students are not learning from the punishment, but rather it seems to exacerbate the behaviors. Atkins et al. (2002) support that assertion. Their research indicated that, for a group of students in inner-city schools, behaviors were either suppressed for a time or

exacerbated depending on circumstances. This research also called to question the idea that students may find reward in suspension, due to increases in behavior issues following punitive disciplinary measures. Both findings showing the less effective impact that suspension seems to have on students.

Another area of controversy regarding punitive measures is that in schools the severity of the punishment does not seem to fit the perceived crime. This is a result of zero tolerance policies (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). The idea is that certain behaviors will simply not be tolerated and a severe consequence will be assigned to impact behavior change (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Zero tolerance policies were put in place in schools in the early 1990s in response to increased violence at school. These policies essentially created a concrete way to respond to various offenses in school. Thus there are no gray areas when it comes to assigning punishment for the offenses such as drug and alcohol use, bringing weapons to school, fighting, and threats of violence. However this has led to trivial incidences resulting in the most severe of punishments. Policies that were once put in place to abate violence are now applied when students share cough drops or headache medicines (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). The controversy around zero tolerance policy is whether or not suspension is being used effectively, much less whether or not it is a disciplinary measure that is effective in its own right. Since the implementation of zero tolerance policies in the early 1990s school violence and safety remains an issue. This reiterates the assumption that these measures, while well-intentioned, are not as effective as they could be. Zero tolerance policies contribute to the negative impacts of suspension.

Overall, there are a number of concerns regarding the use of suspension at a fundamental level. Theory that was developed in 1973 and has subsequently been proven as accurate through the years suggests that punitive measures are ineffective. Suspension is often used as a

punishment for an unacceptable behavior in schools. Also the idea that the punishment should fit the crime has been impacted by the implementation of zero tolerance policies. Often misbehavior is met with a severe consequence for which the rationale is unclear, again impacting the student learning from the consequence. The concerns identified across the studies identified above have led to other research regarding alternative programming.

Alternative Programs

As concerns about the effectiveness of suspension programs have grown, research on alternative programming has increased as well. A number of programs have been developed. Problem behavior tracking, classroom management strategies, utilizing counseling in conjunction with disciplinary measures, and evaluations of school's mental health programs have all been researched (Burke, Oats, Ringle, Fichtner, & DelGaudio, 2011; Lannie, Coddling, McDougal, & Meier, 2010; Massey et al., 2007; Wilson et al., 2003). Many of the programs have shown a positive impact on the schools in which they've been tested as a pilot (Wilson et al., 2003). The fact that these programs run as pilots means that once the research is complete, the program stops running. Often this is due to the fact that the school is left without the appropriate resources to continue running them.

Early identification programs tracking problem behaviors and classroom management training for teachers have been considered effective for decreasing discipline referrals. Early identification programs have been suggested as a proactive approach to disciplinary measures (Eklund et al., 2009; Smith, Bicard, Bicard & Casey, 2012). Students may not always be identified to have a behavioral or emotional struggle as they continue through school. Yet these students may consistently be facing consequences for their behaviors without any added support

to see what might be going on for the student. Using a screening tool to identify students who struggle with emotional and behavioral regulations has been shown to be a helpful approach to alleviate disciplinary issues early on. Getting students help to manage the issues they struggle with early on could essentially prevent or curb problem behaviors in the future. Tracking student problem behavior can help to inform administrators as to how to approach a disciplinary situation. Creating a classroom environment that is safe and proactive in managing behavior has proven successful in a number of school districts (Burke et al., 2011; Reglin, 2012). Tracking behavior and the interventions used has also been identified as effective in managing problem behaviors in school (Spaulding et al., 2010). Brown (2006) rolled out new district policy in Cincinnati to effect change in behavior for students. They accomplished this through a community effort, where a team of community members, parents, school officials and faculty came together to address concerns about the current state of discipline in the district. The team developed district wide policies that applied to students beginning in kindergarten and following them throughout high school. Creating policy that remained the same from kindergarten through senior year of high school made rules more clear to students, the ambiguity of what is expected was decreased. The code is clear and understood by those who must abide by it; helping to improve behavior concerns. Discipline tracking and classroom management seem to target parts of the concerns that were raised regarding the effectiveness of suspension programs.

Some programs take a more holistic approach. The combination of discipline and mental health support services has been explored as an alternative program to suspension. Research suggests that a combination of these services could be the most effective model for an in school suspension program (Morris & Howard, 2003). Using suspension in school, character education strategies while the student is in ISS, and offering direct counseling as a follow-up has been

suggested to be successful. This seems relevant as much discussion has focused on the personal needs of students that often drive the behaviors. This is supported by Nabors et al. (2000), who show positive student outcomes. The counseling services provided students with the skills and resources they needed to enhance protective factors in their life that reduce the risk of violent and/or disruptive behavior. Since these services are more individualized and attend to the specific needs of each student, they may seem more effective in the long run than other alternative programs. They take into consideration what is beyond the behavior that the student may need help with.

There are issues with the research regarding alternative programs. One of the issues with these alternative programs is that they've been run as a pilot program on a small scale with program specific trained professionals (Massey et al., 2007). Thus, the generalizability and true effectiveness is often questioned. There is also a lack of empirical research for these programs at the high school level. Implementing these programs has also been a struggle for schools. Once the pilot testing is completed, the researchers do not stay with the district and training is often extensive and time consuming. Teacher and other faculty are on limited schedules, so the applicability is also brought into question for these alternative programs. In addition, model fidelity and consistency when being facilitated are important when implementing these programs (Burke et al., 2011). This is a struggle many schools face as attempting to get 70 plus individuals to have the same perspective has proven quite problematic. This in turn impacts student behaviors, which will be discussed at a later point. There are difficulties with follow through and implementation of these programs.

