

EXAMINING ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF
SOCIAL MEDIA ON ADOLESCENT SCHOOL DISCIPLINE:
A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Stephanie N. Cox

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

2023

EXAMINING ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF
SOCIAL MEDIA ON ADOLESCENT SCHOOL DISCIPLINE:
A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by Stephanie N. Cox

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2023

APPROVED BY:

Karla Swafford, Ed.D., Committee Chair

Gail Collins, Ed.D., Committee Member

Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand middle and high school administrators' perceived influence of social media on school discipline and student behavior in southeastern Virginia. Bandura's social cognitive theory and Skinner's behavioral theory of operant conditioning guided this study and provided the theoretical framework for learning through observation and reinforcement. Twelve middle and high school administrators participated in this study and shared their administrative experiences regarding social media and its perceived influence on student discipline and behavior in their respective schools. The central question guiding this research study was the following: What are the experiences of middle and high school administrators as they manage school discipline when student behaviors are influenced by outside interactions on social media? Data collection included interviews, a focus group, and an analysis of current disciplinary policies and procedures. Data analysis followed those procedures outlined in Moustakas' (1994) guidelines for transcendental phenomenological studies, including using *epoché* for bracketing, identifying, and coding emergent themes, utilizing textural and structural descriptions, and developing a composite description to derive a universal essence of the shared experiences. The essence of this study revealed the increased usage of social media among adolescents influences their behavior. Both negative and positive behaviors are reinforced through the quantifiability of social media. These behaviors spill into the school environment, affecting discipline at the secondary level. Even without social-media-specific policies to guide them, administrators leverage the code of conduct to teach students about appropriate behavior and effectively address negative behaviors.

Keywords: social media, middle school, high school, adolescence, school discipline, administrators

Copyright Page

© 2023, Stephanie N. Cox

Dedication

First, I would like to thank God and give Him the glory for allowing me to experience this process and complete my dissertation. Without prayer and His guidance, I would never have completed this task. Reflecting on this journey, it is amazing to see how God orchestrated everything—from interactions with professors to the evolution of dissertation topics. In times of doubt and anxiety, He steadied me and comforted me. I am thankful for His guidance every day.

I would also like to dedicate this work to my family. Thank you to my amazing husband, Cliff, and my sweet baby girl, Emma. Thank you for your endless support and encouragement. Cliff, you stepped in without question or hesitation to help with household chores and with taking care of our daughter whenever I needed time to complete assignments. You helped me to maintain focus and encouraged me when I was questioning myself. You are my rock, and for you, I am forever grateful. I would never have been able to do this without you. To the rest of my family, thank you for your unwavering support and love.

Finally, to my TEAM, thank you. Coach Parker and Ms. Lawrence, you worked with me and gave me the flexibility to accomplish my goals. You supported me throughout this entire process. You have given me amazing opportunities to help me learn and grow as a person, a professional, and a Christian. You have truly taught me the meaning of team. Our prayer time and meeting time mean the world to me. Without your support, I would not have had the time or the opportunity to complete some of my coursework. I am immensely grateful for your love and support, as well as the support of the rest of our team.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Karla N. Swafford, and my methodologist, Dr. Gail Collins. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to conduct this study. Thank you for your patience and support through this process. It was an honor to work with both of you. I am so grateful for your kindness, your guidance, your wisdom, and your prayers throughout this process.

I would also like to thank my dear friend, Janis. Janis, thank you for jumping into this journey with me. Being able to support one another through the process has kept me going. Your encouragement means so much to me, and you are truly an inspiration. I cannot wait for us to both have Ed.D. behind our names. God has plans for us, and I can't wait to see what they are.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Copyright Page	4
Dedication.....	5
Acknowledgements	6
List of Tables.....	13
List of Abbreviations	14
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	15
Overview	15
Background.....	16
Historical Context.....	17
Social Context	19
Theoretical Context	21
Situation to Self	22
Philosophical Assumptions	23
Research Paradigm	26
Problem Statement.....	26
Purpose Statement	27
Significance of the Study.....	28
Empirical Significance	28
Theoretical Significance	29

Practical Significance	30
Research Questions	31
Central Research Question	31
Sub-question One	32
Sub-question Two.....	33
Sub-question Three.....	33
Sub-question Four	34
Definitions	35
Summary.....	36
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	38
Overview	38
Theoretical Framework	38
Social Cognitive Theory.....	39
Behavioral Theory of Operant Conditioning.....	43
Related Literature	45
Social Media and Teenagers.....	46
Social Networking and Public Education.....	47
Social Media and Communication	48
Mobile Devices.....	49
Implications of Social Media on Instructional Practices	49
Cyberbullying.....	51
Legal Precedents, Ambiguity, and School Discipline of Social Media	52

The Influence of Social Media on Adolescent Mental Health and Behavior	55
Summary.....	67
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS.....	69
Overview	69
Design.....	70
Research Questions	71
Central Research Question	71
Sub-question One	71
Sub-question Two.....	71
Sub-question Three.....	72
Sub-question Four	72
Sites	72
District One: Independent District.....	72
District Two: Unified District	74
District Three: Southern District	75
Participants	78
Procedures	80
The Researcher’s Role.....	80
Data Collection.....	82
Interviews	82
Focus Group	87

	10
Document Analysis	91
Data Analysis.....	92
Horizontalization	92
Textural and Structural Descriptions.....	93
Essence	93
Trustworthiness	94
Credibility.....	94
Dependability and Confirmability	95
Transferability	95
Ethical Considerations.....	96
Summary.....	96
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	98
Overview	98
Participants	98
Sarah	100
John.....	102
Calvin	103
Isaiah.....	104
Jeffrey	105
Cassidy	106
Marcus	107
Jarrod	107

	11
Jessica	108
Stephen	109
Michael	110
Eliza	111
Results	112
Theme: Changing Behaviors	115
Theme: Acting in the Best Interest of Students	116
Theme: Inability to Disconnect	118
Theme: Lack of Oversight	119
Outlier Data and Findings	122
Research Question Responses	123
Central Research Question	123
Sub-Question One	124
Sub-Question Two	124
Sub-Question Three	125
Sub-Question Four	126
Summary	126
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION	128
Overview	128
Discussion	128
Interpretation of Findings	129
Implications for Policy or Practice	134

Theoretical and Empirical Implications	136
Limitations and Delimitations	138
Recommendations for Future Research.....	139
Conclusion	139
References	141
Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter	152
Appendix B: Recruitment Letter	153
Appendix C: Screening Survey	154
Appendix D: Emails to Selected and Potential Participants.....	156
Appendix E: Consent Form	157
Appendix F: Interview Questions.....	160
Appendix G: Focus Group Questions.....	161
Appendix H: Sample Interview Transcript Approval Letter	162
Appendix I: Sample Focus Group Transcript Approval Letter	163
Appendix J: Reflexive Journal	164
Appendix K: Audit Trail	167

List of Tables

Table 1: Participants' Role, Level, and Years of Experience	103
Table 2: Participants' Contribution by Data Collection Methods	104
Table 3: Themes from Codes Identified in Phenomenological Reduction	105

List of Abbreviations

English language learners (ELL)

Fear of missing out (FOMO)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Students with disabilities (SWD)

Virginia Department of Education (VDOE)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

With social media permeating the lives of both adolescents and adults, its incorporation into educational pedagogy has become an issue of controversy (Lee et al., 2015). Despite the advantages of incorporating social media and technology as educational tools, administrators now face the unintended consequences of social media use—from cyberbullying to infringement of First Amendment freedoms (Conn, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; O'Connor et al., 2016; Sheridan, 2015). Ambiguities in the law require administrators and teachers to make disciplinary decisions without policies upon which to make them. The problem is that social media seems to influence student behavior and creates complex situations with student discipline. While the push for providing students with 21st-century learning skills grows, educational leaders must strive to find a balance between disciplining inappropriate online behaviors that disrupt the learning environment while also evaluating what constitutes freedom of speech or expression rather than simply a disruption to the learning environment. While social media has its advantages, it is creating a complex problem for administrators who are now facing more disciplinary situations that originate off-campus and must handle such situations delicately (Dunn & Derthick, 2013; O'Connor et al., 2016; Sheridan, 2015).

This chapter introduces a phenomenological study to understand middle and high school administrators' perceived influence of social media on school discipline and student behavior in southeastern Virginia. The goal is to provide an understanding to middle and high school administrators and school leaders of how social media can possibly influence adolescent behavior and school discipline, thus providing guidance for navigating this 21st-century issue. The background includes social media and secondary school discipline's historical, social, and

theoretical context. Following the background section, the situation to self describes how the research topic influenced the researcher and led to the research design. The problem and purpose statements describe the current problem and the need for guidance in mediating issues that arise in the secondary setting due to adolescents' conflicts on social media. The significance of the study expounds on the empirical, theoretical, and practical significance of the research. Research questions guide the study and reinforce its purpose. Finally, definitions of key terms clarify the meanings of key terms as they are used within the context of the research study.

Background

Social media and technology seems to permeate nearly every aspect of society. Students are inundated with social media or some form of technology daily, in their personal lives and at school (Lee et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2018; Tuzel & Hobbs, 2017). They are rapidly changing the face of education. Teachers must grapple with maintaining the attention of learners accustomed to the instant gratification associated with technology access on mobile devices (Jena & Mohanty, 2015). With the continuous advancements in technology and the one-to-one initiatives that are becoming more commonplace in schools across the United States, an increasing number of middle and high schools are incorporating technology and blended learning into their classrooms (Balakrishnan et al., 2017; Bartow, 2014). Education and pedagogy are evolving, which is causing school leaders to reexamine what learning should look like in this digital age where lecture is no longer the most effective mode of instruction (Garner & Chan, 2019; Steinmetz, 2013). Additionally, administrators are required to manage disciplinary and behavioral issues that arise as a result of social media interactions that may or may not have occurred on campus (Conn, 2010; Jones, 2013; Sheridan, 2015). Adolescents are grappling with balancing their online social and academic lives while attempting to prevent one from blending

into the other (Bartow, 2014; Conn, 2010; Sheridan, 2015). Learning and school discipline are being reshaped as social media becomes ever-present in classrooms worldwide.

Historical Context

The traditional school and classroom include explicit instruction, typically through lecture (Garner & Chan, 2019; Steinmetz, 2013). The teacher is the subject-matter expert who delivers information and imparts knowledge to students (Steinmetz, 2013). Students complete activities independently, with limited opportunities for inquiry and collaboration (Garner & Chan, 2019; Steinmetz, 2013). This is typically the type of classroom depicted in pop culture through movies, television shows, and music videos. However, in the past few decades, the field of education has experienced an evolution or progression of instructional practice.

As technology became more readily available and more research studies focused on educational best practice, educational researchers began recommending more collaboration and inquiry within the classroom (Garner & Chan, 2019; Steinmetz, 2013). Researchers found that allowing students to learn through inquiry, discovery, and collaboration with others yielded more successful academic outcomes than did traditional classroom instruction via lecture and basic notetaking (Danker, 2015; Garner & Chan, 2019; Islam et al., 2018; Scott et al., 2016). As a result, instructional methods have morphed to include such concepts as flipped classrooms and blended learning (Danker, 2015; Garner & Chan, 2019; Islam et al., 2018; Scott et al., 2016; Steinmetz, 2013). Flipped classrooms allow students to explore upcoming topics before they are formally taught in the classroom (Danker, 2015; Garner & Chan, 2019; Islam et al., 2018; Scott et al., 2016). Generally, flipped classrooms incorporate some form of technology that allows students to view videos and presentations and take notes to gain some background knowledge on the subject prior to its formal introduction in class (Danker, 2015; Garner & Chan, 2019; Islam et

al., 2018; Scott et al., 2016). Blended learning occurs when some instruction takes place in a traditional format, such as lectures and worksheets, while other parts of the classroom instruction incorporate technology (Irawan et al., 2017; Kimmons, 2015). While these are just two examples of modern instructional practices, they demonstrate how technology is shaping the way educators approach classroom instruction. No longer is the teacher the all-knowing subject-matter expert; now, the teacher is the facilitator of learning.

With the rapid advancements in technology, the 21st-century classroom no longer resembles the traditional classroom and method of instruction (Danker, 2015; Garner & Chan, 2019; Islam et al., 2018; Scott et al., 2016; Steinmetz, 2013). Now, the teacher must be the facilitator of learning, providing students with the opportunity to explore and collaborate in an effort to engage in active learning (Steinmetz, 2013). Students must engage with technology, providing them with more information than even a subject-matter expert ever could. As school systems integrate technology into classrooms and adopt one-to-one initiatives, they are also creating policies to govern social media and personal cell phone use on campus. However, this cannot control what students do when they leave school grounds. As a result, new dilemmas face administrators concerning student behavior and discipline (Conn, 2010; Dunn & Derthick, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Sheridan, 2015). Further complicating this matter is the prevalence of social media in the lives of adolescents. Nesi et al. (2018) explained:

The current generation of adolescents lives in an environment that is saturated with social media of different types at increasing frequencies, providing an historical period that may be vastly different than what existed a mere 5 or 10 years prior. (p. 272)

Due to this saturation of social media in their lives, adolescent behavior and mental health are rapidly changing, posing even more challenges to the educational system and educational leaders (Rodgers et al., 2020; Vannucci & Ohannessian, 2019).

Social Context

Interaction with technology also extends beyond the classroom. Students are not only required to engage with technology for their academics, but they also engage with social media to connect with peers, family, and, sometimes, school personnel (Bartholomew & Reeve, 2018; Hershkovzt & Forkosh-Baruch, 2017; Lee et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2018; Tuzel & Hobbs, 2017). As social media use among younger adolescents increases, school officials are facing new challenges with student behavior (Jones, 2013; O'Connor et al., 2016). Administrators must carefully manage discipline concerning social media activities to ensure they are not infringing upon students' First Amendment rights (Hayes & Burkett, 2018). Arguments and controversies that arise online are trickling into classrooms. Photos and videos are being shared to demean or demoralize others (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). Cyberbullying is on the rise (Conn, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; O'Connor et al., 2016; Rice et al., 2015). This further complicates the already complex social structure of the secondary school setting.

While social media provides a wealth of knowledge at users' fingertips, as well as some social benefits, such as availability, immediacy of communication, and increased frequency of communication (Nesi et al., 2018), a growing number of researchers are finding adverse effects of social media on adolescent development and mental health (Jena & Mohanty, 2015; Nesi et al., 2018; Rodgers et al., 2020; Vannucci & Ohannessian, 2019). As adolescents spend increasing amounts of time on social media, they exhibit risks and behaviors that negatively influence a wide variety of areas in their lives. Frequent social media use among more sedentary

teenagers results in poorer health habits, creating adolescents who binge-watch shows and spend long hours perusing multiple social media platforms (Shimoga et al., 2019). This may also result in a disruption to sleeping habits, which can ultimately create a mindset predisposed to mental health issues such as depression (Shimoga et al., 2019). Other researchers have found that adolescents who spend more time on social media comparing their profiles to others display decreased self-esteem, increased loneliness, and increased aggressive behaviors (de Calheiros Velozo & Stauder, 2018; Franchina et al., 2018). Teenagers experience a fear of missing out (FOMO), resulting in an obsession with keeping up with the latest trends on social media (Franchina et al., 2018). FOMO can entice adolescents to engage in riskier behaviors to live out trends, get likes, and potentially attain fame by going viral (Franchina et al., 2018).

As depression, eating disorders, and other mental health issues rise among adolescents, researchers are finding a direct correlation between these issues and social media behaviors (de Calheiros Velozo & Stauder, 2018; Franchina et al., 2018; O'Reilly, 2020; Shimoga et al., 2019). Because school is not confined to simply an academic setting but a social setting as well, it is imperative for school leaders to consider the impact social media can have on adolescent behavior and mental health. What students do outside of school does not remain a separate entity but matriculates into the school setting and students' interpersonal relationships (Sampasa-Kanyinga et al., 2019). As technology continues to evolve and become a more permanent fixture in both the educational and social aspects of adolescents' lives, schools must develop measures not only to manage any behavioral issues that may originate in social media interactions but also to provide support to adolescents who struggle with mental health issues that are further complicated by social media.

Theoretical Context

School officials need to consider how social media is affecting student behavior. Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory provides one part of the theoretical framework for this study that enables school officials to grasp better how social media could influence adolescent behavior. According to the social cognitive theory, people internalize and learn information through various means. For example, people can learn through observation and modeling (Bandura, 1986). When we consider the amount of time students spend on social media (Lee et al., 2015; Nesi et al., 2018; Tuzel & Hobbs, 2017), we can extend Bandura's (1986) theory to frame our understanding of how social media can influence adolescent behavior. Social media platforms, from Facebook to Instagram to Snapchat, allow adolescents to view videos and posts of a variety of behaviors, regardless of whether they are appropriate or inappropriate (Lee et al., 2015; Nesi et al., 2018; Tuzel & Hobbs, 2017). When such videos and posts are shared and have the possibility of going viral, students may not comprehend the appropriateness, or lack thereof, of the behavior they are viewing. Observing these modeled behaviors that are being encouraged via likes and shares could cause adolescent behavior to change to replicate the success of the post's author, thereby supporting Bandura's (1986) idea of enactive and vicarious learning. Enactive learning occurs through one's own experience and action (Bandura, 1986). Vicarious learning occurs through the observation of the experiences and actions of others (Bandura, 1986). Both enactive and vicarious learning allow us to internalize what we observe, ultimately enabling us to replicate behaviors we see.

Skinner's (1953) behavioral theory of operant conditioning is also included in the theoretical framework for this study because, according to Skinner, by examining positive reinforcement and punishment, one can determine whether behaviors are inhibited or

disinhibited. The quantifiability of likes and views work as sources of positive reinforcement (Nesi et al., 2018). If creators of posts receive enough likes, shares, or views, their posts go viral, providing them with possible fame and monetary gain. If the posts with negative behaviors, such as videos of fights or posts that support cyberbullying, go viral, viewers see the behavior being positively reinforced with the quantifiability of social media (Nesi et al., 2018). Adolescents, who are developmentally susceptible to suggestion, are likelier to emulate such behaviors (Vannucci & Ohannessian, 2019). This not only supports the need for further understanding of the facets of social cognitive theory as well as the behavioral theory of operant conditioning, but it also highlights the need for school leaders to focus some instruction on the appropriateness of various behaviors, regardless of their online popularity.

Situation to Self

Social media permeates the lives of the middle schoolers who attend the school where I am employed. With social media permeating the lives of both adolescents and adults, its incorporation into educational pedagogy has become an issue of controversy (Lee et al., 2015; O'Connor et al., 2016). Furthermore, teachers are facing more complex disciplinary situations in the classroom (Dunn & Derthick, 2013); arguments or confrontations can erupt in a matter of seconds from a social media post from earlier in the morning or from the previous evening. Cyberbullying is also changing how school officials handle bullying in general (Sheridan, 2015). As I have witnessed administrators attempting to manage disciplinary issues that arose on social media without any concrete policies on which to stand, it has sparked my interest in pursuing a research study on this topic.

As a member of my school's administrative team, I find this topic fascinating. I use multiple social media outlets daily. I operate the Facebook page for my school in addition to my

own social media profiles. I often use social media platforms and templates to engage students with literature and classroom topics by having them create mock profiles and templates. While I recognize the benefits of social media for learning and creating networks and connections, I have observed an increasing number of problems as I have been exposed to the administrative side of school. I have participated in countless student meetings with the administration in which the problematic classroom behavior being addressed did not originate in the classroom at all. In many cases, it originated in a group chat, on Instagram, on Snapchat, or in someone's comment on another social media platform. In these instances, my administrators had to tread carefully in doling out consequences for fear of infringing on students' First Amendment rights. If the behavior did not directly correlate with a behavior outlined in the school's code of conduct, it was unclear how to handle the situation best. The lack of guidelines made me wonder whether this problem was unique to our school or other regional schools.

Philosophical Assumptions

Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that, as humans, "we always bring certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions to our research" (p. 15). Philosophical assumptions are the beliefs that guide and influence our research—from topic ideas to research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To remove as much bias as possible, it is imperative that the researcher reflect upon and identify the philosophical assumptions that influence their research decisions. Creswell and Poth (2018) described four philosophical assumptions: ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological. Ontological assumptions question the nature of reality, while epistemological assumptions focus on knowledge and justifying claims (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Axiological assumptions center around the role of values, and methodological assumptions focus on the

research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study was guided by ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions.

Ontological Assumptions

By conducting a phenomenological study, I focused on developing subjective meaning to the shared experiences of the participants by relying on ontological assumptions and the personal experiences and perceptions of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Throughout this study, my goal was to describe the shared experiences of secondary administrators and their perceptions of how social media influences adolescent behavior and, thus, their decisions for disciplinary action. An ontological mindset helped me to remain aware that each participant shared their personal realities and experiences, and epistemology was essential to the subjective nature of the study by relying heavily on the participants' quotes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The central goal of this phenomenological study was to derive common themes from the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Epistemological Assumptions

Epistemology led to the choice in research. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), epistemology is "how the researcher knows reality" (p. 18). As a reading specialist in the secondary setting, I was aware of how social media interactions outside of school matriculate into conversations and actions among peers within the school walls. As I began working more closely with the administrative team, I noticed a higher frequency of students being referred to the office for classroom disruptions and arguments that originated with a social media post made after school hours. I began to wonder whether this occurrence was unique to our school system and whether this reality was shared in other places as well.

Furthermore, a qualitative study guided by an epistemological assumption requires the researcher “to get as close as possible to the participants being studied” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21) and to utilize the different perspectives to derive themes in the findings. This was the foundation for the research approach. Even though I initially was not able to enter every building due to COVID-19 precautions, I was able to conduct participant interviews via Zoom. As part of two administrative teams, I shared experiences with the participants and understood the various tasks and roles they assumed throughout a school day. Limiting the study to a particular region also familiarized me with the various school cultures and communities. While I did not have firsthand experience of being in each school, I was familiar with the various school districts, their demographics, and the prevalence of social media in the secondary setting.

Axiological Assumptions

Because of the subjective nature of qualitative research, it is imperative that researchers make their values and biases known (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Axiology requires that the researcher “openly discusses values that shape the narrative” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 20). Actively witnessing the increased number of discipline issues that arose due to social media posts at the middle school where I was employed piqued my interest in this research topic. After participating in multiple student conferences in which an argument or classroom disruption emerged due to a social media comment or private message, I began to believe that social media had a profound influence on adolescent behavior. Furthermore, when those issues arose, administrators sometimes had no policies to guide their decisions. Classroom disruptions or bullying that result from social media posts have no guidelines in the school’s code of conduct. Without policies to guide them, administrators risk infringing upon students’ First Amendment freedoms. I have witnessed administrators make the best and most fair decisions they can

without having written policies to guide them. If this was the case in other secondary schools across the region, I believed secondary school administrators were placed in a precarious situation with little guidance to uphold their decisions. To ensure that I removed my personal biases from the study, I bracketed my views and focused my attention on the experiences of the study participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This was included in a reflexive journal (see Appendix J).

Research Paradigm

The research paradigm that guided me through this study was social constructivism. Social constructivism enables the researcher to gain a better understanding of the world in which they live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This paradigm supports actively constructing meaning rather than creating a hypothesis and testing it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Throughout this study, social constructivism was employed through open-ended questions in interviews and through focus group discussions. The open-ended questions allowed participants to elaborate freely on their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Social constructivism best fits interpretive and subjective research, such as a phenomenological study, because the researcher must interpret and derive themes from the participants' interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The social constructivism paradigm provided a framework for interpreting the perceptions of secondary administrators as they shared their experiences of navigating school discipline decisions and adolescent behavior in the age of social media.

Problem Statement

An increasing number of adolescents engage in social media daily. In fact, in 2013, 94% of teenagers reported having a Facebook profile (Martin et al., 2018). Constant social media exposure presents students with a plethora of multiliteracies and messages within the matter of

an instant (Tuzel & Hobbs, 2017). Various apps and online learning platforms are available for teachers to help with blended learning and flipping classrooms (Metzger, 2014). In the digital age of the 21st century, educators are having to reevaluate traditional methods of instruction, such as lecturing, for more relevant methods that incorporate technology and social media platforms (Steinmetz, 2013). As social media use increases among younger adolescents outside of school as well as within the educational setting, administrators are facing new challenges that arise with behavior and discipline as situations that originate off-campus matriculate into the school setting. Ambiguities in the law require administrators and teachers to make disciplinary decisions without policies upon which to make them. The problem is that social media seems to influence student behavior and creates complex situations with student discipline in which administrators are called upon to make disciplinary decisions without policies to support them.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand middle and high school administrators' perceived influence of social media on school discipline and student behavior in southeastern Virginia. For this study, social media was defined, according to Carr and Hayes (2015), as "Internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of mass-personal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content" (p. 49). For the purpose of this study, social media included such outlets as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and YouTube. The theories guiding this study were Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory and Skinner's (1938) behaviorist theory of operant conditioning. According to Bandura's social cognitive theory, learning occurs enactively, by learning from consequences, and vicariously through unintended learning (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2016). Skinner (1953) found that people learn by doing, which

is consistent with Bandura's (1986) concept of enactive learning. These two theories served as the theoretical framework for this study.

Significance of the Study

This study may have empirical, theoretical, and practical significance regarding research involving social media and its perceived influence on school discipline decisions by secondary administrators. The empirical basis for this study may add to the existing literature by filling the present gap regarding social media and its influence on secondary school discipline policies and decision-making. The theoretical significance was rooted in Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory and Skinner's (1953) behavioral theory of operant conditioning. The practical implications may provide school leaders with information to assist them in addressing school discipline problems that originate with social media posts, messages, or comments.

Empirical Significance

According to Patton (2015), phenomenological studies "focus on exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning" (p. 115). This study revealed the shared experiences of middle and high school administrators and their perceptions of the influence of social media on student discipline. Existing research has determined that the frequency of adolescent social media use is correlated with various behavioral changes (Mingle et al., 2016; Tang & Patrick, 2018). Adolescents who frequently use social media have demonstrated fluctuations in academic performance (Bulu et al., 2016). Teenagers who frequent social media platforms are more inclined to engage in social comparison, to experience eating disorders, and to exhibit depressive symptoms (Bittar & Soares, 2020; McClean et al., 2017; O'Reilly, 2020; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Wilksch et al., 2020). While existing research supports the theory that social media influences

adolescent behavior, a gap exists in the research when examining social media's influence on student behavior as it pertains to school discipline. The perceptions of secondary administrators can address this gap by sharing how social media interactions and posts have influenced managing student discipline. Any further research supporting the findings of this study would aid in providing support for school leaders in navigating a developing issue in public education. Emergent themes gained from interviews and focus groups, combined with textural and structural descriptions, provided a foundation for further research (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). Interviews and focus groups allowed the researcher to discover the essence of the culmination of the participants' shared experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). This study added to the existing body of literature because the shared experiences of secondary administrators could close the gap in understanding the influence of social media on student behavior and student discipline.

Theoretical Significance

Theoretical frameworks are vital to influencing the research process. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), theoretical frameworks are essential to qualitative studies because they "guide the practice of research" (p. 22). As social media use becomes more frequent among adolescents (Mingle et al., 2016; Tang & Patrick, 2018), it is important to consider the role of social cognitive theory as it pertains to social media's potential influence on student behavior and school discipline. Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory provided a framework that allowed me to interpret participants' perceptions and to derive themes from their shared experiences. Social cognitive theory is grounded in observational learning (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2016). Students, and people in general, learn through observation (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2016). As students engage with social media, they observe an array of behaviors that receive views and

likes regardless of their appropriateness. Depending on the frequency with which they are observed and the consequences that may or may not occur, some behaviors may be internalized with continued observation (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2016). Therefore, it is essential for administrators and school officials to understand enactive and vicarious learning, self-regulation, and the role of modeling when creating policies to address social media and its influence on the learning environment and school discipline.

Skinner's (1953) behavioral theory of operant conditioning also provided an additional framework with which to interpret participants' perceptions and to derive themes from their shared experiences. Operant conditioning aids learning through reinforcement and punishment (Andrzejewski et al., 2011; Schunk, 2016; Skinner, 1953). Positive and negative reinforcement "increase the likelihood that the response will be made in the future in the presence of the stimulus" (Schunk, 2016, p. 90). Additionally, punishment aids in decreasing the likelihood of the reoccurrence of a less desirable behavior (Andrzejewski et al., 2011; Schunk, 2016; Skinner, 1953). By understanding operant conditioning, administrators and school officials can implement programs and incentives that more positively influence student behavior and discipline.

Practical Significance

The results of this study provided secondary school educators, instructional coaches, and school leaders with an understanding of how social media can possibly influence students' behavior and, thus, school discipline. Interviews and focus groups allowed administrators to share their personal experiences and perceptions of this phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). Analyzing the shared experiences of administrators to discover a universal essence could provide guidance in addressing issues that originate on social media without violating students' First Amendment freedoms. The field of research on social media and its influence on adolescent

behavior and mental health is rapidly growing (de Calheiros Velozo & Stauder, 2018; Franchina et al., 2018; O'Reilly, 2020; Shimoga et al., 2019). A common finding among researchers is that social media interactions and increased time spent on social media can adversely affect adolescent mental health and behavior (de Calheiros Velozo & Stauder, 2018; Franchina et al., 2018; O'Reilly, 2020; Shimoga et al., 2019; Vannucci & Ohannessian, 2019). The practical significance of this study was in discovering the universal essence of the shared experiences of the participating administrators. This provided a platform to begin further research for creating guidelines for codes of conduct and a basis for discussing how secondary schools could provide support to their students in the areas of mental health and counseling.

Research Questions

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand middle and high school administrators' perceived influence of social media on school discipline and student behavior in southeastern Virginia. Several questions guided the study.

Central Research Question

What are the shared experiences of middle and high school administrators as they navigate through managing discipline as it is influenced by outside interactions on social media?

Social media permeates most aspects of society and is becoming more frequently used by younger people (Martin et al., 2018). Social media is now the primary competitor for education; students are budgeting more of their time for social media than for schoolwork (Mingle et al., 2016; Tang & Patrick, 2018). Increased social media use can be linked to adolescent behavioral and mental health issues, such as cyberbullying and depression (Conn, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; O'Connor et al., 2016; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Sheridan, 2015). Cyberbullying, whether it occurs in the form of a social media post, a fake social media account, or a video of body

shaming, and student mental health crises can significantly disrupt the learning environment (Conn, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Salomon & Brown, 2019). While the push for providing students with 21st-century learning skills grows, educational leaders must strive to find a balance between disciplining inappropriate online behaviors that disrupt the learning environment while also evaluating what constitutes freedom of speech or expression rather than simply a disruption to the learning environment. While social media has its advantages, it is creating a complex problem for administrators who are now facing more disciplinary situations that originate off-campus and must handle such situations delicately (Dunn & Derthick, 2013; O'Connor et al., 2016; Sheridan, 2015).

Sub-question One

What are administrators' perceptions of social media's influence on middle and high school student behavior?

To better understand administrators' experiences as they manage discipline, it is important to first understand their perceptions of social media's influence on discipline, if any. Research shows that increased social media use often results in increased instances of cyberbullying (Sheridan, 2015). Frequent social media use among adolescents has also resulted in increased social comparison (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). By engaging in constant social comparison, adolescents can experience FOMO (O'Reilly, 2020) and body image issues (Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018). Additionally, Merrill and Liang (2019) found that frequent social media use combined with infrequent meaningful face-to-face interactions can result in depressive symptoms for adolescents. While research supports that adolescents internalize and externalize the behaviors they observe on social media (Merrill & Liang, 2019; Odgers & Jensen,

2020), learning about administrators' experiences with student behavior related to social media influences adds to the existing research.

Sub-question Two

What are the existing discipline policies and procedures concerning social media interactions that affect the learning environment?