In summary, alternative programs have been researched to an extent. The implementation after the pilot test and follow through have proven to be the downfall of these

programs. The programs have shown success while they run, which implies that suspension is not the only existing behavior management program. The difference between the alternative programs and suspension is that the alternative programs have been proven to show change in individuals who experience the program.

Conclusion to Literature Review

Suspension is a behavior management tool that has been used in the public school system. Research regarding suspension is far reaching and widespread. One limitation of the existing research may be that it has been performed using mostly a quantitative approach. The subject matter covered considers the program's effectiveness, alternative programming, how to be proactive rather than reactive, contributing factors to a student being suspended and common themes in the characteristics of students who typically get suspended. Overall, the research has shown that suspension programs are less effective than holistic approaches in helping youth to learn from and change their behavior. Using one standard program to teach and discipline unique individuals does not work. Throughout the research, surveys have been performed, programs have been implemented and statistics have been compiled and reviewed. Little to no research has considered the feelings and thoughts of the individuals who are directly impacted by suspension programs: the students. Working to understand what effects their behaviors, how suspension impacts their lives, and what they believe they may need to help them manage their behavior through the school day. By interviewing students about their attitudes and experiences with suspension at the high school level the researcher hopes to add to the research and help promote change. All of the literature and research discussed above show how disciplinary actions or reactions in school can have an impact on the developing identity of young people.

Suspension as a punitive disciplinary measure has proven to be unsuccessful for a majority of offenders. The idea that punishment is less effective than other avenues of behavior change strategies has been present since B.F. Skinner's work in 1973. The recognition of punishment's ineptitude seems to show that change is necessary. Considering the needs of students and how to most effectively help them learn and grow is essential. Creating alternative programming in schools has been attempted as a solution to this issue in recent years.

Method

A qualitative research approach was used for this research project, more specifically phenomenological research. Phenomenological research considers the meaning of the phenomena in question for the participant (Sheperis, Young & Daniels, 2010). The goal of this research is to understand the experience of high school students who have been assigned in-school or out of school suspension and how it impacts their lives.

Participants

Participants were selected from a rural mid-sized school district. All participants are high school students, males and females between the ages of 15 and 19. Students were identified by the school counselors, psychologist, and assistant principal as those who've experienced suspension in the high school in the last calendar school year, which qualified them to participate in the study. In total, 30 students were identified, five females and 25 males. A recruitment letter and consent forms were sent to the students' primary residences as an initial attempt at recruitment. No consents were received in this initial attempt. A general recruitment announcement was then made individually to the identified students. Students were asked to come individually to the researcher's office in the school and general information regarding the

study was given to the students. The students were asked if they were interested in participating in the study. Those who expressed interest in participating were mailed the recruitment letter and consent forms. Choosing to participate in the study was voluntary and there were no incentives offered. Three students participated in this study. Four students did not participate as they moved out of the district prior to recruitment. Two students declined interest in participating, and twenty-one did not return consent forms. Obtaining both parental and student consent was required as most of the students were under the age of 18.

The Researcher

The author is a counselor education graduate student interning as a school counselor in the suburban high school that the student participants attend. The researcher has been interning at the school for almost a year and had worked previously with a number of the students in individual or academic counseling. Institutional Review Board approval was sought and obtained to conduct this research project.

Data Collection

Individual interviews were conducted to collect the data for the study. A focus question guide was developed and used in the interviews. Topics included in the question guide addressed the students' personal experiences with suspension at school, their motivation for the behaviors that led to suspension, their beliefs about the program's effectiveness, and ideas for improvement. The question guide was comprised of the following:

- How would you describe being suspended to someone who has never had the experience?
- What would you say is the likelihood of your being suspended again? Why?

- What were you suspended for? Explain what happened.
 - How do you feel about being suspended for this?
- What have you learned from being suspended?
- How does getting suspended impact other areas of your life?
- Where can you find/see the rules of the school?
- How would you describe discipline at this school?
- If you could change anything, what would you change?
- What would stay the same?
- If you could create a consequence here that would work for you what would it be?
- How well would you say you know what is expected of you as a student?
- When did you experience your first suspension?
 - What was that like?
- How have you grown since that first experience?
- How would you describe yourself as a student?

These questions were chosen as the purpose of the study is to understand the student experience of in school and out of school suspension programs and how they affect their life in school.

Procedure

Each interview was about 30 minutes in length as they were conducted during school hours and the students were called from a study hall or elective class to participate. The participants came down to the counseling office individually. None of the students were aware of who else was participating in the study. When the students were called down a phone call was made to their classroom teacher, and it was requested the student come to the counseling office.

No other information was offered in regards to why the student was needed in the counseling office. This is standard practice for all regular appointments. Therefore, their participation in the study remained anonymous. The interview was conducted in the researcher's office with the door closed to protect the student's anonymity. Before starting the audio taping the researcher explained the interview procedure and how it would be different from a typical counseling session. The student was asked if he or she still desired to participate and if there were any questions prior to beginning the interview. The researcher asked the questions included in the guide. If an answer from a participant was unclear, clarification was requested. Interviews were audio taped to aid in the transcription and coding process used for analysis of the data.