One goal of this study was to ascertain how school districts react to social media as it influences the school environment. Because of the rapid increase in the prevalence of social media, existing laws and school policies create ambiguity for school leaders when making decisions about discipline for behaviors that occur within school but result from social media interactions (Conn, 2010; Dunn & Derthick, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). Due to these ambiguities, many lawmakers and school leaders refer to Supreme Court precedents for guidance to not infringe upon students' constitutional rights (Dunn & Derthick, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). The court findings of *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent County School District* (1969), *Bethel School District No. 403 et al. v. Fraser* (1986), and *Morse v. Frederick* (2007) can serve as guidance on what constitutes infringing upon a student's First Amendment freedoms. Learning about existing school policies concerning social media interactions would support a deeper understanding of the administrators' experiences managing discipline with or without disciplinary policies.

Sub-question Three

How do administrators manage discipline issues arising from social media interactions outside of the classroom?

As students peruse various social media outlets, they observe an assortment of behaviors. Sometimes, these behaviors are externalized in the form of imitating the behaviors in their own

environments (Merrill & Liang, 2019; Odgers & Jensen, 2020). Other times, the behaviors are internalized and can influence adolescents' moods and attitudes (Merrill & Liang, 2019; Odgers & Jensen, 2020). When students begin to externalize negative behaviors that receive likes on social media, they engage in riskier behaviors, such as fighting, that can result in negative consequences (Merrill & Liang, 2019; Odgers & Jensen, 2020). These behaviors can sometimes overlap between students' personal and academic lives, which can cause disruptions to the learning environment and may require disciplinary action. To comprehend the influence of social media on disciplinary decisions, it was imperative to understand how administrators navigate through the decision-making process pertaining to negative behaviors that stem from social media interactions.

Sub-question Four

What are secondary administrators' perceptions of how disciplinary actions and decisions are influenced by students' behaviors resulting from interactions on social media?

Middle and high school students often engage with social media within school through educational social networking sites as well as outside of school through personal social media outlets (Bartow, 2014; Hodge et al., 2017). Adolescent exposure to social media outlets can result in positive outcomes, such as increased knowledge about particular subjects and finding a sense of belonging within online communities (Odgers & Jensen, 2020). However, such exposure may also result in an increase in depressive symptoms, dissatisfaction with body image, perpetuating or being victimized by cyberbullying, and imitating negative behaviors in hopes of going viral (Merrill & Liang, 2019; Odgers & Jensen, 2020; Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Sheridan, 2015). Daily, administrators observe a variety of behaviors from students. In conversations with students about their behavior, administrators often find the

motivations behind certain student actions. Administrators may have similar experiences observing negative in-school behaviors that originate with out-of-school social media posts. Describing their personal experiences provided insight into the shared experiences of secondary administrators as they make disciplinary decisions about student behaviors that stem from social media interactions.

Definitions

1. *Body image* - The degree to which individuals feel satisfied with their physical selves, which can include their body shape, size, and appearance (Salomon & Brown, 2019, p. 540)
2. *Body shame* - When individuals feel particularly negative about their bodies (Salomon & Brown, 2019, p. 541)
3. *Body surveillance* - An excessive monitoring of the outer appearance (Salomon & Brown, 2019, p. 542)
4. *Cyberbullying* - Willful and repeated harm inflicted on another through the use of computers, cell phones, or other electronic devices (Rice et al., 2015)
5. *Fear of missing out (FOMO)* - Feelings of anxiety that arise from the realization that one may be missing out on rewarding experiences that others are having (Franchina et al., 2018)
6. *Influencers* - Individuals who influence an exceptionally large number of their peers, usually through social media platforms, such as Instagram (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019, p. 2)
7. *Self-esteem* - The perception of self-value, a major predictor of psychological well-being (Shah et al., 2019, p. 149)

8. *Social comparison* - Occurs when adolescents view social media posts of their peers and compare the lives and experiences of others to their own (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).
Sometimes, this results in a positive outcome when the expectations are met; however, when the comparison results in feelings of inadequacy, social comparison can result in negative behaviors and depressive symptoms (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).
9. *Social media* - Forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (Martin et al., 2018)

Summary

As technology continues to change and social media becomes a more permanent fixture in society, school leaders are adapting instructional practices and disciplinary and behavioral policies. Social networking and learning management systems are becoming more commonplace in K-12 classrooms to increase blended learning opportunities (Kimmons, 2015; Lee et al., 2015). Schools are using social media platforms to communicate with stakeholders. Adolescent peer interaction, both in and out of school, is occurring more frequently within the context of social media (Nesi et al., 2018; Rodgers et al., 2020; Vannucci & Ohannessian, 2019). As students spend more time perusing videos posted on various social media outlets, they internalize behaviors they witness. School leaders may face more behavioral and mental health issues that emerge in students as a result of social media interactions (Rodgers et al., 2020; Vannucci & Ohannessian, 2019). Due to the complexity of social media's influence on students' mental health and behavior, as well as its influence on the learning environment, it is clear that research is needed to provide school leaders with insight into how this issue influences adolescent

behavior in a variety of schools and provide strategies for managing disciplinary decisions about adolescent behavior that results from social media interactions.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review provides a theoretical understanding of social media as well as related literature on general adolescent social media use, blended learning, student engagement and academic performance, legal precedents, adolescent mental health and behavior, and school discipline. This body of knowledge, while helpful to researchers studying social media and its integration into public education, highlights the literature gap that exists concerning the influence of social media on disciplinary decisions and procedures in middle school. Framing this inquiry is Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). According to Bandura's social cognitive theory, learning occurs enactively, learning from consequences, and vicariously, through unintended learning (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2016). Skinner's (1938) theory regarding behaviorism and operant conditioning can provide additional insight into understanding adolescent behavior through observation and consequences. This review of the literature demonstrates how social media, through its permeation both inside and outside of school, directly influences disciplinary decisions (or lack thereof) and the need for guidelines for districts to develop sound policies that address out-of-school issues that originate on social media but do not infringe upon the First Amendment rights of students and staff.

Theoretical Framework

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), theoretical frameworks are essential to qualitative studies because they "guide the practice of research" (p. 22). To fully examine the perceived influence of social media on discipline, one must first understand how social media relates to contemporary public education, from instruction to discipline, while highlighting the need to understand the dilemma facing administrators and school districts when handling

disciplinary issues that arise from social media posts. Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory and social cognitive theory of mass communication (2001) provided the theoretical framework to understand better how students reciprocate the behaviors they see outside of school via social media and their influence on the school environment. Skinner's (1953) behavioral theory of operant conditioning provides an additional theoretical framework as it aligns with Bandura's (1986) theory of enactive learning. Additionally, operant conditioning's inclusion of learning through punishment and reinforcement (Skinner, 1953) can frame the review of the literature to examine social media and its perceived influence on discipline by addressing how punishment and positive reinforcement affect discipline in middle school.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social media inundates the lives of students throughout the world; it is used for personal use as well as for educational uses within the classroom (Bartholomew & Reeve, 2018; Bulu et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2018; O'Connor et al., 2016; Oltman & Surface, 2017; Salomon & Brown, 2019). One-to-one initiatives are becoming more prevalent in schools throughout the United States (Hodge et al., 2017), and students may have more frequent access to social media throughout the day unless limited by an Internet filter. Administrators and teachers walk a fine line when doling out consequences for 21st-century behaviors stemming from social media interaction (Dunn & Derthick, 2013), further reinforcing the need for sound policies that provide a solid foundation for school officials.

Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory provides a framework around which to structure policy. Social cognitive theory is grounded in observational learning (Bandura, 1986, 2001; Schunk, 2016). People learn through observation (Bandura, 1986, 2001; Schunk, 2016). Salomon and Brown (2019) wrote, "Social cognitive theory argues that individuals learn from media

symbols and that media use, regardless of mode, is never passive” (p. 541). As students engage with social media, they observe an array of behaviors that receive views and likes regardless of their appropriateness. Depending on the frequency with which they are observed and the consequences that may or may not occur, some behaviors may be internalized with continued observation (Bandura, 1986, 2001; Schunk, 2016). Therefore, it is essential for administrators and school officials to understand enactive and vicarious learning, self-regulation, and the role of modeling when creating policies to address social media and its influence on the learning environment.

Enactive and Vicarious Learning

One important facet of social cognitive theory is enactive and vicarious learning (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2016). According to Schunk (2016), “Enactive learning involves learning from the consequences of one’s actions” (p. 120). This means that learning occurs through action or by doing (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2016). Bandura (1986) emphasized the importance of consequences and their role in understanding the appropriateness of behavior. As people understand the consequences of actions, their thinking and behavior change and demonstrate new levels of cognition and learning (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2016). This provides evidence of the necessity of clear consequences for inappropriate behaviors. Students need to understand that there are consequences for their actions, including social media posts that may disrupt the school environment (O’Connor et al., 2016).

Learning also occurs vicariously (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2016). Vicarious learning occurs through observation; action is unnecessary (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2016). Bandura (2001) wrote, “Indeed, virtually all behavioral, cognitive, and affective learning from direct experience can be achieved vicariously by observing people’s actions and its consequences for

them” (p. 271). Schunk (2016) cited examples of vicarious learning to include electronic sources, such as television, computer, or movies. Bandura (2001) examined vicarious learning through mass communication, including television and the Internet; in 2020, 19 years later, this could easily be extended to videos and images that frequent social media sites. As students scour YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook, they watch countless videos on various topics—from fighting to documentaries. As the frequency of observation occurs, so, too, does the likelihood of performing the observed behaviors (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2016). So, as students watch more inappropriate behaviors on social media and do not observe negative consequences for those behaviors, they are inclined to repeat them. When discussing the symbolic environment that the Internet provides, Bandura (2001) explained that people choose their behavior based upon what is sanctioned by authority—in this case, the Internet, or social media, serves as the authority. If students are not receiving consequences for negative behavior at home and are operating under the assumption that their behavior is sanctioned by social media (as evidenced by quantifiable metrics), then the responsibility may fall to the school through its disciplinary policies, code of conduct, and educational intervention practices.

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is another central component of social cognitive theory. According to Bandura (1997), people desire “to control the events that affect their lives” (p. 1). Self-regulation occurs when people can sustain or control their behavior intentionally. For this to develop, people must be given choices (Bandura, 1997, 2001; Schunk, 2016). When this is taken into consideration with enactive learning, teachers and administrators can offer students choices to help them develop self-regulation regarding their online behaviors and their influence on the school environment. This again exemplifies a need for clear, consistent policies to explicitly

teach students what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. Because the Internet provides people with a sense of security due to anonymity, cyberbullying and character defamation are on the rise (Conn, 2010; Dunn & Derthick, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Sheridan, 2015).

Teaching self-regulation, a skill necessary for adulthood, is essential for decreasing the frequency of inappropriate behaviors that can negatively impact the lives of others. Consistent expectations and clear policies can equip students with the self-regulation skills necessary to help them throughout their lives.

Modeling

Modeling is one of the most critical facets of social cognitive theory (Rosenthal & Bandura, 1978; Schunk, 2016). Modeling “refers to behavioral, cognitive, and affective changes deriving from observing one or more models” (Schunk, 2016, p. 122). In other words, modeling concerns learning through observation or vicarious learning. However, modeling also adds a level of depth to vicarious learning, as it can be intentional (Bandura, 1986, 2001; Schunk, 2016). Modeled, accepted behavior is often replicated (Bandura, 2001). This notion can be extended to the quantifiability of social media since behaviors modeled via posts, images, and videos are accepted in terms of likes, views, and shares. More likes, views, and shares may result in the recognition of acceptance; thus, the modeled behavior is internalized. In terms of this study, the most important component of modeling to consider is inhibition and disinhibition. Inhibition refers to the punishment of models for certain behaviors, which ultimately deters observers from repeating such behaviors (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2016). Disinhibition occurs when the models perform inappropriate behaviors and receive no punishment, reinforcing the behaviors for observers (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2016).

Students are disinhibited when they watch videos that capture inappropriate behavior and engage in inappropriate discourse without repercussions. However, when schools consistently enforce consequences for inappropriate behavior, regardless of whether it originates online or in person, students are inhibited from repeating such behavior. This supports vigilance in enacting and upholding specific policies and procedures for discipline, especially 21st-century issues, such as cyberbullying and situations that arise from social media posts.

Behavioral Theory of Operant Conditioning

Skinner's (1953) behavioral theory of operant conditioning also supports the development of disciplinary policies. According to Skinner (1953), people learn by doing. Operant conditioning aids learning through reinforcement and punishment (Andrzejewski et al., 2011; Schunk, 2016; Skinner, 1953). Positive and negative reinforcement "increase the likelihood that the response will be made in the future in the presence of the stimulus" (Schunk, 2016, p. 90). Additionally, punishment aids in decreasing the likelihood of the reoccurrence of a less desirable behavior (Andrzejewski et al., 2011; Schunk, 2016; Skinner, 1953). By educating students about Internet etiquette and outlining specific expectations for conduct, educators can utilize operant conditioning to reinforce desirable Internet behaviors and social media etiquette to help students as they move into adulthood.

For school leaders to adequately address and prevent any issues that may potentially arise from social media use, they must thoroughly understand how operant conditioning theory can be extended to the online setting and learning. Learning occurs when we change what we do, and reinforcement (both positive and negative) "change the way we respond to stimuli" (Skinner, 1989, p. 14). According to Skinner (1988), "An operant is strengthened, for example, when a response has reinforcing consequences, but subsequent responses occur because of what has

happened, not what is going to happen” (p. 172). In terms of the quantifiability of social media (Nesi et al., 2018), an operant can be strengthened by the reinforcing consequences of likes, shares, and views of social media posts. Regardless of the behaviors captured in the various posts, adolescents’ behavior is subject to change when the behavior they witness is positively reinforced (Andrzejewski et al., 2011; Schunk, 2016; Skinner, 1953). This is further strengthened when the witnessed behavior goes viral and gains fame for the person who posted the content. Such consequences positively reinforce adolescent behavior by showing them and possibly rewarding them with something they want (Skinner, 1973). Furthermore, comments, likes, views, and shares provide adolescents with corrective feedback, which ultimately plays a role in shaping their behavior (Schunk, 2016).

While positive and negative reinforcement are major factors in operant conditioning theory, the role of the environment is equally important (Schunk, 2016; Skinner, 1975). Environmental variables affect students’ learning (Schunk, 2016). In fact, the environment shapes and controls our behavior (Andrzejewski et al., 2011; Skinner, 1975). One could argue that social media and the online setting comprise an environment in and of themselves. In this environment, students observe a variety of behaviors that they internalize. If parents and guardians are unable to monitor online activity or provide guidance on what is appropriate or inappropriate, then educators are given the responsibility of espousing those values and teaching students the difference between appropriate and inappropriate online behavior. By incorporating such content into the hidden curriculum, educators can modify the online environment in a way that empowers students to observe various behaviors but exercise discernment among appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. Such discernment is vital in operant conditioning as it

enables students to navigate various environments and reinforcers while being aware of the contingencies that shape their behavior (Schunk, 2016).

To effectively address and prevent behavioral issues that originate in social media and adversely impact the classroom or school environment, school leaders must consider how operant conditioning theory and social cognitive theory shape our understanding of student learning. In this context, we are not considering academic learning but vicarious and inactive learning that occurs through observation. The quantifiability of social media provides students with immediate, “corrective” feedback and positively and negatively reinforces various behaviors (Nesi et al., 2018; Schunk, 2016; Skinner, 1953). Social media is a source of learning for students; however, what they are learning, especially when it concerns behavior, must be addressed at some level—either at school or at home. School leaders must be prepared to find innovative ways to utilize an understanding of operant conditioning to teach students how to discern what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

Related Literature

The following literature review describes the various facets of social media as they relate to education—from frequency of use by teenagers to integration in the classroom. As social media use increases among teenagers, school officials are facing a rapidly changing environment that extends beyond learning and into the climate and culture of the building (Bulu et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2018; Mingle et al., 2016; Tang & Patrick, 2018). The following topics are described throughout this review of the literature: (a) social media and teenagers, (b) social networking and public education, (c) implications of social media on instructional practices, (d) cyberbullying, (e) legal precedents, ambiguity, and school discipline of social media, and (f) the

influence of social media on adolescent mental health and behavior. The literature review also highlights a gap in the literature, which supports the need for the present study (Galvan, 2017).