After each interview was complete, the researcher reviewed the audiotape in a private office through headphones that only the researcher could hear. The tapes were transcribed as they were listened to. Once the interviews were transcribed the researcher began the coding process. Each interview was read through, separating out different ideas and thoughts offered by the students. Once the ideas were separated they were categorized or coded by the researcher. Two general themes were determined - experience of suspension and contributors to behavior. There are a number of subcategories within these themes including: connection in the classroom, ineffective coping skills, adolescent development, inconsistency in application of rules, experience of in/out of school suspension, consequence matching behaviors, and impact of suspension on the individual. These were deemed appropriate by the researcher as they closely related to the research question.

Results

The purpose of this research study was to better understand the student experience of in school and/or out of school suspension. Through the interview process a number of themes regarding the experience of suspension emerged and some discrepancies were identified. Students identified similar experiences with in school suspension and their first experiences of suspension. Some of their ideas about how suspension impacted their lives and motivation for their behaviors were alike as well. The overall experience of the discipline process also showed some similarities. Some of the experiences with out of school suspension and perceptions of the disciplinary system varied. Overall, the information in the interview responses helped the researcher understand the student experience of suspension.

Experience of Suspension

Students were asked a number of questions regarding their personal experiences of both ISS and OSS. Two of the students had experience with both, one student had only experience ISS. There were a number of similarities regarding the experience of ISS; patterns regarding the experience of OSS were less frequent.

In school suspension. Students were asked a series of questions at the start of the interview regarding the overall experience of suspension. Across the interviews students identified in school suspension specifically as being boring and/or annoying more so than punishing. All three students had experience with in school suspension; they'd each been suspended at least eight times.

“It’s pretty boring, but it gives you time to get all your work done, if you’re behind.”

“In school is just a quiet place; you get to be by yourself and, you know, just work in there. It’s kind of a punishment. I don’t really think of it being that bad...being in that room all day, that’s what really bothers me.”

“In school, it’s really kind of a more like, I’m not going to say harsh, but you don’t like it because you actually have to stay in school, do your work - you don’t really get any breaks.”

The structure of in school suspension allowed for the students to have time to do their school work or get help from a teacher in the educational lab where the in school suspension room is housed. It is an annoying to students for a couple of reasons. Two students identified that having to stay in that particular room all day annoyed them. The other said the fact that he had to come and stay in school to serve that consequence was what was bothersome.

Students also identified that the way that ISS is structured is very lenient. The fact that they can do school work, use their phones, be a part of the educational lab, and leave the room to get lunch led to their belief that it was lenient. Students noted that in comparison with previous experiences, specifically experiences they had in middle or elementary school, the high school level in school suspension was much less structured. Their first experiences with suspension were in elementary school. These experiences were much clearer in their memories than the suspensions they’d had in high school. The following excerpts are responses of the students about their first suspension experience:

“Yeah it sucked then. You were sitting in a classroom like this at a desk facing a wall and she was looking at you at her desk and I had to take a spelling test - it sucked.”

“Yeah, I do. It was ...um... in, I think, second or first grade with... um... me and my friend used to always play around and I like kicked him or something. I had to go to this big old lady... um... for recess for a whole week and even though it was like thirty minutes it was like, holy cripe, she was so big and she smelled so bad and she ate the whole time. I don’t know how I remember all that but.”

“Fourth grade...lord, I remember it like it was yesterday. I was in a relationship with a girl and some guy came up and started talking to her so I punched him in the face and I got suspended...I got suspended for like ten days and that really started the bad attitude.”

In contrast to the above excerpts, their responses about why they’d been suspended in high school or what the experience was like were much more vague. They’d either not remember why they’d been suspended or they could remember some reasons, but the way they described the experiences were much less poignant.

Out of school suspension. Out of school suspension was an area of discrepancy among the respondents. Two of the three students interviewed had experienced out of school suspension. When asked about their experiences with out of school the answers varied. It seemed the experiences of OSS were unique to the individual. One student identified it as a consequence that should be avoided because of how his family handled his being suspended. He noted that he had to stay in the house throughout the time he had been suspended and that getting behind on his school work was a deterrent to getting out of school again. The other student also noted that his family was upset about his getting suspended, but that it was not that punishing as he essentially had some time off from school. Having OSS only began to distress him when he

realized that it was impacting his grades. The findings overall regarding the out of school suspension experience are inconclusive as no clear patterns or themes emerged.

Impact on Student's Life

Questions were asked of the students regarding lessons they have learned, growth they have noted, their perception of self, and the impact suspension has made on other areas of their lives.

Lessons and growth. The researcher inquired what lessons the students had learned from being suspended. The students were not able to identify specific lessons they had learned regarding the behaviors that led to the suspension, nor did they note any particular insight into themselves as a result of being suspended.

“What have I learned from it...umm...don't do anything that will get you in there. Yeah. That's about all I've got.”

“All in general just follow the rules, because they're really not that hard of rules to follow. I mean you want to do everything you want to do, just do it outside of school. Plain and simple, it bothered me to the point of just making yourself look bad sitting in there. It would be easy to just follow the rules.”

These responses were intriguing as all three students had been suspended multiple times in high school, which contradicts the idea that they learned to follow the rules. They also added that there could be a chance they could be suspended again during a response to a previous question. The lessons learned were contradictory to other responses in the interview.

Later in the interview students were asked how they had grown since their initial suspension. This question was asked to understand how students see suspension has impacted their lives. All three students noted that it was an experience outside of school that initiated a change in their behavior in school. Overall, the students did not note any significant lessons or changes they made that they could attribute to suspension.

Other areas of life. There were discrepancies in this area of questioning. All three students could see how getting suspended had impacted their family members. Their parents were typically upset by the student's suspension. This particular impact, however, is not long lasting. The two students who had OSS identified that suspension had impacted them academically, while the student who had only experienced ISS determined that it depended on how productive he wanted to be while he was in ISS. Academically, the effects were longer lasting as the students either had to repeat courses or were consistently making up work for long periods of time in the school year. One student made note of how he thought it could impact him at a job or when trying to get a job; no other student identified that connection. No other connections were made in terms of the impact of suspension on students' lives. The other topic that fell under this category was the students' perception of self. All three students identified themselves as good students overall. They recognized that they had flaws and had made mistakes, but that did not make them permanent trouble-makers. Overall, suspension impacted students' family relationships for a short period of time and academics for long periods of time.

Examining the Behaviors

Students were also asked to consider the behaviors that led to their being suspended. Students identified that feeling engaged in the classroom, their maturity, and rule enforcement inconsistency impacted their behaviors.

Classroom engagement. Feeling bored or disconnected in class was noted across the interviews as a contributor for acting out.

I don't know, like ... um... - more...of a one on one like do work...talk...have fun...just don't make it all about work because even in adult life, real world, there are some times when you can have fun, joke, laugh , talk and here it's like they're making it a zombified work area...like you're [doing the] same thing over and over again every day, Monday through Friday, doing the same thing...we hate Mondays...middle of the week better, weekend and Monday again...its boring you know, we have to jump into work but half way through make it fun like have a conversation...teachers need to have conversations with students.

Students noted that they were bored in class, which often led to them acting out. They would do something in class to make others laugh or leave class and walk the hallways, which often led to trouble. It had less to do with the material being taught and more to do with feeling like the teacher or people in the classroom were connected to them in some way. The quote above is from one of the interviews, but he seemed to sum up what all three interviewees were trying to say. The students understand that there are standards and curriculum that must be taught, but they need to feel like that is not the only thing that matters at school.

Individual development. Maturity was another area that all three students addressed when questions were asked on why the students chose to behave the way they did.

“You know most of the time it's just that split second thing when I wasn't really thinking too much back then because I was just kind of young and stupid.”

“Um... because it's kind of childish to be like, oh, you're getting suspended.”

The students' responses to the questions regarding why they believed they behaved the way they did were quite matter of fact. They attributed their behavior to where they were at that point in their lives. They thought it was because they were immature at the time they were suspended. They were wrapped up in what others thought of them and were trying to please the crowd, which is typical in adolescence. They lacked certain coping skills as well. It was noted by the students that they were not thinking when they chose to behave the way that they did. This suggests that they may not have been developmentally able to determine an effective way to deal with their boredom or desire to please the crowd. Individual development was a theme that developed across the interviews.

Rule enforcement inconsistencies. Students also shared that sometimes it was difficult to know what was expected of them going from one classroom to the next. Rules or expectations were often not visible. What they did understand in terms of expectations were responsibilities that had been a part of their educational careers since elementary school, for example, attend school, be respectful, and complete your work. The word lenient continued to appear in the conversation when discussing rule enforcement. Students noted that one teacher may be more tolerant of some behaviors than others or that some teachers would follow through on a consequence when others would not, making it difficult to know how to behave.

A number of factors played a role in the decisions the students made about their behaviors. Some of those factors seemed to be within the control of the students and other appeared to be externally controlled. This recognition led to the final theme that emerged from the findings, the students' opinion of the disciplinary process.

Disciplinary Process

Students were asked questions regarding their opinion of the disciplinary process. The questions covered knowing where the rules could be seen, how they had learned what was expected of them, what they would change, what they would keep the same, and their overall opinion about the disciplinary system. Some patterns emerged within the responses and some discrepancies were identified.

Rule visibility and clarity. All three students identified that the rules of the school could be seen in the student agenda, which is a planner provided by the school to students, but that they did not use them. They also said that much of what is expected of them was learned through word of mouth; they either asked questions or someone told them. A number of expectations were also the same since elementary school. The rules and expectations were clear per the interview responses, but were not always readily visible.

Thoughts for change. This was an area where the students essentially agreed. All three noted that the process should be more of a progression and a collaborative experience. The students identified that suspension should not be the first resort for all behaviors. They thought that discipline should increase in severity with each offense. The students did not believe that their suspensions were always warranted and that the process could be improved to seem fairer. Ensuring that the student's voice was heard in the process was important to them as well. It was noted that at times the student was not able to share one's interpretation of the situation. The students believed that if they were given the opportunity to explain their situation to the administrator or teacher, being suspended could have been avoided.

I'll get suspended, so it's like they don't hear my side and then, you know, they'll believe the teachers. I think it should be like...um... what's the word... miscommunication... need to have communication between the teachers, student, and the principals. I think it should be like...you have a problem and the teacher is involved - you can talk about it to resolve it...

“It depends on, like, if it's your first time, then you should get detention, then in school; then if you do it, keep going - then out of school [suspension] really.”

On the whole the students had similar ideas in terms of how to improve the disciplinary system at this school. Collaboration and communication were key components of the improvement plan.

There were some discrepancies in this area as well. One student said that he would change everything when it came to the discipline at the school, and the other two believed that there were some aspects that were fair. One student also addressed the way that the ISS room is structured needed to be changed, whereas the other two did not mention the need to change the structure of the suspension programs. The two students who had experienced both ISS and OSS identified that leniency was one of the problems with the discipline system. There were some aspects of the disciplinary process that the students did not share the same opinion on.