Social Media and Teenagers

As social media pervades most aspects of society, it is becoming more frequently used by younger people (Martin et al., 2018). Social media is now the primary competitor for education; students are budgeting more time for social media than schoolwork (Mingle et al., 2016; Tang & Patrick, 2018). For example, Bulu et al. (2016) wrote, “60% of the children reported social networks took away from their study time while 25% claimed they spent less time with their family and friends because of social media” (p. 44). Mingle et al. (2016) found that senior high school students admit to social media negatively affecting their academic performance, especially among those attending private schools. Tang and Patrick’s (2018) research supported Mingle et al. (2016) and Bulu et al. (2016) as they found that those students who spent more time on social media and playing video games generally demonstrated lower grades and a decreased likelihood of completing homework. Social media claims an enormous amount of time in teenagers’ lives (Bulu et al., 2016; Mingle et al., 2016; Tang & Patrick, 2018).

Understanding how students perceive social media may give educators and school leaders insight into what students find interesting and what behaviors they may be imitating. For example, in one study, students reported that Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube are the most popular social media outlets, with Snapchat being most popular among middle schoolers (Martin et al., 2018). Another study revealed that the more time students spent on social media, the more they became engrossed in it, continually spending increasing amounts of time on social media outlets and spending less time on their schoolwork (Bulu et al., 2016; Tang & Patrick, 2018). In addition to understanding how students spend their time, educators must also include discussions

with parents to ensure they are aware of how students are spending their time (Martin et al., 2018). Establishing this communication may help in teaching students the importance of budgeting their time, as well as opening dialogue about social media interactions and their influence on the learning environment and student behaviors.

Social Networking and Public Education

With the rising popularity of social media and digital citizenship, schools have begun to incorporate social networking systems and platforms into the classroom to increase student engagement (Bartow, 2014; Hodge et al., 2017; Irawan et al., 2017; Mason et al., 2013). Some educators argue that traditional pedagogy, including lecturing, is no longer relevant for 21st-century learners (Mason et al., 2013; Steinmetz, 2013). Some advocate for flipped classrooms, while others call for using social networking platforms and other forms of technology (Mason et al., 2013; Steinmetz, 2013). Regardless of the form, most educators and educational researchers agree that technology is integral to learning for modern students.

As social media and technology are integrated into pedagogy, they also influence the learning environment in other ways. Salomon and Brown (2019) found that girls, in particular, experience more body surveillance and body shame as a result of social media use. This can result in increased cyberbullying as well as the development of psychological disorders that can negatively impact students' lives (Salomon & Brown, 2019). Teachers' personal use of social media can also disrupt the learning environment if posts deemed inappropriate by others are brought to the attention of school officials (Oltman & Surface, 2017). O'Connor et al. (2016) suggested that learning institutions must clearly outline social media policies and consequences and educate students on those policies frequently to ensure that all stakeholders understand the institution's expectations.

Social Media and Communication

Currently, schools use social networking systems in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. Many schools use them for authentic writing experiences (Al-Naibi et al., 2018; Jones & Rice, 2017). Others use them to enhance vocational training (Irawan et al., 2017). In the platform Edmodo, there is a micro-blog component that teachers have found useful for gathering written responses from students (Jones & Rice, 2017). This can be used for any content as a way to give students writing assignments. Blogging and other forms of writing in Edmodo provide teachers with an enormous amount of diversity in creating authentic writing experiences as well as for differentiation (Al-Naibi et al., 2018). Some teachers even use social networking systems to write and video chat with other schools and nations to promote cross-cultural understanding (Tuzel & Hobbs, 2017).

Social media is not just changing instructional methods; it is also impacting teacher-parent and teacher-student communication (Hershkovzt & Forkosh-Baruch, 2017). Teachers use social networking platforms, such as Remind or Facebook, to communicate with parents and students (Hershkovzt & Forkosh-Baruch, 2017). Hershkovzt and Forkosh-Baruch (2017) found that while many policies forbid or warn against teachers friending students on Facebook, students generally have positive feedback when communication occurs in a group setting. This allows for study groups that include the instructor's guidance, providing confidence and correcting misconceptions (Hershkovzt & Forkosh-Baruch, 2017). Regardless of how educators use social networking systems, whether for writing instruction, vocational instruction, or simply for communication, they are becoming commonplace in secondary classrooms.

Mobile Devices

Many schools that lack 1:1 technology are exploring and allowing students to utilize mobile devices in the classroom as an alternative form of technology (Bartholomew & Reeve, 2018; Hodge et al., 2017). Students can use mobile devices to engage in online platforms and social networking when laptops are unavailable. Bartholomew and Reeve (2018) determined that this type of instruction could be detrimental to student learning. The researchers explained that although the students cited high engagement, the engagement surrounded the social aspect of the mobile device (Bartholomew & Reeve, 2018).

Contrarily, Hodge et al. (2017) found that students reported several positive ways they utilized mobile technology to support learning. They formed study groups and collaborated to generate ideas (Hodge et al., 2017). Students also reported they were able to work on group projects outside of school, allowing them to more effectively and efficiently complete their work (Hodge et al., 2017). While these studies highlight the pros and cons of technology in conjunction with learning, they fail to acknowledge the potential pitfalls of such technology with social media interactions. Using mobile devices in the classroom, unless heavily monitored or censored via an Internet filter, can also result in more personal social media use rather than instructional activities (Bartholomew & Reeve, 2018; Lee et al., 2015).

Implications of Social Media on Instructional Practices

In the widespread adoption of educational social networking systems, numerous studies have examined the perceptions of teachers and students toward these systems to prove that they positively influence student engagement (Balakrishnan et al., 2017; Kimmons, 2015; Lee et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2018). Many teachers and students have noted many positive effects of social networking systems (Lee et al., 2015). These observations included improved communication

skills, friendly interactions, and relationships (Lee et al., 2015). Interestingly, students and teachers noted the negative effects of social networking on class climate and culture. Students noted instances of cyberbullying (Lee et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2018). Others noted that students became more distracted and focused on additional websites rather than just the assigned work (Lee et al., 2015). In examining these perceptions, researchers caution that while students are engaged with social networking systems, educators must actively monitor them to ensure they are engaged with the correct websites (Lee et al., 2015).

While there is controversy about the effectiveness of social networking systems in education, many educators welcome them simply for increased student engagement (Lee et al., 2015). However, Kimmons (2015) presented a rising problem that faces educators worldwide: “little work has been done to systematically explore the use of such systems across multiple K-12 (primary and secondary) contexts and to determine their generalizable impacts on institutional efficiencies and student learning outcomes” (p. 379). Furthermore, Balakrishnan et al. (2017) stated, “While the use of social media is popular in many higher institutions, research shows this does not necessarily translate to student success” (p. 81). These statements and research studies represent the driving force behind this study. Balakrishnan et al. (2017) found that with careful planning and implementation, social media could positively influence students’ academic performance in higher education. Yet, Kimmons (2015) postulated that the results are not strong enough to generalize their effectiveness. Therefore, it is important to continue to study whether these systems enhance students’ academic performance and serve to enhance, rather than disrupt, the learning environment.

Cyberbullying

One of the central themes that emerged in the search for social media's influence on education was cyberbullying. Even considering educational social networking systems and their role in classroom learning, students cited concerns about cyberbullying (Lee et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2018; Underwood & Ehrenreich, 2017). According to Rice et al. (2015), cyberbullying can be defined as “the willful and repeated harm inflicted on another through the use of computers, cell phones, or other electronic devices” (p. 66). While schools have developed and adopted various anti-bullying programs, cyberbullying is a rapidly evolving phenomenon that many school systems struggle to address (Conn, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; O'Connor et al., 2016; Rice et al., 2015).

If cyberbullying occurs at school, it is easier for administrators to dole out disciplinary consequences because the infraction occurred on campus. The procedures become less clear when such behavior occurs off-campus (Conn, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Sheridan, 2015; Underwood & Ehrenreich, 2017). Hinduja and Patchin (2011) described this dilemma:

School districts are given the task of addressing problematic online behaviors committed by students while attempting to protect themselves from civil liability. This is made more difficult because the law concerning these behaviors is continuously evolving, and little consensus has yet been reached regarding key constitutional and civil rights questions. As a result, many school district personnel are justifiably reluctant to get involved in cyberbullying cases because they fear they will overstep their legal authority. (p. 71)

Despite the murky waters surrounding disciplining instances of cyberbullying, administrators must address the problems as they arise or risk losing students to suicide or some other tragic event (Conn, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Underwood & Ehrenreich, 2017). Whether it

occurs in the form of a social media post, a fake social media account, or a video of body shaming, cyberbullying can significantly disrupt the learning environment (Conn, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Salomon & Brown, 2019). Dunn and Derthick (2013) explained that the Internet allows not just the student body but the entire world to be privy to gossip and slanderous speech, thus creating problems without someone ever “setting foot on campus” (p. 7). As a result, rumors can spread much more rapidly than 20 years ago. Videos and posts can go viral within minutes, and students’ lives can be impacted almost instantly. Although there have been cases where disruptions were not significant, having clear policies that address cyberbullying, not just bullying, can equip teachers and administrators with the knowledge of how to address such situations when they arise.

Legal Precedents, Ambiguity, and School Discipline of Social Media

Perhaps the most prevalent topic to emerge during the literature review process concerned existing legal precedents that administrators can use to guide them in developing policies to address problems arising from off-campus social media use, a contemporary issue surrounded by ambiguity. The dilemma current administrators and school officials face when disciplining students for social media posts concerns First Amendment freedoms (Conn, 2010; Dunn & Derthick, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Sheridan, 2015). Administrators must be careful only to discipline such behaviors that cause a significant disruption to the learning environment, not just to an individual (Conn, 2010; Dunn & Derthick, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Sheridan, 2015). Conflicting results from court cases further complicate the issue and create ambiguity that makes it difficult to ascertain when it is permissible to censor or discipline off-campus speech and when it is a violation of students’ rights (Conn, 2010; Dunn & Derthick, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Sheridan, 2015).

Tinker v. Des Moines Independent County School District

The court case that serves as the foundation for many educational decisions is *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent County School District* (1969). This case set a precedent for establishing whether an act of freedom of expression significantly disrupts the learning environment (Conn, 2010; Dunn & Derthick, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Sheridan, 2015; *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent County School District*, 1969). In the *Tinker* case, students wore black armbands in protest of the Vietnam War after being directed not to do so and were subsequently suspended. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the suspension was unconstitutional since the armbands were a form of peaceful protest and expression that did not significantly disrupt the learning environment (*Tinker v. Des Moines Independent County School District*, 1969).

More recent court cases have been subjected to the *Tinker* test to determine whether school officials acted constitutionally in their disciplinary actions. In 2007, students at a Tennessee high school were suspended for wearing shirts with Confederate flags that school officials believed were being used to entice racial conflict (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). Because there was a police presence and a history of racially induced violence at this particular school, the court upheld the school's decision based on the *Tinker* test (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). Other cases, such as those concerning creating fake profile pages to defame students or school officials, are frequently overturned (Conn, 2010; Dunn & Derthick, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Sheridan, 2015). In these cases, judges explain that while the behavior may be inappropriate, the lack of significant disruption to the learning environment does not support suspensions (Conn, 2010; Dunn & Derthick, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Sheridan, 2015). When principals

consider the consequences of actions that originate on social media, they must be cautious. The *Tinker* test can be invaluable when deciding whether to suspend a child for their online behavior.

Bethel School District No. 403 et al. v. Fraser

Another frequently cited case throughout the literature was *Bethel School District No. 403 et al. v. Fraser* (1986). This case arose after a student, Matthew Fraser, used “lewd, vulgar, and indecent speech at school” (*Bethel School District No. 403 et al. v. Fraser*, 1986; Sheridan, 2015, p. 59) during an assembly when nominating another student for office. Fraser was suspended, and the court upheld the suspension, stating that one of the functions of schools is to teach students appropriate public discourse (*Bethel School District No. 403 et al. v. Fraser*, 1986; Conn, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Sheridan, 2015). Even though Fraser cited a violation of his freedom of speech, the ruling “reaffirmed that not all student expressions are protected by the First Amendment” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011, p. 73).

The *Fraser* (1986) ruling was later used when a student in Alaska unveiled a sign that read “BONG HiTS 4 JESUS” at a school-sponsored event (Conn, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; *Morse v. Frederick*, 2007; Sheridan, 2015). Joseph Frederick was suspended for supporting the use of illegal drugs at a school-sponsored event (Conn, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; *Morse v. Frederick*, 2007; Sheridan, 2015). Upon review, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the school system, citing the *Fraser* (1986) ruling as its precedent. Schools are responsible for teaching and modeling appropriate speech and behavior, and Frederick’s banner represented the school at the school-sponsored event; therefore, the speech was no longer Frederick’s but the school’s (Conn, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; *Morse v. Frederick*, 2007; Sheridan, 2015). Therefore, the *Fraser* (1986) ruling can also be instrumental in making

disciplinary decisions regarding students' online behavior if the speech represents the school inappropriately.

The Influence of Social Media on Adolescent Mental Health and Behavior

While social media's influence on adolescent school discipline has not been widely researched, the influence of social media on adolescent mental health and behavior has undergone extensive publication. Adolescence is a critical time in human development (Barry et al., 2017; Bittar & Soares, 2020; Shah et al., 2019). During adolescence, teenagers experience social and cognitive changes and seek peer interaction and approval more than ever before (Shah et al., 2019). According to Barry et al. (2017):

adolescence may represent a developmental context during which individuals are particularly susceptible to potentially negative impacts of social media, given an emphasis on social connectedness during this period and a possibility that social media experiences may engender feelings of exclusion or victimization. (p. 1)

Because of their impressionability during this developmental stage, adolescents are likelier to replicate behaviors they observe on social media. Furthermore, recent research indicates more serious impacts on adolescent mental health (Barry et al., 2017; Odgers & Jensen, 2020).

Researchers are finding links between social media use and body image concerns, a rise in eating disorders among adolescents, and a rise in depressive symptoms (Barry et al., 2017; Bittar & Soares, 2020; Merrill & Liang, 2019; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; O'Reilly et al., 2019; Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). While there are benefits to utilizing social media to promote mental health (Odgers & Jensen, 2020), many researchers posit that further research and intervention is necessary to educate adolescents about internalizing and externalizing behaviors and to provide support for the aforementioned mental health issues. Two prevalent

themes emerged in the literature review on adolescent mental health: social comparison and the internalization and externalization of behaviors.

Social Comparison

Social comparison was a prevalent theme in the literature review on adolescent mental health and social media. Social comparison refers to when adolescents view the social media posts of their peers and compare the lives and experiences of others to their own (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). Sometimes, this results in a positive outcome when the expectations meet; however, when the comparison results in feelings of inadequacy, social comparison can result in negative behaviors and depressive symptoms (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).

Social comparison can also result in FOMO (Barry et al., 2017; Franchina et al., 2018; O'Reilly, 2020). FOMO originates from continually checking social media profiles to ensure one's social life measures up to the lives of peers (Barry et al., 2017; Franchina et al., 2018; O'Reilly, 2020). When people discover that they have missed an opportunity or have been deliberately excluded from an activity, they can experience feelings of isolation, loneliness, or inadequacy (Barry et al., 2017). This can result in issues with self-esteem and self-confidence (Burnette et al., 2017; de Calheiros Velozo & Stauder, 2018; O'Reilly, 2020; Salomon & Brown, 2019).

An adverse effect of social comparison emerging in the literature is dissatisfaction with body image, especially among adolescent females (Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). Social media is instrumental in promoting the ideal or perfect body (Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). When adolescents continually compare their photos and personal images with the photos being shared online, they may perceive themselves

as flawed, resulting in lower self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy (de Calheiros Velozo & Stauder, 2018; Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019; Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). Sometimes, however, social comparison of this manner can result in increased self-esteem and self-confidence if the comparison yields positive feedback (Odgers & Jensen, 2020). Despite its potential benefits, research rarely supports social comparison as a positive tool as it typically has a detrimental influence on the psychosocial well-being of adolescents (O'Reilly, 2020; Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017).