Taken as a whole, a number of themes and patterns emerged throughout the data collection process. These include the student experience of in school suspension, factors contributing to behaviors that led to suspension, and opinions about the disciplinary process. At times, depending on the student's personal experience, there were inconsistencies. Students did not share the same experiences with out of school suspension and did not agree on all aspects of

the disciplinary process. The interpretation of these findings and limitations of this research will be discussed in the next section.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to understand the experience of students who have been assigned in school or out of school suspension. Upon reviewing the literature about suspension, there were few studies that were qualitative or that addressed the student experience, demonstrating the importance of using this approach. Individual audio-recorded interviews were the means by which data were collected. The question guide that was developed by the researcher and used to complete the interviews was used to understand the experience with suspension of high school students in a rural district. Under the umbrella of the term “experience,” the researcher specifically wanted to understand student’s experience with suspension, the behaviors that led to suspension, and how students felt about the disciplinary process overall.

A number of themes and patterns arose in the students’ responses. All three participants had experienced in school suspension and shared the same thoughts regarding the experience. They noted that the consequence was boring rather than punishing. They identified that in school suspension was a place where school work could be completed. None of the students noted learning specific lessons in regards to their behaviors or how to avoid suspension in the future. In terms of understanding what led to the behaviors, feeling engaged in the classroom, individual immaturity, and rule enforcement inconsistencies were identified as contributors to the negative behaviors. The students identified that they would change the process of how students are assigned consequences. They believe that it would be more effective

to make the discipline process more progressive rather than punitive practices where the consequences are severe and immediate. These were the overall themes within the findings.

Interpretation of Findings

Based on the themes and discrepancies identified in the results section, interpretations about the findings will be discussed in this section. Some of the findings are supported in the literature while others seem to be new findings regarding suspension. The findings that will be discussed include the experience of suspension, behavior motivators, impact on student's life, and experience of the disciplinary process.

Experience of suspension. Overall in-school suspension is more of a nuisance than a punishment or avenue for learning. Students described the experience as boring or annoying. When questions were posed regarding learning experiences or growth they were unable to identify any suspension experience that contributed to change in their behavior or way of thinking about school. B.F. Skinner's (1973) work in behavior theory supports the idea that punishment does not create learning. The students also identified that their first experiences of suspension were more structured and deterring than those they experienced in high school. This implies that how a program is structured and what privileges are provided affect how the experience impacts students' lives. This outcome is congruent to the literature as well. The Alternative Programming section of the literature review identified a number of programs with formal structures that have been shown to be effective in reducing suspension rates and negative behaviors. These programs include early identification systems (Eklund et al., 2009; Smith, et al., 2012), behavior tracking programs (Spaulding et al., 2010), classroom management models (Burke et al., 2011; Reglin, 2012) and combining counseling services with discipline (Morris &

Howard, 2003). The findings regarding the ISS experience seem to suggest there is a need for change to make the consequence more meaningful and promote change in student behavior.

OSS seems to be an individual experience more so than ISS. ISS is a school monitored program that is structured in some manner. The experience is meant to be the same for all students, whereas with OSS there is another element added to the way the experience is structured - students' families. Both students who had experienced OSS identified that their families impacted how they experienced their OSS consequence. One student's family seemed to be more involved in terms of ensuring that he stayed in the house all day when he was home, creating a more punitive environment. The other student noted that while his family was disappointed, there were not many rules impacting what he did with his time when he was home. The experience of OSS also seems to depend on students' personal values. One of the students identified that part of the reason he disliked OSS was because he was bored, all of his friends were at school and he was stuck at home. The second student identified that OSS at times was exactly what he wanted. He did not mind having time away from school or from the people he had to interact with when he was in school. OSS experience seems to highly depend on the individual perceptions and needs of the student. These findings are contrary to information discovered during the review of literature. The research regarding OSS mostly focused on how being out of school can lead to legal issues down the road as the unsupervised time allows for the student to do as he/she pleases (Menzies & Lane, 2011). The OSS experience seems to be highly unique to individual situations.

Impact on life. Suspension has little impact on students' lives. Students were able to recognize how their suspensions have impacted their academic situation, long term and familial relationships, short term. The impact that suspension has on academic standing has been a

concern for a number of researchers (Brown, 2006; Raffaele-Mendez et al., 2002). The students were all repeat offenders in terms of being suspended more than once and being suspended more than once for the same behavior. Previous research by Massey et al. (2007) noted that this implies students are not learning from their experiences, supporting the notion that the overall impact is insignificant. When questions about growth and lessons learned were posed, the students did not attribute any behavioral changes or significant lessons learned to their suspension experience. Rather, they identified experiences outside of school as contributing to behavioral change and to lessons learned. Students did not learn anything from being suspended in regards to changing their behaviors.

According to previous researchers (Breunlin et al., 2002; Christle et al., 2004) other areas of students' lives that are affected are students' self perceptions and attitudes towards school. This was not an issue for the students interviewed. All three students had been suspended multiple times beginning in elementary school. When asked how they perceived themselves as students they all identified themselves in a positive way. Also, they all identified that academic success was important to them. While suspension often led to them getting behind, none of them mentioned faltering when it came to their attitude towards school. Thus, it does not seem that suspension impacted the students' views of themselves or attitudes toward school.

Behavior motivators. Student engagement is a crucial component for keeping students in the classroom. This topic is not something that was addressed in previous research. School climate, classroom management, and teacher wellness have all been considered, but not the connection that students have to the classroom or teacher (Bevans et al., 2007; Kennedy, 2011; Pas et al., 2010, Reglin, 2012). It was clear that connection was an essential piece for students choosing to behave the way they did as they identified feeling bored or disconnected and not

caring whether or not they got in trouble for misbehaving. Perhaps if they felt more connected they would respect the rules and want to stay in the classroom.