Other adverse effects of social comparison extend further into the mental health and well-being of adolescents: eating disorders and depressive symptoms (Bittar & Soares, 2020; McClean et al., 2017; O'Reilly, 2020; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Wilksch et al., 2020). Social comparison can result in an obsessive-like compulsion to check on social media profiles of peers, celebrities, and social media influencers (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019; Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). As with the instances of dissatisfaction with body image, such comparisons, if found to be unmatched, can produce a decrease in one's perception of self-worth (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019; Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). In some cases, trying to achieve the ideal body results in extreme dieting and can lead to eating disorders (Bittar & Soares, 2020; McClean et al., 2017; Wilksch et al., 2020). In other cases, social comparison and feelings of inadequacy increase symptoms of depression, specifically for those adolescents who are predisposed to such symptoms offline (George et al., 2018; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; O'Reilly et al., 2018, 2019). Even though social media can provide a safe space in which adolescents can find resources, research issues, and

discuss problems (McClellan et al., 2017; Odgers & Jensen, 2020; O'Reilly, 2020; Shah et al., 2019), research findings suggest that certain online behaviors amplify offline existing or underlying issues, expediting the adverse effects of social media on the already vulnerable adolescent mind (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019; Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017).

Body Image. Adolescence is characterized by tremendous change—physically, cognitively, and emotionally (Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018). During this stage of development, teenagers begin to think about peer perceptions and their impact on their social lives and reputations (Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018). Thirty years ago, peer perceptions during adolescence were of extreme importance, but now those perceptions are magnified with social media platforms (Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). As social media influencers and celebrities portray the “ideal” body through Photoshop and filters (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019), unknowing adolescents strive to replicate an unrealistic, fictitious ideal (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019; Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018). Rousseau and Eggermont (2018) cited social media as a source of heightened body surveillance where “Individuals continuously monitor their bodies’ outward appearance to ensure they match up to the internalized ideal” (p. 51). Such constant monitoring can yield heightened stress, more self-criticism, body shaming, and lower self-esteem (Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017).

In their study of Instagram influencers in Germany, Pilgrim and Bohnet-Joschko (2019) found that most fitness and healthy lifestyle influencers, despite posting encouraging messages and promoting healthy lifestyles, placed priority on appearance. They concluded, “Fitness success is not measured by physical performance, but exclusively by physical appearance”

(Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019, p. 5). These influencers, followed by thousands of people from adolescence through adulthood, repeatedly posted images of the ideal body—characterized by defined muscles and minimal body fat (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019). For adolescents who already meet the parameters of such an ideal, upward comparison would result in a boost in self-confidence (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019). However, those who fail to reach the ideal image may experience a downward spiral as their comparison creates feelings of discontent (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019). Pilgrim and Bohnet-Joschko (2019) purported that the subliminal message communicated through these posts is the notion that true happiness can only be achieved by the attractive; failure to meet those standards implies that success and happiness are unachievable. Pilgrim and Bohnet-Joschko's (2019) findings support other research that cites social media as a source of body image problems among adolescents.

While Pilgrim and Bohnet-Joschko (2019) focused specifically on body image problems that arise due to false narratives espoused by fitness influencers, other researchers have discussed how social comparison creates feelings of inadequacy for adolescents, especially for females (Burnette et al., 2017; Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Sugimoto et al., 2020; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). Sugimoto et al. (2019) explained that social comparison is a risk factor for the desire for slimness. This becomes further complicated because “Mass media are powerful transmitters of societal values and standards, especially those regarding ideal beauty, weight, food, fashion, and gender roles” (Burnette et al., 2017, p. 114). As adolescents survey various social media platforms, they are inundated with what the mass media values as ideal, which results in social comparison (Burnette et al., 2017; Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Sugimoto et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). When social comparison becomes a source of anxiety, it creates lower self-

esteem and body shaming and devalues an individual's self-worth (Burnette et al., 2017; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Sugimoto et al., 2019). This causes adolescents, especially girls, to have a decreased sense of body image and increased body shame—finding flaws and dissatisfaction with the image they see in the mirror (Salomon & Brown, 2019).

Social comparison can also fall to another extreme: competition (Sugimoto et al., 2019). The quantifiable social media metrics (such as likes, views, comments, and shares) can increase competition among peers, placing further importance on how well-received a post or photo may be (Sugimoto et al., 2019). Competition and social comparison, along with the readily available filters on Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat, encourage adolescents to modify their photos or themselves to gain more followers, comments, and likes and to increase their chance of achieving the ideal image, fame, or going viral (Burnette et al., 2017; Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Sugimoto et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). This resulted in feelings of inadequacy and heightened stress and anxiety (George et al., 2018).

Several researchers have found dissatisfaction with body image to be especially true for girls who are active on social media. Burnette et al. (2017) reported that girls reported dissatisfaction with their overall attractiveness when they examined the photos and posts of their peers. Facebook, in particular, has been associated with female body image concerns (Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). With more friends and the opportunity to connect with strangers and celebrities, girls have a greater opportunity for social comparisons that can increase body image concerns (Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). Not only can social comparison create body image concerns through observation, but it also creates pressure for adolescents to post their own perfect images or to avoid behavior or photos that could portray their bodies in unflattering ways

(Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018). Shah et al. (2019) cited that 28% of female adolescents have admitted to editing their photos prior to posting them to improve their reception online. Such extreme body surveillance results in body shame as one becomes disenfranchised with the inability to reach an internalized body standard (Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019). Salomon and Brown (2019) found that due to social media, body surveillance is so engrained in adolescents that they consider how others may perceive their posts before posting them on various social media platforms. In all of the research articles discussed, the researchers found that body surveillance and body image concerns were directly correlated with specific online behaviors—posting selfies, spending increased amounts of time on social media, and seeking approval from others through posts (Burnette et al., 2017; Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Sugimoto et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). This is important for school leaders to consider in matters of conduct; social media is making self-image even more crucial to teenage life than in past decades.

Eating Disorders. Social comparison has also been linked to the increasing number of cases of eating disorders among adolescents globally (Bittar & Soares, 2020; McClean et al., 2017; Shah et al., 2019; Wilksch et al., 2020). Sugimoto et al. (2019) affirmed that social comparison is a risk factor for the desire for slimness. McClean et al. (2017) added additional risk factors compounded by social comparison: eating disorders in adolescent girls, body dissatisfaction, internalization of appearance ideals, and dietary restraint (p. 847). When one considers the role social media plays in portraying the ideal body type, it is evident that social media platforms lend themselves to extreme instances of social comparison and body surveillance (Bittar & Soares, 2020; Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Shah et al., 2019; Sugimoto et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). When adolescents strive to achieve the ideal body

image as observed through social media, they may go to extreme lengths when they realize that their physical appearance does not align with the media's standard of the ideal body, resulting in dangerous dietary restraint or eating disorders (McClellan et al., 2017; Shah et al., 2019).

During adolescence, parents and guardians encourage more independence; therefore, adolescents are able to have more autonomy over their diets and social activities (Bittar & Soares, 2020). Adolescents are more susceptible to developing eating disorders due to the transition to more autonomous and independent decision-making (Bittar & Soares, 2020). This is interesting since previous research findings associate increased media usage with obesity and weight gain (Bittar & Soares, 2020). While this is true for those who forego physical activity in favor of social media bingeing, other adolescents who succumb to social comparison and have a predisposed lower self-esteem may be more vulnerable to eating disorders (Bittar & Soares, 2020). Bittar and Soares (2020) described adolescence as a developmental stage marked by incredible changes. These changes set the stage for vulnerable adolescents to engage in risky dietary behaviors:

The diversity and intensity of these changes, together with rebellious attitudes, an attempt at independence, a desire for transgression, and a lack of concern for a distant future, can influence eating habits and other behaviors that tend to impact on health and well-being of these adolescents. (Bittar & Soares, 2020, p. 295)

All of the physical and psychological changes that comprise adolescence, combined with social media's emphasis on body image, create extreme pressure to conform to an unrealistic ideal (Bittar & Soares, 2020; Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019). For some adolescents, that pressure results in dietary restrictions or eating disorders in the form of anorexia or bulimia (Bittar & Soares, 2020; Wilksch et al., 2020). Adolescents who experience body dissatisfaction

or body shame are more prone to skipping meals, avoiding food, or fasting to attain their internalized perception of the ideal body (Bittar & Soares, 2020; McClean et al., 2017; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Wilksch et al., 2020).

Despite the mounting research that links adolescent eating disorders with social media use, McClean et al. (2017) found promising results for parents and school leaders to consider. The research team sought to determine whether media literacy intervention would decrease body surveillance and dietary restrictions among adolescent girls (McClean et al., 2017). They found that when girls engaged in a media literacy intervention to promote self-esteem and individuality, they were more likely to be more body positive and less concerned with dietary restrictions than the girls in the control group who received no intervention (McClean et al., 2017). Burnette et al. (2017) corroborated this finding when participants reported more body confidence due to an environment created by an all-girls' school that encouraged individuality and empowerment. School leaders must recognize and embrace the benefits of intervention and of encouraging individuality in combating adolescent eating disorders. Intervening and preventing eating disorders among students can help decrease behaviors stemming from dissatisfaction and hunger.

Depression. Continuous social comparison can also amplify symptoms of depression in adolescents who are already susceptible to them offline (de Calheiros Velozo & Stauder, 2018; O'Reilly et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2019). Depression can result in feelings of isolation, decreased social presence, increased instances of cyberbullying, and decreased academic performance (Merrill & Liang, 2019; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Shah et al., 2019; Shimoga et al., 2019). O'Reilly et al. (2018) surveyed adolescents about their perceptions of social media's impact on mental health, and the adolescents revealed their beliefs that social media leads to lower self-esteem and depression due to the emphasis on body image and "the influence of social media

culture” (p. 606). In this particular study, participants cited social comparison and cyberbullying as the leading causes of depression among adolescents who utilize social media (O’Reilly et al., 2018). Social media can also have detrimental impacts on adolescent sleeping habits (Shimoga et al., 2019). Disrupted sleep, or a prolonged lack of sleep, can create a scenario in which the sleep-deprived adolescent is more susceptible to the onset of mental health problems, such as depression (Shimoga et al., 2019).

Despite the multiple research studies that link adolescent social media usage with depression or depressive symptoms, other researchers have highlighted the benefits of social media in combating depression and eating disorders while promoting mental health and well-being (de Calheiros Velozo & Stauder, 2018; Odgers & Jensen, 2020; O’Reilly, 2020; O’Reilly et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2019). Social media can provide support groups where adolescents can find encouragement in others and discover resources to help them through their issues (de Calheiros Velozo & Stauder, 2018; Odgers & Jensen, 2020; O’Reilly, 2020; O’Reilly et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2019). Social media has been found to enhance friendship quality, decrease feelings of loneliness in support group settings, increase bonding through friendships, and provide a safe space to share concerns and learn about various topics (de Calheiros Velozo & Stauder, 2018). Therefore, when utilized appropriately, social media can potentially eradicate depression and eating disorders among adolescents (de Calheiros Velozo & Stauder, 2018; Odgers & Jensen, 2020; O’Reilly, 2020; O’Reilly et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2019). If adolescents can understand how social comparison may lead to feelings of inadequacy and may adversely influence their mental health, they may be more inclined to be more selective in the activities and behaviors they engage in online. School leaders and parents can provide intervention and education to promote mental health online and decrease instances of adolescent depression.

Internalizing and Externalizing Behaviors

Throughout all of the literature regarding adolescent mental health, one theme was common: the internalization and externalization of behaviors (Barry et al., 2017; Franchina et al., 2018; George et al., 2018; Merrill & Liang, 2019; Odgers & Jensen, 2020; O'Reilly et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2019). This supports the theoretical framework of Bandura's (1986, 2001) social cognitive theory in that adolescents observe behaviors online, learn from them enactively and vicariously through observation and modeling, and internalize or externalize the behaviors they observe. Shah et al. (2019) characterized adolescence as a period of social experimentation. Adolescents experiment with their identities and receive feedback via social comparison and social media metrics (Shah et al., 2019). The feedback they receive on posts reinforces or discourages behaviors that are internalized, like body image, or externalized, as in cyberbullying (Shah et al., 2019).

Social media lends itself to internalization. Body image ideals are internalized through social media influencers' posts, photos, and videos portraying muscular bodies (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019). Social comparison causes adolescents to internalize what they perceive to be ideal lives, experiences, body images, and relationships (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019; Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). When adolescents feel inadequate as they peruse their peers' social media profiles, they may internalize lower self-esteem, feelings of loneliness or isolation, and feelings of depression (Odgers & Jensen, 2020; O'Reilly, 2020; Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019; Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). If interventions or educational opportunities emphasize the positive aspects of social media,

adolescents may be less prone to internalize negativity and more apt to internalize positive attributes (Odgers & Jensen, 2020; O'Reilly, 2020).

Social comparison and FOMO may also trigger externalization of behaviors as well. When adolescents experience FOMO, they may be more likely to engage in risky or negative behaviors (Barry et al., 2017; Franchina et al., 2018). Merrill and Liang (2019) referred to social media as a “superpeer” (p. 2) and cited Bandura’s social learning theory to explain how adolescents view social media as a model for behavior. Adolescents observe a variety of behaviors on social media platforms, both positive and negative, and when they are reinforced through the quantifiable metrics of likes, views, and shares, they are sometimes replicated by the observers. Merrill and Liang (2019) found that adolescents who spent more time on social media engaged with inappropriate content were more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors. They explained, “How teenagers incorporate technology and media into their lives, and the amount of time spent consuming different types of media, may reinforce unhealthy behaviors and expectations that . . . become normative” (Merrill & Liang, 2019, p. 7). Such unhealthy behaviors could manifest in conduct problems that affect academics (George et al., 2018).

Recognizing and understanding how social media can result in the internalization and externalization of behaviors is important for school administrators and counselors. Social comparison has the potential to increase self-esteem and body confidence when adolescents are in an environment that encourages empowerment and individuality. However, generally, adolescents are more susceptible to negative influences through social comparison on various social media platforms. Research supports intervention and education to decrease the instances of adolescent depression and eating disorders (Odgers & Jensen, 2020; O'Reilly, 2020; Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019; Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al.,

2019; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). When behaviors do arise, school leaders can better understand the origin of certain behaviors and can adjust their reactions accordingly.

Summary

An increasing number of adolescents are engaging in social media every day. In fact, in 2013, 94% of teenagers reported having a Facebook profile (Martin et al., 2018). Constant social media exposure presents students with a plethora of multiliteracies and messages within an instant (Tuzel & Hobbs, 2017). With social media permeating the lives of both adolescents and adults, its incorporation into educational pedagogy has become an issue of controversy (Lee et al., 2015). Many teachers have begun to incorporate social networking systems in their classrooms to enhance student engagement, while others still rely upon more traditional styles of teaching (Lee et al., 2015). A plethora of apps and online learning platforms are available for teachers to help with blended learning and flipping classrooms (Metzger, 2014). Furthermore, 1:1 initiatives are promoting the use of mobile devices, such as cell phones, within the classroom (Bartholomew & Reeve, 2018; Hodge et al., 2017).

Despite the advantages of incorporating social media and technology as educational tools, administrators now face the unintended consequences of social media use—from cyberbullying to infringement of First Amendment freedoms. The problem is that ambiguities in the law require administrators and teachers to make disciplinary decisions without policies upon which to make them. While the push for providing students with 21st-century learning skills grows, educational leaders must strive to find a balance between disciplining inappropriate online behaviors that disrupt the learning environment while also evaluating what constitutes freedom of speech or expression rather than a disruption. While social media has its advantages, it is creating a complex problem for administrators now facing more disciplinary situations that

originate off-campus and must handle such situations delicately (Dunn & Derthick, 2013; O'Connor et al., 2016; Sheridan, 2015). This literature review supports the need for further research to examine the perceived influence of social media on discipline by middle and high school administrators.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

With social media permeating the lives of both adolescents and adults, its influence and incorporation into the educational setting have become issues of controversy (Lee et al., 2015). Students utilize social media outside of school to engage in a variety of behaviors, from posting their feelings and selfies to engaging in cyberbullying (Conn, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Lee et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019). The problem is that ambiguities in the law require administrators and teachers to make disciplinary decisions about issues that arise off-campus through social media without policies upon which to make them. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand middle and high school administrators' perceived influence of social media on school discipline and student behavior in southeastern Virginia. The goal was to provide an overview of the shared experiences of administrators and how they manage discipline in the 21st century, where social media can create complex issues that may or may not align with existing school policies.