The students also identified immaturity and rules not consistently being enforced as reasons for misbehaving. Immaturity speaks to a developmental issue. Students identified that they were young and not giving much thought to the decisions that they were making or the behaviors in which they were engaged. Essentially, they were not in a position developmentally to make a better decision about their behavior. This is supported by Erikson's theory of development, as he discussed that adolescents will try on various behaviors and determine their fit based on the consequences they receive (Santrock, 2011). If expectations are different from one class room to the next, the commitment to the disciplinary system is corrupted, making it difficult for students to know how to behave from classroom to classroom. Research has identified that fidelity to a model impacts the school environment which has previously been discussed as a contributor to disruptive student behaviors and in turn suspension rates (Bevans et al., 2002). Student misbehaviors can be attributed to both student maturity and rule enforcement consistency.

Experience of discipline process. Views of the disciplinary process varied among the interviewed students. They all identified a desire for change when it came to the process of receiving consequences. There was a desire for a more progressive rather than a punitive process, one that required collaboration among the student, teacher, and administrator. That is, students thought that suspension should not be a go-to consequence. Intervention should start with a warning, move to detention, and progress from there in terms of consequences. Students indicated that they did not always believe their behavior warranted a suspension, which is part of the controversy of zero tolerance policies (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). It was also discussed that

students felt they were given a strong consequence without their side of the situation being taken into consideration. Inconsistencies in the discipline process have a significant impact on students and their behavior choices. In order to alleviate this dilemma of inconsistency, open communication and clear, visible expectations need to be present. That is, when a student must be disciplined for their actions, all parties involved should have an opportunity to discuss their perspective on the situation that occurred. The administrator essentially takes into account all the information before assigning a consequence to the behavior. This will help to ensure that the severity of the consequence matches the intensity of the behavior. Also, communication with teachers and other faculty in the building is key. Making certain that all faculty are aware and understand the expectations of all students and their responsibilities in enforcing those expectations would aid in solving the inconsistency dilemma as well. Having the same expectations and consequences for not meeting those expectations was an aspect that the students noted as something they desired to be a part of the disciplinary process. Expectations and perhaps even consequences being made more visible in classrooms and hallways could help to keep everyone consistent. When someone, student or faculty, is not being consistent, some action should be taken to correct the inconsistencies. The students' experienced the disciplinary process as inconsistent and at times unfair.

The purpose of this research project was to better understand the experience of students who have been assigned ISS or OSS. The researcher hoped to understand this experience in order to better inform educators how to help students avoid suspensions and change their behaviors. Overall, considering all components of the study, it seems that the suspension procedures are ineffective.

Limitations of the Study

It is important to note that the generalizability of this study is limited because a convenience sample was used. There were only three participants and the participants shared a number of similar characteristics. All three participants were males, seniors in high school, and have suffered significant consequences for delinquent behavior outside of school. Also, the question guide used was an instrument created by the researcher for the purposes of this study. Thus, the instrument has not been proven valid or reliable. Interview times were limited as well, as they were conducted during the school day to avoid removing students from class for an extended period of time. These limitations could have impacted the findings of this study.

Recommendations for Counseling Practice

It is important that school counselors and other school professionals attend to the information in this study. While the generalizability of this study is limited, the themes determined in the responses offer important information regarding student needs in school.

Counselors can offer counseling services in conjunction with punitive consequences to impact change with students. Social skills groups could be implemented by counselors in school where coping skills are taught to help students better handle boredom or peer pressure. These groups could possibly be incorporated into the days that students are suspended in school to identify ways to change their behaviors and avoid future suspensions. Counselors may also work with teachers and/or administrators to enhance conflict resolution/communication skills. This could benefit all parties in high tension situations, or at times when students identify that they are not being treated fairly. Improving communication could help to de-escalate the situation. Counselors could also be part of a collaborative team to help re-structure the disciplinary process to support a therapeutic approach, allowing for effective behavior change. Working with students individually to help them connect what they are learning in the classroom to their individual

interests could also be a task of the counselor. Collaborating with colleagues and students to create positive change is the essential role of the counselor.

Future study. Expanding the study to multiple schools would be beneficial. Various suspension models are utilized and comparison of different models or similar models could be telling of what is or is not effective. Researching students at a younger age to help identify where schools may begin to be proactive with students and perhaps curb behavior sooner would be interesting as well. The students in this particular study were all high school seniors and their first experiences with suspension were in elementary school. Perhaps that speaks to where intervention and further research is needed. Comparing the views of school faculty and stake holders regarding what, in terms of response to inappropriate behaviors, the school is responsible for would be an interesting study.

Researcher experience. Qualitative research is completely experiential; the researcher seeks to understand the human experience of participants, and the experience itself impacts the researcher(s). This research began by determining what question to answer. Suspension from school was the topic chosen because the researcher has long been skeptical of its impacts and effectiveness as a consequence.

Personally, the researcher has always seen out of school suspension as merely a day off for the student rather than a consequence, and in school suspension could be effective depending on how it is structured. These beliefs of the researcher could have impacted the study. First, the question guide used for the interviews was created by the researcher. Thus, there are questions that could be considered biased or leading by readers despite the researcher's best efforts to keep questions general and open. During the interview it is possible that these pre-ceding ideas affected the way that the researcher responded to the participants' answers, which in turn could impact how participants responded to future questions. Also, given the researcher's position at the research site the students may have been hesitant to answer certain questions honestly, in spite of several confidentiality statements made by the researcher. The researcher's personal ideas and values could have impacted the interviews and/or participants.