This chapter discusses the methods used in this study, including the research design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, role of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. Triangulation is met in three methods of data collection: individual interviews, focus groups, and school documents regarding discipline policies. The data analysis process includes horizontalization, the development of textural and structural descriptions, and the determination of universal essence of the shared experiences to ascertain emerging themes.

Design

This study followed a qualitative design. According to Creswell (2013), a qualitative research method is most appropriate for conducting research in a natural setting, for utilizing the researcher as the primary role of collecting research, and for discovering a universal theme or essence that results from the shared experiences of the participants. Qualitative research relies on information from participants rather than numeric data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, a qualitative approach was most appropriate because it is holistic and creates a complex picture that relies upon interviews with participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015).

For this study, phenomenology was the most appropriate design. A phenomenological study allowed for examination of the phenomenon and for understanding the shared experiences of the participants (Chenail, 2011; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), “The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (p. 75). The researcher gathered narratives about the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). In phenomenology, participants’ narratives are “regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52). Subjectivity, which is central to phenomenology, enabled the researcher to explore a phenomenon by examining various perspectives shared by participants in interviews and discussions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). Participants’ stories of their lived experiences helped to enlighten the researcher about the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994).

Researchers may utilize various phenomenological approaches when designing a study. If the purpose of this study were to interpret the shared experiences, a hermeneutic approach would be utilized (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, because this study described the participants’

experiences, it followed a transcendental phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013). According to Moustakas (1994), transcendental phenomenology “is a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in our consciousness” (p. 49). Additionally, transcendental phenomenological studies require thick textural and structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). While this would not yield generalizable results, it enabled the researcher to repeatedly replicate the process while also providing qualitative evidence that supported more narrow, specific conclusions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). A transcendental phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to gain firsthand knowledge from participants who experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this phenomenological study.

Central Research Question

What are the shared experiences of middle and high school administrators as they navigate through managing discipline as it is influenced by outside interactions on social media?

Sub-questions included the following:

Sub-question One

What are administrators’ perceptions of social media’s influence on middle and high school student behavior?

Sub-question Two

What, if any, are the existing discipline policies and procedures concerning social media interactions that affect the learning environment?

Sub-question Three

How do administrators manage discipline issues that arise from social media interactions that occur outside of the classroom?

Sub-question Four

What are secondary administrators' perceptions of how disciplinary actions and decisions are influenced by students' behaviors as a result of interactions on social media?

Sites

This study took place with middle and high school administrators across southeastern Virginia. The study included eight schools across three school districts. Each school had at least two administrators, allowing the sample to range from 8 administrators (with at least 1 participant each) to 16 administrators (with 2 participants each). The selection of these schools was based on criterion sampling. Because social media use is so frequent and widespread among adolescents (Bulu et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2015), middle or high schools fit the research criteria. In fact, selecting a variety of middle and high schools with different demographics enhanced the descriptions and shared experiences among the administrators of the schools.

The school district superintendents and principals were contacted by phone and by letter to request written and verbal consent for participation in the study. In addition, a PowerPoint presentation was sent to the district superintendents to provide an overview of the study's purpose, significance, and methods. Copies of the research proposal were also sent, as requested by district applications for research.

District One: Independent District

One middle school and one high school, included in this study, are located in Independent District, a small, rural school district. Independent District is located in southeastern Virginia.

This portion of Virginia is within an hour's drive of the state capital. It is also within an hour's drive of the North Carolina state line. The nearest city is approximately 30 miles away.

Independent District is comprised of one elementary, one middle, and one high school and serves approximately 1,000 students. The enrollment by subgroup consists of the following: 72.6% Black, 21.6% White, 4.2% Hispanic, 1.3% multiple races, and less than 1% Native Hawaiian (Virginia Department of Education; VDOE, 2020). Of the student population, 48.5% are considered economically disadvantaged (VDOE, 2020). Approximately 14% of the student population are classified SWD (VDOE, 2020). This district was selected to include the perspectives of administrators in a rural setting with a small student population. The smaller population allowed the administrator to have more intimate knowledge of student behaviors, and the rural setting provided different experiences than those in an urban district.

Site One: Independence Middle School

Independence Middle School is located in a rural area of southeastern Virginia. It is the only middle school in this district. According to the VDOE school quality profile, this middle school had an enrollment of approximately 240 students in grades 6-8 in 2018 (VDOE, 2018). The enrollment by subgroup consisted of the following: 68.5% Black, 21.3% White, 6.0% Hispanic, 3.0% two or more races, and 1.3% Asian (VDOE, 2018). Approximately 49% of students were classified as economically disadvantaged (VDOE, 2018). Sixteen percent of the school population was classified as SWD and 1.3% were English language learners (ELLs) (VDOE, 2018). The school was fully accredited.

Site Two: Independence High School

Independence High School (pseudonym) was located in a rural area of southeastern Virginia. It was the only high school in this district. According to the VDOE school quality

profile, this high school had an enrollment of approximately 320 students in grades 9-12 in 2019 (VDOE, 2019). The enrollment by subgroup consisted of the following: 72% Black, 22.7% White, 3.4% Hispanic, and 1.9% two or more races (VDOE, 2019). Approximately 47% of students were classified as economically disadvantaged (VDOE, 2019). Seventeen percent of the school population were classified as SWD, and less than 1% were classified as ELLs (VDOE, 2019). The school was fully accredited. Independence High School's larger population of SWD also provided interesting insight into that specific population.

District Two: Unified District

One high school, located in Unified District, was included, a large, mostly suburban school district. Unified District was located in southeastern Virginia. It was within a two-hour drive of the state capital. It was also within an hour's drive of the North Carolina state line. This district encompassed a large city and was in close proximity to several other cities. Unified District was comprised of 55 elementary, 15 middle, and 12 high schools and served approximately 65,000 students. The enrollment by subgroup consisted of the following: 46.2% White, 23.5% Black, 12.9% Hispanic, 10.4% multiple races, 6.3% Asian, and less than 1% American Indian and Native Hawaiian (VDOE, 2021). Of the student population, 41.1% was considered to be economically disadvantaged (VDOE, 2021). Approximately 12% of the student population were classified as SWD (VDOE, 2021). This district was selected to include the perspectives of administrators in a mixed suburban and urban setting with large student populations. The large size of the school district provided sites that included a variety of demographics and varied student populations. With its proximity within and around cities, this district provided a different set of experiences that could vary from those in rural or mostly urban districts. Only one participant was willing to participate from Unified District.

Site Three: Pine Grove High School

Pine Grove High School was located in an urban area of southeastern Virginia. It was 1 of 12 high schools in this district. According to the VDOE's school quality profile, this high school had an enrollment of approximately 2,000 students in grades 9-12 in 2019 (VDOE, 2021). The enrollment by subgroup consisted of the following: 45.9% Black, 27.7% White, 11.8% Hispanic, 8.3% two or more races, 5.6% Asian, and less than 1% American Indian and Native Hawaiian (VDOE, 2021). Approximately 61% of students were classified as economically disadvantaged (VDOE, 2021). Thirteen percent of the school population were classified as SWD, and 3% were classified as ELLs (VDOE, 2021). The school was fully accredited but was identified for improvement in achievement gaps. The school was in an urban area with a varied student population, so it offered a varied experience from the rural and suburban schools.

District Three: Southern District

Three middle schools and two high schools included in this study were located in Southern District, a medium-sized, suburban school district. Southern District was in southeastern Virginia and contained rural, suburban and urban areas. It was within a two-hour drive of the state capital. It was also within an hour's drive of the North Carolina state line. This district encompassed a large city and was near several other large cities. Southern District comprised 11 elementary, 5 middle, and 3 high schools and served approximately 14,000 students. The enrollment by subgroup consisted of the following: 35% White, 56% Black, 2% multiple races, 2% Asian, and less than 1% American Indian and Native Hawaiian (VDOE, 2022). Of the student population, 51% was considered economically disadvantaged (VDOE, 2022). This district was selected to include the perspectives of administrators in a mixed suburban, rural, and urban setting with average student populations. The school district's size

provided sites that included a variety of demographics and varied student populations. With its proximity within and around cities, this district provided a set of experiences that varied from those in rural or mostly urban districts.

Site Four: Riverside Middle School

Riverside Middle School was located in a suburban area of southeastern Virginia. It was one of five middle schools in this school district. According to the VDOE school quality profile, this middle school had an enrollment of approximately 750 students in grades 6-8 in 2020 (VDOE, 2022). The enrollment by subgroup consisted of the following: 57% Black, 25.4% White, 7.9% Hispanic, 6.8% multiple races, and less than 1% Asian and American Indian (VDOE, 2022). Approximately 42.5% of students were classified as economically disadvantaged (VDOE, 2022). Nine percent of the school population were classified as SWD, and 1.9% were classified as ELLs (VDOE, 2022). The school was fully accredited. The varied student demographics provided additional perspectives and insights into the phenomenon studied.

Site Five: Woodside Middle School

Woodside Middle School was in an urban area of southeastern Virginia, but many of its students resided in rural areas. It was one of five middle schools in this school district. According to the VDOE school quality profile, this middle school had an enrollment of approximately 460 students in grades 6-8 in 2020 (VDOE, 2022). The enrollment by subgroup consisted of the following: 48.1% White, 42.5% Black, 4.1% Hispanic, 4.4% multiple races, and 1% Asian and American Indian (VDOE, 2022). Approximately 53.8% of students were classified as economically disadvantaged (VDOE, 2022). Sixteen percent of the school population were classified as SWD, and less than 1% were classified as ELLs (VDOE, 2022). The school was fully accredited. Woodside Middle School had a small population of students, which provided

administrators with more intimate knowledge of students. It also has a large number of students who resided in rural areas, which provided more variety in the administrators' experiences.

Site Six: Centerville Middle School

Centerville Middle School was located in an urban area of southeastern Virginia. It was one of five middle schools in this school district. According to the VDOE school quality profile, this middle school had an enrollment of approximately 1,000 students in grades 6-8 in 2020 (VDOE, 2022). The enrollment by subgroup consisted of the following: 66.8% Black, 18.2% White, 6.7% Hispanic, 6.4% multiple races, and 1.9% Asian and American Indian (VDOE, 2022). Approximately 60% of students were classified as economically disadvantaged (VDOE, 2022). Fifteen percent of the school population were classified as SWD, and less than 1% were classified as ELLs (VDOE, 2020). The school was fully accredited. This was a large school located within the district. The large student population and the large population of students with disabilities provided the administrators with more varied experiences and insights into the behaviors they observed.

Site Seven: Centerville High School

Centerville High School was located in an urban area of southeastern Virginia. It was one of three high schools in this school district. According to the VDOE school quality profile, this high school had an enrollment of approximately 1,600 students in grades 9-12 in 2020 (VDOE, 2022). The enrollment by subgroup consisted of the following: 63.9% Black, 21.8% White, 6.8% Hispanic, 5.5% multiple races, and 2% Asian, Native Hawaiian, and American Indian (VDOE, 2022). Approximately 54% of students were classified as economically disadvantaged (VDOE, 2022). Eighteen percent of the school population were classified as SWD, and 1.2% were classified as ELLs (VDOE, 2022). The school was fully accredited. The large SWD population

and the large percentage of students classified as economically disadvantaged provided additional perspectives and insights into the phenomenon being studied.

Site Eight: Riverside High School

Riverside High School was located in a suburban area of southeastern Virginia. It was one of three high schools in this school district. According to the VDOE school quality profile, this high school had an enrollment of approximately 1,700 students in grades 9-12 in 2020 (VDOE, 2022). The enrollment by subgroup consisted of the following: 49.6% Black, 35.7% White, 6.4% Hispanic, 5.8% multiple races, 2.1% Asian, and less than 1% Native Hawaiian and American Indian (VDOE, 2022). Approximately 33% of students were classified as economically disadvantaged (VDOE, 2022). Twelve percent of the school population were classified as SWD, and less than 1% was classified as ELL (VDOE, 2022). The school was fully accredited. The varied student demographics provided additional insight into the phenomenon studied.

Participants

A purposeful sample was used for this study to gain an in-depth understanding of information-rich cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gall et al., 2015; Patton, 2015). More specifically, criterion sampling was used (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Criterion sampling allowed the researcher to seek cases and participants who met specific criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which, in this case, narrowed that sample to middle and high school administrators. Through criterion sampling, a purposeful sample was selected in an effort to understand the shared experiences of middle and high school administrators pertaining to social media's influence on adolescent behavior, and, therefore, disciplinary decision-making.

A total of 12 administrators from 8 schools of varied demographics were selected for this study. Phenomenological researchers should select between 5 and 25 participants for interviews to gather a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). This also enabled the researcher to focus on the diverse experiences of each participant rather than on the number of participants, which ultimately aided in deriving themes and universal essence (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). For this particular study, participants were selected based on their administrative experience, their role as either a middle or high school administrator, and the demographics and setting of their particular schools. In accordance with Moustakas' (1994) guidelines for phenomenological research, participants were required to confirm their interest in participation, as well as their willingness to be recorded. Interviews with the recommended number of participants were conducted until data saturation occurred (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). In this study, data saturation occurred with 12 participants, although the number of sites allowed more interviews to reach data saturation if needed. The sites were selected to acquire data from various settings, including rural, suburban, and urban. The selected administrators managed schools that served students in grades 6-12. The administrators of the selected schools shared similar job roles and were able to articulate "common experiences, themes, and the overall essence of the experience" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 153). The participants were willing to participate in the research process through interviews and focus groups (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher obtained written consent forms from each participant to document their understanding of the study, the selection criteria, and their willingness to participate (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Procedures

Prior to conducting the actual research study, I emailed the superintendents and research coordinators of the selected school districts to request permission for middle and high school administrators to participate in the study. After gaining IRB approval (Appendix A), I conducted a pilot study. I tested the interview and focus group questions and procedures during the pilot study to refine them as needed. As Moustakas (1994) recommended, I emailed each administrator to solicit their interest in participating in the study and their willingness to be recorded. I sent each potential participant a recruitment letter (Appendix B) with a link to a screening survey (Appendix C) on SurveyMonkey. After reviewing the screening survey and selecting the participants, I emailed the selected participants to request that they electronically sign the IRB consent form; these are located in Appendices D and E, respectively. I also emailed those participants who were not selected to participate. That email is also reflected in Appendix D. Once participants were selected, I began data collection by conducting interviews and focus groups, as well as through analysis of school codes of conduct. Individual interviews were conducted via Zoom. Focus groups were also conducted via Zoom, one for middle school administrators and one for high school administrators. The codes of conduct were analyzed to determine what, if any, policies existed concerning social media. After completing the interviews and focus groups, I analyzed data to discover emergent themes and a universal essence.

The Researcher's Role

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research varies significantly from quantitative research because, in qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument in the process rather than quantifiable data. Therefore, it is worthwhile to note that epistemology led to the choice in research. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), epistemology is “how the

researcher knows reality” (p. 18). Social media permeate the middle school at which I am employed. Cyberbullying, body shaming, and the air of confidence that coincides with the veil of online anonymity affect middle school children daily. Over the past 11 years, I have observed arguments and bullying increase as a result of a comment that was shared or posted online. This interaction inadvertently matriculates into the school environment, causing classroom disruptions and negatively impacting students. This created a classroom management problem for teachers and has presented administrators with new challenges in managing discipline. Witnessing administrators manage disciplinary issues that arose on social media without concrete policies on which to stand sparked my interest in this research study.

It is also worth noting that for eight years, I worked in a small, Title I middle school, part of the time as an English teacher and part of the time as a reading specialist. This small setting permitted me to become accustomed to knowing and seeing all students throughout the school week. Their behaviors and mannerisms were well known due to the small school setting. Information is disseminated and clearly communicated regularly. Including larger schools in this study would require a different level of understanding, since those administrators would not be as familiar with all students as in the small setting.

Additionally, each of the schools and districts selected for this study were located within the same region where I resided. The particular schools and school districts that were chosen were selected to incorporate participants from rural, suburban, and urban settings. My role was to interview the administrators in an effort to examine their shared experiences in managing discipline in the age of social media. I had no authority over the participants.