The researcher is still skeptical at this point about the effectiveness of out of school suspension. It should be noted that the researcher recognizes OSS's importance as a safety measure, but questions its effectiveness in curbing negative behaviors. The researcher's ideas regarding in school suspension have changed. Based on the findings, it seems that in school suspension if structured differently could be more effective.

Conclusion

Overall, disciplinary experiences are highly dependent on the individual. A number of personal experiences and characteristics that are unique to the student affect how suspension does or does not impact her/his life. If structured appropriately, in school suspension seems as though it has higher potential to be effective in curbing negative behaviors than out of school suspension. Restructuring in school suspension could be difficult given that it seems impossible to find a one size fits all consequence that helps students to change behavior and learn a lesson. Further qualitative research regarding suspension programs with a diverse student population and multiple school districts involved is important. Perhaps even more importantly, school counselors continuing to strive to understand the student experience is essential to developing the effectiveness of the profession.

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Appendix A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

The College at
BROCKPORT
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Grants Development Director

Date: May 16, 2013
To: Jessica James
From: Colleen Donaldson
Institutional Review Board Director
Re: IRB Project # 2012-148

Project Title: High School Students' Experience of In School and/or Out of School Suspension in a Suburban Setting

Your proposal "High School Students' Experience of In School and/or Out of School Suspension in a Suburban Setting" has been approved as of 5/16/13.

You must use only the approved consent form or informational letter and any applicable surveys or interview questions that have been approved by the IRB in conducting your project. If you desire to make any changes in these documents or the procedures that were approved by the IRB you must obtain approval from the IRB prior to implementing any changes.

If you wish to continue this project beyond one year, federal guidelines require IRB approval before the project can be approved for an additional year. A reminder continuation letter will be send to you in eleven months with the specific information that you will need to submit for continued approval of your project. Please note also that if the project initially required a full meeting of the IRB (Category III proposal) for the first review, then continuation of the project after one year will again require full IRB review.

Please contact Colleen Donaldson, IRB Administrator, Office of Academic Affairs, at (585) 395-5118 or cdonalds@brockport.edu, **immediately** if:

- the project changes substantially,
- a subject is injured,
- the level of risk increases
- changes are needed in your consent document, survey or interview questions or other related materials.

Best wishes in conducting your research.

Appendix B**INITIAL RECRUITMENT LETTER**

Dear Parents/Guardians:

My name is Jessica James. I am the intern in the [REDACTED] School Counseling office under the supervision of Mrs. [REDACTED]. I am also a Master's degree student at The College at Brockport in the Counselor Education Program.

I am writing you today to tell you about a thesis project that I must complete as a requirement for graduation from my program. My project entitled "The Student Experience of Suspension" intends to interview students of [REDACTED] regarding their experiences with the suspension and disciplinary system. The purpose is to gather data that could help to inform the school on student needs and experiences when it comes to disciplinary action.

The project outline is essentially the following:

- Once appropriate consent from parents/guardians/students is obtained I (the researcher) will interview students
- The interview will take no more than 30 minutes
- I will do my best to pull students during lunch or study hall periods
- All identifying information regarding the student being interviewed will be confidential- it will not be in the final report, it will not be shared with the school
- Once the interview process is complete the researcher will review and group the data to report in group form, again protecting your student's confidentiality

There is more detailed information about this project in the enclosed consent form. Your permission for your child to participate in this project would be fully appreciated. The project is required for graduation by my program. Please take a look at the consent form attached for more information- my contact information is there if you have any further questions or concerns.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica James BS, CASAC

School Counselor Intern

[REDACTED]

Appendix C

PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Dear Parents/Guardians:

My name is Jessica James. I am currently the intern in the High School Counseling office under the supervision of Mrs. [REDACTED]. I am a Master's student at The College at Brockport in the Counselor Education program. For the completion of my Master's degree my program requires that I complete a thesis project. My thesis is investigating the experience of high school students who have been assigned in school and/or out of school suspension. The purpose of this study is to determine how these disciplinary measures impact students behaviorally and academically.

The possible benefit from being in this study could be that information will be learned that would better inform administrators and their team how to help the students.

Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary; being in it or refusing to be in it, will not affect your child's grades or class standing. S/he is free to change her/his mind or stop being in the study at any time.

I understand that:

1. My child's participation is voluntary and he/she has the right to refuse to answer any questions. S/he will have a chance to discuss any questions s/he has about the study with the researcher after completing the interview.
2. My child's confidentiality is protected. My child's name will not be written on the interview notes. There will be no way to connect my child to the written data. If any publication results from this research, s/he would not be identified by name or any other means, such as unique stories or situations. Results will be given anonymously and in group form only, so that neither your student nor their school can be identified. Please understand that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed due to voice recognition on the recordings. Participation will have no effect on grades or status.
3. There is a risk that your student may miss part of a class to participate if they are not available during a study hall or lunch period. The interview is not intended to last beyond 30 minutes.
4. My child's participation involves meeting with the researcher in the counseling office where their responses will be audiotaped by the researcher. Once the audio tape has been reviewed by the researcher it will be destroyed.
5. Approximately 6 to 9 students will take part in this study. The results will be used for the completion of a research project by the primary researcher to fulfill a Master's thesis requirement for graduation.

6. Data and consent forms will be kept separately in a locked filing cabinet by the investigator and will be destroyed by shredding when the research has been completed. Audio recording device will kept separately in a locked filing cabinet by the investigator. Once data from the recordings is transcribed all tapes will be deleted from the device. Any electronic data will be maintained by the researcher on a password protected computer and files will be deleted upon completion of the project.