Data Collection

Data triangulation is essential for gaining rich, thick descriptions and an in-depth understanding of the phenomena being studied (Gall et al., 2015). In the case of phenomenology, data collection must focus on participant experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Data collection for this study occurred in three steps: (a) individual interviews, (b) focus group meeting, and (c) documents. According to Moustakas (1994), interviews allow researchers to gain perception and maximize the depth of data required to analyze a phenomenon. A combination of analyzing transcriptions of focus group meetings and interviews along with the discipline manuals enabled me ultimately to discover the essence of the shared experiences and theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation refers to a point in the process of comparing theoretical constructs and empirical indicators of their meaning when additional data collection and analysis no longer contribute new understanding about the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gall et al., 2015). This allowed the researcher to gain a full picture of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gall et al., 2015).

Interviews

Individual interviews occurred with each of the administrators at the beginning of the study. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that in-depth interviews are the most common form of data collection for phenomenological studies. In-depth interviews allowed me to describe each administrator's experience and perception of whether social media influences adolescent behavior and thus, school discipline decisions. They also provided participants with the opportunity to express their thoughts freely and openly (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015).

Due to the Centers for Disease Control guidelines for the COVID-19 pandemic at the time of this study, all interviews were conducted via Zoom. All Zoom sessions were password

protected and links were sent only to those participating in the scheduled interview. The Zoom interviews were locally recorded through the Zoom platform and saved to a universal serial bus (USB) drive that was secured in a safe at the researcher's home to ensure confidentiality. An additional camera was set up to record the laptop screen to capture the interviews in the event of technical difficulties with the Zoom recording. Questions were open-ended and utilized to gain a deeper understanding of how middle and high school administrators perceived social media to influence adolescent behavior and therefore their decision-making as it pertained to school discipline. The interview questions were as follows:

1. Please state your name and with which school you are employed.
2. How long have you been an administrator?
3. Please describe your roles and responsibilities at this school.
4. What do you consider to be your most rewarding experiences as a middle or high school administrator?
5. What do you consider to be your most challenging experiences as a middle or high school administrator?
6. How did a typical day look when students physically attended school full-time (i.e., prior to the pandemic)?
7. How would you describe the integration of technology in this school when students physically attended full-time? Would you classify it as a positive or negative experience? Why?
8. How often do you believe your students used social media both in school and out of school when they physically attended school full-time prior to the pandemic?

9. What is your perception of social media's influence on student behavior and on school discipline decisions?
10. What are the existing discipline policies and procedures concerning social media interactions that affect the learning environment?
11. How do you manage discipline issues that arise if there is no existing written policy?
12. Please share anything else you believe would be beneficial for the study.

Questions one through five were used as opening questions for the interview. Moustakas (1994) and Patton (2015) encouraged asking questions at the outset of the interview to create a relaxed and trusting environment to enable the participant to share their experiences more freely. They also helped me to develop a rapport and conversational tone with each participant (Patton, 2015). The remaining questions were adjusted as necessary for each participant based on their answers and experiences with the topic.

Questions 6 through 10 focused specifically on social media and its potential influence on adolescent behavior and administrators' disciplinary decisions. Question six allowed the administrators to reflect on their own experiences when students were physically in school full-time, which has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic. During adolescence, teenagers experience social and cognitive changes and seek peer interaction and approval more than ever (Shah et al., 2019). They are more susceptible to outside influences and engaging in risky behaviors (Barry et al., 2017). Responses to question six provided insight into typical adolescent behaviors at each school before delving into the topic of social media.

Question seven centered around the use of technology within the school. As technology becomes a more permanent fixture in the educational setting (Bartow, 2014; Irawan et al., 2017), it is important to understand how the school uses technology to support instruction. Many

schools have begun to incorporate social networking systems and platforms into the classroom to increase student engagement (Bartow, 2014; Hodge et al., 2017; Irawan et al., 2017). Some teachers are using social networking platforms, such as Remind or Facebook, to communicate with parents and students (Hershkovzt & Forkosh-Baruch, 2017). Answers to this question assisted in distinguishing between social media use during and outside of the school setting.

Question eight began to narrow the focus of the interview to the central focus of the study—social media and adolescent behavior. Research shows that the more students use social media, the more it impacts their learning and behaviors (Bartholomew & Reeve, 2018; Bulu et al., 2016; Kimmons, 2015; Lee et al., 2015; Mingle et al., 2016). Because an increasing number of schools have deployed mobile devices or have enacted a bring-your-own-device procedure (Bartholomew & Reeve, 2018; Hodge et al., 2017), administrators may have shared experiences in which they saw an increase in the amount of time students spent on social media while they were in school. Additionally, since increased time on social media has been linked, in some cases, to decreased academic performance (Bulu et al., 2016; Mingle et al., 2016), administrators were able to provide insight about whether these findings pertained to students in their schools.

Question nine upheld the central research question and supported the first research sub-question. This question gave the participants the opportunity to share their personal perspectives about social media's influence on adolescent behavior. Research shows that increased social media use often results in increased instances of cyberbullying (Sheridan, 2015). Frequent social media use among adolescents has also been found to result in increased social comparison (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). By engaging in constant social comparison, adolescents can experience FOMO (O'Reilly, 2020) and body image issues (Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018). Despite the wealth of research documenting the adverse effects of social media, Odgers and Jensen (2020)

found that some students reported positive impacts, such as finding a sense of belonging. If administrators' experiences revealed that they perceived social media to influence adolescent behavior negatively, they were able to discuss the implications of the behavior on their management of school discipline.

Question 10 focused on existing policies concerning social media interactions and supported the second research sub-question. To understand how administrators navigate managing school discipline resulting from negative social media interactions, one must first understand the policies that guide each school's disciplinary decision-making process. The primary dilemma that current administrators and school officials face when disciplining students for social media posts concerns First Amendment freedoms (Conn, 2010; Dunn & Derthick, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Sheridan, 2015). Administrators must be careful only to discipline such behaviors that cause a significant disruption to the learning environment, not just to an individual, to avoid infringing upon students' rights (Conn, 2010; Dunn & Derthick, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Sheridan, 2015). The responses to this question shed light on existing policies and how administrators utilized them without infringing upon students' First Amendment freedoms.

Question 11 was a follow-up to question 10 in the event that no social-media-specific policy existed. If this was the case, administrators shared a variety of management strategies they used to navigate potentially difficult situations. A lack of policy and conflicting results from federal court cases create ambiguity that makes it difficult to ascertain when it is permissible to censor or discipline off-campus speech and when it is a violation of students' rights (Conn, 2010; Dunn & Derthick, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Sheridan, 2015). This question was included to provide administrators the opportunity to share their perceptions not just on how social media

influences adolescent behavior but also on their decision-making pertaining to school discipline. It also supported the third and fourth research sub-questions. Questions 6 through 11 were designed to refine what the participants experienced and how they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994).

The final question allowed the participants to share any additional information, not covered by the interview questions, that they believed would be beneficial to the study. The primary goal of phenomenological research is to discover the essence of the participants' shared experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015), and this question helped to accomplish that goal.

A laptop for recording through Zoom was used, and I ensured a back-up plan was in place in the event of equipment failure. If there was an equipment failure, I had another secure computer on standby to continue the Zoom interview. Before conducting the interviews, I conducted a pilot test of the questions to refine them and the interview procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviews were conducted via Zoom in a semi-structured setting. At the conclusion of the interviews, I began transcription.

Focus Group

Focus groups were another data collection method used throughout the study. The focus group allowed the administrators to share experiences and allowed new levels of understanding to develop. Two focus group meetings were held during the study to share past and current experiences. One group included four middle school administrators, while the other included three high school administrators. This allowed me to hear the shared experiences of each level of the secondary setting separately. Each of the participating administrators was asked to participate in the focus group for their respective school level; however, not all participants were able to

engage in the focus group. The meeting took place in a neutral setting after completing the individual interviews. This meeting, like the interviews, was audio-recorded for transcription. Due to the Centers for Disease Control guidelines for the COVID-19 pandemic during the time of the study, both of the focus group sessions were conducted via Zoom. All Zoom sessions were password protected, and links were sent only to the focus group participants. The Zoom focus group session was recorded and saved to a USB drive secured in a safe at my home to ensure confidentiality.

The focus group meeting began with greetings, and meeting norms were shared. I developed meeting norms to ensure participants were respectful and receptive. These norms included active listening and participation, speaking from awareness, being respectful of others, being honest, and maintaining the confidentiality of information shared within the group. The focus group allowed the administrators to share their own experiences while drawing on the experiences of others.

The focus group questions were as follows:

1. Please introduce yourself to the group.
2. Please describe your current roles and responsibilities at your school.
3. What experiences have you had concerning social media in your school?
4. What culture has your school established regarding adolescent social media use?
5. What is your perception of social media's influence on adolescent behavior?
6. Please provide an example of an instance in which you perceived social media to have positively influenced a student's behavior.
7. Please provide an example of an instance in which you perceived social media to have negatively influenced a student's behavior.

8. What is your perception of social media as it pertains to discipline at your school?
9. How does your school manage disciplinary issues that originate on social media?
10. How do you use the school's discipline manual or code of conduct to guide your decisions in determining appropriate consequences for discipline? How does this change when dealing with social media issues?
11. As social media becomes more prevalent, what would you like to see concerning school management as it concerns social media and discipline?
12. Please share anything else you believe would be beneficial for the purpose of the study.

Questions one and two were used to create an inviting, trusting, and conversational atmosphere among the participants and myself. Moustakas (1994) and Patton (2015) encouraged asking questions at the outset of the interview to create a relaxed and trusting environment enabling the participant to share their experiences more freely. They also helped me to develop a rapport and conversational tone with each participant (Patton, 2015). The remaining questions were adjusted as necessary for each participant based on their answers and experiences with the topic.

Questions three through nine allowed the participants to describe their experiences and witness the experiences of others. Question three provided the participants with the opportunity to discuss social media use in school. This could relate to academic uses, such as the utilization of educational, social networking sites (Bartow, 2014; Irawan et al., 2017). This could also refer to the increased frequency of personal social media use among adolescents (Bulu et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2018; Mingle et al., 2016; Tang & Patrick, 2018). The broad reference to social media allowed participants to freely share varying experiences regarding student social media use.

Question four encouraged the participants to share their schools' cultures surrounding adolescent social media use. Many schools are incorporating social networking into parent and student communication and into instructional practices (Bartow, 2014; Hershkovzt & Forkosh-Baruch, 2017; Hodge et al., 2017; Irawan et al., 2017). With the incorporation of mobile devices in schools, some schools allowed students to bring their own devices, including personal laptops or cell phones (Bartholomew & Reeve, 2018; Hodge et al., 2017). This question enabled participants to share the restrictions, if any, placed on social media use in schools as well as their approaches to educating students about social media use and etiquette. The school culture could provide further insight into the administrators' lived experiences.

Questions five and six afforded the participants the opportunity to share their perspectives on social media's influence on adolescent behavior. Frequent social media use among adolescents has resulted in increased instances of cyberbullying and social comparison (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Sheridan, 2015). Social comparison often leads to FOMO (O'Reilly, 2020) and body image issues (Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018). While much research documents the adverse effects of social media use, Odgers and Jensen (2020) noted that some students reported positive impacts, such as finding a sense of belonging. This discussion allowed participants to share positive and negative perceptions of social media's influence on adolescent behavior. Question seven followed to ascertain whether administrators linked social media use to increased instances of school disciplinary infractions.

Questions eight and nine focused on existing policies concerning social media interactions. To understand how administrators navigate managing school discipline resulting from negative social media interactions, one must also understand the policies that guide each school's disciplinary decision-making process. One problem school leaders face when

disciplining students for social media posts is infringing upon students' First Amendment freedoms (Conn, 2010; Dunn & Derthick, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Sheridan, 2015). The responses to this question shed light on existing policies and how administrators utilized them without infringing upon students' First Amendment freedoms.

Questions 10 and 11 permitted the participants to share what they would like to see in the future, expounding on their personal experiences. In sharing any changes, they wished to see, common themes emerged through the discussion. Because the primary goal of phenomenological research is to discover the essence of the participants' shared experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015), these questions assisted in accomplishing that goal.

Document Analysis

Document analysis served as the final source of data. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis "is a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents" (p. 27). Document analysis "can provide data on the context within which participants operate" (Bowen, 2009, p. 29). This was the primary reason for incorporating document analysis as a data collection method for this study. I collected samples and copies of codes of conduct, discipline manuals, and handbooks from each school administrator who participated in the study. Document analysis focused on policies that administrators used to manage school discipline issues that arose as a result of social media interactions. This allowed me to understand policies and provided insight into the phenomenon and context for the participants' experiences (Bowen, 2009; Patton, 2015). The inclusion of a document analysis also enabled the researcher not only to triangulate data but to enhance the rich description of the phenomenon at hand (Bowen, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). According to Patton (2015), "Thick, rich description provides the foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting" (p. 533). Document analysis, in

combination with coding and analyzing transcriptions of focus groups and interviews, resulted in thick, rich descriptions (Bowen, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis

Once the interviews and focus group meetings were complete, I reviewed the transcripts of interviews and the focus group meetings, as well as the discipline manuals to begin coding to discover the essence of the administrators' experiences (Gall et al., 2015; Moustakas, 1994). I utilized NVivo to transcribe the recorded individual interviews and focus group sessions and to assist in coding the transcriptions to determine themes. Additionally, I created a reflexive journal (Appendix J) to record personal biases. Once the transcripts of the interviews were completed, the participants were asked to review their interview and their part of the focus group for accuracy, an integral part of member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Analysis revealed emergent themes, which ultimately were reported as findings in terms of a universal essence (Moustakas, 1994). The analysis procedures followed those outlined by Moustakas (1994).

Horizontalization

Horizontalization requires a researcher to acknowledge that every statement in each data source has equal value (Moustakas, 1994). Horizontalization allows for the "possibilities for new discoveries of experiences" (Gilstrap, 2007, p. 5). This method of data analysis required me to highlight significant statements and quotes that alluded to an emerging theme after reading and rereading statements and holding all statements at equal value (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). While the process of horizontalization can be unlimited, stopping points were reached when data saturation occurs through the repetition of themes or data (Moustakas, 1994).

The horizons, or recurring statements, could then be clustered into themes, which were used to provide textural and structural descriptions through imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994).

Textural and Structural Descriptions

Textural and structural descriptions were developed through imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). Textual descriptions provide readers with a sense of the experience supported by actual quotes and text from the participants and participating schools (Moustakas, 1994). To write textural descriptions, I needed to create themes and delimit horizons (Moustakas, 1994). The themes “create clusters and remove repetition” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 201), which helped to establish a strong textural description for readers. NVivo was used to transcribe the interviews and focus groups and to highlight the themes. Next, I engaged in imaginative variation, reflection, and analysis to develop structural descriptions. Structural descriptions provide the reader with a description of how the phenomenon occurred (Moustakas, 1994). Ultimately, the textural and structural descriptions enabled me to develop composite descriptions that led to the creation of a universal essence.

Essence

Essence is developed from the composite textural and structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) wrote the “essences of any experience are never totally exhausted” (p. 100). However, the composite description served as the essential structure of the overall experiences included in the study. After providing thorough descriptions of the entire process, from interviews to documentation, I was able to arrive at the essence of the experience. The participants’ shared experience provided guidance on how schools manage situations arising from off-campus social media interactions.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) posited that an important component of establishing the worth of a research study is to evaluate its trustworthiness. They developed four criteria for establishing trustworthiness when conducting and sharing the findings of a study: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility refers to the researcher's confidence in the truth of the findings (Gall et al., 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability demonstrates that the findings were consistent and could be repeated in a subsequent study (Gall et al., 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability refers to the neutrality of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, transferability is the degree to which the study is applicable in other contexts (Gall et al., 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

Member checks were utilized to ensure the interview and focus group transcriptions accurately captured the participants' perceptions and avoided research bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This also allowed the participants to "review and confirm or alter the research data to correspond to her or his perception of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 110). The participants provided feedback in case adjustments were needed (Gall et al., 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process increased the study's credibility because the participants were able to verify the transcriptions, which allowed the researcher to move forward with deriving themes (Gall et al., 2015). The data were also triangulated to ensure accuracy and validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulating data provided added insight into the themes and perspectives by incorporating data gathered from various sources and methods (Creswell, 2013). This study incorporated data triangulation from the following data sources: individual interviews, focus groups, and codes of conduct.