You are being asked for your permission for your child to participate in this study. If you wish to give permission to participate, and you agree with the statement below, please sign in the space provided. Remember, you may change your mind at any point and withdraw from the study. Your child can refuse to participate even if you have given permission for her/him to participate.

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to allow my child to participate as a participant in this project. I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the above statements. All my questions about my child's participation in this study have been answered to my satisfaction. If you have any questions you may contact:

<u>Primary researcher</u>	<u>Faculty Advisor</u>
Name: Jessica James	Name: Dr. Patricia Goodspeed-Grant
Phone Number: x1404 or contact the counseling office: [REDACTED] - please note I am part time and only in the office Wednesday through Friday during regular school hours	Department and phone number: Counselor Education Dept. (585) 395-2258
Email address: jessica.james@[REDACTED]	Email address:pgoodspe@brockport.edu

I agree for my child to participate and understand that he/she will be audio taped.

Parent Signature: _____ Date: _____

I agree for my child to participate, but do not agree for him/her to be audio taped.

Parent Signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely, Ms. Jessica James BS, CASAC

[REDACTED] High School Counseling Intern

Appendix D

STATEMENT OF INFORMED ASSENT FOR STUDENTS

Dear Student:

My name is Ms. James. I am currently the intern in the High School Counseling office under the supervision of Mrs. [REDACTED]. I am also a Master's student at The College at Brockport in the Counselor Education program. For the completion of my Master's degree my program requires that I complete a thesis project. My thesis is investigating the experience of high school students who have been assigned in school and/or out of school suspension. The purpose of this study is to determine how these disciplinary measures impact you all as students behaviorally and academically.

The possible benefit from being in this study could be that information will be learned that would better inform administrators and their team how to help the students.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary; being in it or refusing to be in it, will not affect your grades or class standing. You are free to change your mind or stop being in the study at any time.

I understand that:

1. My participation is voluntary and I have the right to refuse to answer any questions. I will have a chance to discuss any questions about the study with the researcher after completing the interview.
2. My confidentiality is protected. My name will not be written on the interview notes. There will be no way to connect me to the written data. I understand that voice recognition is possible on the audiotapes and recognize this means complete confidentiality is not possible. If any publication results from this research, I would not be identified by name or any other means, such as unique stories or situations. Results will be given anonymously and in group form only, so that neither I nor my school can be identified. Participation will have no effect on grades or status.
3. There is a risk that your I may miss part of a class to participate if I am not available during a study hall or lunch period. The interview is not intended to last beyond 30 minutes.
4. My participation involves meeting with the researcher in the counseling office where my responses will be audiotaped by the researcher. Once the audio tape has been reviewed by the researcher it will be destroyed.
5. Approximately 6 to 9 students will take part in this study. The results will be used for the completion of a research project by the primary researcher to fulfill a Master's thesis requirement for graduation.

- 6. Data and consent forms will be kept separately in a locked filing cabinet by the investigator and will be destroyed by shredding when the research has been completed. Audio recording device will kept separately in a locked filing cabinet by the investigator. Once data from the recordings is transcribed all tapes will be deleted from the device. Any electronic data will be maintained by the researcher on a password protected computer and files will be deleted upon completion of the project.

You are being asked whether or not you want to participate in this study. If you wish to participate, please sign in the space provided. Remember, you may change your mind at any point and withdraw from the study. You can refuse to participate even if your parent/guardian gives permission for you to participate.

If you have any questions you may contact:

<u>Primary researcher</u>	<u>Faculty Advisor</u>
Name: Jessica James I am in the counseling office Wednesday through Friday every week. If you have any questions please come down and see me.	Name: Dr. Patricia Goodspeed-Grant
	Department and phone number: (585)395-2258
	Email address:pgoodspe@brockport.edu

I agree to participate and understand that I will be audio taped.

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

I agree to participate, but do not agree to be audio taped.

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ms. Jessica James BS, CASAC

████████ High School Counseling Intern

Appendix E**GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENT TO STUDENT**

Hello _____. I am Ms. James the counseling intern. I am a graduate student finishing my Masters' at The College at Brockport. In order to graduate I need to do a thesis project. In order to finish this project your help is needed! The goal of my project is to help us to understand how to best help you at school and in the event that you find yourself in In School Suspension. I have a lot more information about this project in the mailing. I would like to send out if you are interested in participating. Inside the mailing there are consent forms that you and your parent/guardian have to sign so you can participate.

Appendix F

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Intro: I am Ms. James the School Counseling Intern. I am completing my Master's Degree at The College at Brockport and hearing about your experiences with suspension is an area that I am interested in. I want to know more about your experience because I want to know how suspension impacts your experience in school and other areas of your life. While you are in school you are our main concern. I want to see how the school might offer you the most effective learning experience possible and I am only able to do that with your help by sharing your experience with me. Before we begin I want to remind you that everything you share in this room is confidential. There will not be any way for you to be tied to any information that you share in this room today. Your participation is voluntary. Do you have any questions for me before we start? Again thank you for being a part of this interview!

- How would you describe being suspended to someone who has never had the experience?
- What would you say is the likelihood of your being suspended again? Why?
- What were you suspended for? Explain what happened.
 - How do you feel about being suspended for this?
- What have you learned from being suspended?
- How does getting suspended impact other areas of your life?
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Sports
 - School work
 - Part time Job
- Where can you find/see the rules of the school?
- How would you describe discipline at this school?
- If you could change anything, what would you change?
- What would stay the same?
- If you could create a consequence here that would work for you what would it be?
- How well would you say you know what is expected of you as a student?
- When did you experience your first suspension?
 - What was that like?
- How have you grown since that first experience?
- How would you describe yourself as a student?