Dependability and Confirmability

Moustakas (1994) advised researchers who conduct transcendental phenomenological studies to engage in *epoche* to set aside prejudgments, biases, and preconceptions and focus solely on interpreting the lived, shared experiences of the participants. Reflexivity ensured the dependability of the study. Reflexivity occurred when the researcher included personal and professional information to explain her perception and influence on the interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gall et al., 2015; Moustakas, 1994). I created a reflexive journal (Appendix J) to record my personal biases, confirming the research's dependability. Textural and structural descriptions provided an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). This process increased the reliability of the study by bracketing potential bias and acknowledging influential factors before discussing the analysis and results of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gall et al., 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer review also ensured confirmability as it allowed additional scrutiny and feedback on the study and findings (Creswell, 2013). Using a phenomenological approach, I collaborated with a fellow doctoral candidate to review and edit my manuscript for style, form, and content. The peer review resulted in additional insights into the methodology and interpretations of findings.

Transferability

Procedures and methodology were described in detail to allow future researchers to replicate the study in other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail included a dated list of steps taken throughout the research process (Appendix K). Transferability also ensured that the findings were transferable between myself and other researchers who might want to replicate this study or apply the findings to their own settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba,

1985). The composite description, along with the textural and structural description, ensured the participants would be able to see the transferability.

Ethical Considerations

There are many important ethical considerations for this research study. Researchers must be guided by ethical principles (Moustakas, 1994). Pseudonyms concealed participants' identities (including the school and school district), by keeping confidential all information about the school districts and the participants. This is important so that no one experiences negative consequences as a result of the study. The school district had to approve the study.

Administrators signed consent forms to participate and share data. Consent forms were provided; participation was voluntary, and all participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any time (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). I worked diligently to avoid disrupting the school learning environment. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. These transcriptions were reviewed to ensure accuracy and were secured to ensure confidentiality (Creswell, 2013). IRB approval also validated that no ethical considerations were overlooked. Transcriptions and recordings were stored on a locked computer and backed up on a USB drive in a locked safe. After the conclusion of the study and the publication of the findings, all transcriptions and recordings were stored and will be destroyed after three years.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand middle and high school administrators' perceived influence of social media on school discipline and student behavior in southeastern Virginia, while providing an understanding to school officials of the shared experiences of middle school administrators as they manage discipline in the 21st century. For the first step of the data collection process, interviews with administrators occurred.

Two focus group meetings were held. Copies of codes of conducts and discipline handbooks were provided as evidence of existing policies as they pertained to social media. Data analysis included analysis of interview transcriptions, document analysis, horizontalization, textural and structural descriptions, and deriving the essence (Moustakas, 1994). The trustworthiness of the study was ensured through credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Ethical considerations, such as data confidentiality and pseudonyms, also contributed to the overall trustworthiness of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter contains the results of the data analysis. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand middle and high school administrators' perceived influence of social media on school discipline and student behavior in southeastern Virginia. The data were acquired from participants' individual interviews, focus groups, and school division codes of conduct. This chapter provides a brief description of each participant. The four themes that emerged from the data analysis are discussed. The themes include: (a) changing behaviors, (b) acting in the best interest of students, (c) inability to disconnect, and (d) lack of oversight. Rich descriptions extracted from the participants' data are included. Following the presentation of the themes, the central question and sub-questions are answered narratively using the data collected. Finally, a summary is provided to conclude the chapter.

Participants

After receiving IRB approval (Appendix A), participants were secured. Upon receiving district approval from Unified, Independent, and Southern Districts, recruitment letters (Appendix B) were sent via email to potential participants, and 12 participants were secured. Participants completed a screening survey (Appendix C), and individual virtual interviews were scheduled with each participant as soon as they signed and returned the consent form (Appendix E). The focus group was conducted after all individual interviews were completed and codes of conduct secured. The participants included four females and eight males. There were five principals, six assistant principals, and one dean of students. Six participants serve at the high school level, and six participants serve at the middle school level. Among the participants, there is a combined experience of 86.5 years, with an average of 7.2 years. This information is

included in Table 1. All participants completed individual interviews and provided school codes of conduct. Seven of the participants took part in the focus groups. This information is in Table 2.

Table 1

Participants' Role, Level, and Years of Experience

Pseudonym	Administrative Role	Level	Years of experience
Sarah	Assistant principal	High school	5
John	Principal	Middle school	7
Calvin	Assistant principal	Middle school	2
Isaiah	Assistant principal	High school	1
Jeffrey	Dean of students	High school	2
Cassidy	Assistant principal	Middle school	2
Marcus	Principal	Middle school	12
Jarrold	Principal	Middle school	7
Jessica	Principal	Middle school	14
Stephen	Principal	High school	15
Michael	Assistant principal	High school	4.5
Eliza	Assistant principal	High school	15

Table 2*Participants' Contributions by Data Collection Methods*

Pseudonym	Interview	Code of Conduct	Focus Group
Sarah	X	X	
John	X	X	
Calvin	X	X	
Isaiah	X	X	
Jeffrey	X	X	
Cassidy	X	X	X
Marcus	X	X	X
Jarrold	X	X	X
Jessica	X	X	X
Stephen	X	X	X
Michael	X	X	X
Eliza	X	X	X

Sarah

Sarah was a Caucasian female with five years of administrative experience. She had a doctorate and had worked in multiple states. As assistant principal, she was responsible for overseeing 11th and 12th grades, “everything from referrals to student meetings and grading issues” (Sarah, individual interview, March 16, 2022). Sarah also was the administrator responsible for overseeing social studies, physical education, and foreign languages, as well as safety and security for the school. In addition to this, she managed attendance, positive behavior

interventions and supports teams, social emotional learning, in-school suspension, and the school clinic.

Sarah reported that she enjoyed being an administrator, and her most rewarding experiences centered around student graduation. She thrived on seeing students graduate and witnessing their accomplishments along their journeys. She enjoyed seeing their involvement in sports and extracurricular activities, showcasing their talents outside of academics, but graduation was what made her happy.

While working as an administrator has its perks, Sarah also recognized the ever-evolving challenges that came with the role. She found the most challenging part of the job to be supporting the students, the parents, and the teachers simultaneously. Sarah stated, “There is a fine balance in supporting all three as part of a team” (Sarah, individual interview, March 16, 2022). Finding this balance is difficult, especially while “supporting all three with the focus being on the student” (Sarah, individual interview, March 16, 2022).

Challenges have also emerged in the post-pandemic world of administration. Pre-pandemic, Sarah had a larger role in instruction and providing support for project-based learning. Post-pandemic, Sarah spent her days “putting out fires” that spontaneously erupt among students due to “less communication but more of a willingness to have physical altercations” (Sarah, individual interview, March 16, 2022). She believed that the COVID shutdown severely impacted students’ ability to communicate with one another and now “minor problems are exploding very quickly because everything is happening with nonverbal communication, like she looked at me, and then there’s just this explosion” (Sarah, individual interview, March 16, 2022). She was constantly working to teach students appropriate communication skills to maximize their learning and to see the reward of graduation.

John

John was an African American male with seven years of administrative experience. He had a doctorate and had worked in different school divisions within southeastern Virginia. He cited his primary role as principal as being an instructional leader for his building. He conducted observations and provided feedback to teachers. He coordinated school testing, found substitutes for teacher absences, oversaw hiring practices, and was involved with discipline infractions for students and staff. He supervised everyone in the building, “from custodians all the way up to teachers” (John, individual interview, March 7, 2022). John was responsible for the overall management and instruction for the building.

John’s passion for education and student success motivated him in his administrative role. His most rewarding experience as an administrator was building relationships with students. His reward lay in “being able to get to know them, to be a role model for them, and just to help mold them” (John, individual interview, March 7, 2022). John believed “students are what make the job fun” (John, individual interview, March 7, 2022).

Conversely, managing adults could be one of the most challenging parts of John’s role. Pre-pandemic, John’s biggest challenge involved changing staff mindsets and “getting veteran teachers to change with the times” (John, individual interview, March 7, 2022). During the pandemic, John struggled with providing staff coverage. John struggled to find substitutes who would be “able to provide quality instruction where students are getting the written, taught, and tested curriculum” (John, individual interview, March 7, 2022). Post-pandemic, John still grappled with these challenges, but they had evolved. Post-pandemic, the mindset changes concerned technology integration in the classroom and shifting from teacher-centered classrooms to student-centered classrooms that foster creativity and innovation.

Calvin

Calvin was a Caucasian male with two years of administrative experience. Calvin's primary role as assistant principal was to oversee student discipline and discipline data. However, he also was responsible for classroom observations and providing feedback to teachers. He worked closely with his principal to manage the overall operations of the building.

Calvin's most rewarding experience as a middle school administrator was simply interacting with students. He believed that building relationships was the key to having any success with students. He strived to focus on those students who "may not have the best experience overall" (Calvin, individual interview, March 7, 2022). Calvin found joy in classroom interactions as well. He enjoyed being in the classroom, not just as a spectator but as an active participant.

Being in classrooms allowed Calvin opportunities to provide frequent feedback to teachers. While he enjoyed being in the classroom, he found providing feedback to make adjustments for teachers quite challenging. Calvin stated, "Veteran teachers are so engrained with behaviors, ideas, and attributes that are very hard to change. Changing mindsets is probably the most challenging" (Calvin, individual interview, March 7, 2022). Calvin believed that teachers should focus on building relationships with students to foster learning rather than leveraging grades for punitive measures. Post-pandemic, Calvin's role had become a bit more challenging, especially in handling discipline because "it feels like something happens so quick, and I just get pulled in so many different directions" (Calvin, individual interview, March 7, 2022). Regardless of the situation and how quickly it occurs, Calvin endeavored to build relationships in an effort to curb behaviors and to ease the disciplinary process.

Isaiah

Isaiah was an African American male with one year of administrative experience. One of his primary roles as assistant principal was school testing coordinator. He was responsible for organizing and administering pre- and post-tests, as well as district benchmarks and state assessments. He handled discipline, as well as special education. He was involved in academics, conducting observations and providing feedback to teachers. Due to the small size of his school, Isaiah's role expanded beyond that of the typical administrator. With a student population of approximately 500 students and only 2 administrators, Isaiah and his principal shared a workload that was typically split among at least three administrators.

Isaiah found being helpful and celebrating staff and students to be the most rewarding part of his job. His goal was to make the teachers' jobs easier and to create opportunities for the students to feel successful. He helped to organize awards ceremonies and even used technology to connect with and celebrate students. Isaiah made TikToks with students during one ceremony to celebrate their academic success. Being able to uplift staff and students motivates Isaiah in his servant-leader role.

The most challenging part of Isaiah's administrative role has been "learning all the subjects" (Isaiah, individual interview, March 30, 2022). As a former physical education teacher, Isaiah felt pressure to give subject-specific feedback. However, he found comfort in knowing pedagogical best practices are not content-specific and focuses his feedback there. Another challenge that emerged post-pandemic was helping students and staff transition back to face-to-face instruction without an over-reliance on technology or a learning management system. Even with the challenges, Isaiah enjoyed his new role.

Jeffrey

Jeffrey was an African American male with two years of administrative experience. He served as dean of students and was responsible for all first-year students, from managing their behavior to their emotional needs. He processed referrals and was in charge of school safety. He implemented the safety plan and oversaw drills and communication to ensure everything ran effectively. One of Jeffrey's main roles was to communicate with the community to ensure transparency and student safety.

Jeffrey's most rewarding experience was seeing first-year students grow throughout the year. He said it is so rewarding "just seeing the maturity from, you know, beginning of the school year to the end" (Jeffrey, individual interview, August 3, 2022). Along with that, though, came one of the most challenging parts of Jeffrey's role: "seeing how the kids don't develop" (Jeffrey, individual interview, August 3, 2022). Jeffrey experienced disappointment when he worked with students who just "don't figure it out" (Jeffrey, individual interview, August 3, 2022).

Being a young administrator provided Jeffrey with a zeal for his job and a passion for students, but it also could be a barrier. Jeffrey had not always been well-received with more veteran teachers who were unwilling to change. He recognized the wealth of knowledge veteran teachers possess, but he also wished some would be more receptive to trying strategies for behavioral or instructional modifications. This has been true both pre- and post-pandemic. To promote success among first-year students and to convince teachers to try new things, Jeffrey focused on relationship building with everyone.

Cassidy

Cassidy was a Caucasian female with two years of administrative experience. Cassidy served as the assistant principal and the local education agency for special education in her building. She served as the 504 facilitator and the truancy representative. She shared discipline and instruction with her principal. Cassidy oversaw mathematics, foreign language, history, and health and physical education. She was also the director of student activities for athletics and extracurricular activities.

Cassidy believed the most rewarding part of her role was having one-on-one conversations with students, specifically when she saw them for disciplinary infractions. She said it was the perfect time to connect and build relationships with students. She embraced her identity as a mother and talked to students as if they were her own children. Cassidy capitalized on these opportunities to build relationships with students to change behavior and to deter future disciplinary infractions.

Cassidy faced a few challenges in her role. One of the biggest challenges stemmed from being an administrator in a small school. It was challenging because “you’re prioritizing everything, dealing with so much student trauma and mental health” (Cassidy, individual interview, March 23, 2022). Because she was responsible for so much, she felt like instruction sometimes fell to the wayside since “there are so many other challenges that need attention all the time” (Cassidy, individual interview, March 23, 2022). Part of the problem, according to Cassidy, was a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to a seeming lack of conflict-resolution skills, students were engaging in more altercations, prioritizing Cassidy’s time. Cassidy stated, “Keeping them out of school has affected socialization and dealing with conflict” (Cassidy, individual interview, March 23, 2022). As she grappled with finding balance, Cassidy

continued to focus on the most rewarding part of her job, building relationships, to thwart some of the disciplinary issues that seemed to monopolize her time.

Marcus

Marcus was an African American male with 12 years of administrative experience. Throughout his administrative career, Marcus served at all levels. As principal, he was responsible for overseeing the building operations and all staff in the building. He perceived his primary roles to be establishing the climate and culture of his building and overseeing student achievement and success.

Marcus' favorite part of being a middle school administrator was witnessing “the growth that students do from the time they enter middle school to the time they leave” (Marcus, individual interview, July 14, 2022). Marcus enjoyed getting to know students and observing their growth from year to year. However, seeing students mature from sixth grade to the end of eighth grade was the “highlight of my year” (Marcus, individual interview, July 14, 2022).

Marcus also described this process as “a blessing and a curse” (Marcus, individual interview, July 14, 2022). Because so much growth occurred during those developmental years, Marcus endured immaturity and magnified deficiencies. One of his biggest challenges was “being able to help students grow through those deficiencies, especially now with all the influence that students have growing up” (Marcus, individual interview, July 14, 2022). Marcus spent the majority of his time focusing on the growth of his students and his staff, especially in the post-pandemic environment.

Jarrold

Jarrold was an African American male with seven years of administrative experience. As principal, his job was to oversee everything in his building. He was responsible for everything

from budgeting to instruction to the overall management of the building. Jarrod took pride in walking the building every morning and popping into every classroom to greet students and staff. His primary goal was to be in classrooms and observing instruction, but he also recognized the importance of building strong relationships with parents and the community through conferences and open communication.

Jarrod enjoyed his role as a middle school administrator. He found the ability to touch and mold kids to be most rewarding. He loved connecting with students “mentally, emotionally” (Jarrod, individual interview, August 8, 2022). When he needed to bring students in for disciplinary infractions, Jarrod attempted to assume a father-like role, counseling and, when necessary, admonishing students in a way that hopefully impacted their behaviors and influenced their future decision-making. One issue that was problematic for Jarrod was the public school politics that came with the job. While navigating the political side of the role, Jarrod expended most of his energy and focus on building relationships with his students.

Jessica

Jessica was a Caucasian female with 14 years of administrative experience. She served students in sixth through eighth grades. Because she was the principal of a smaller school, her “responsibilities are vast,” and she had her “hands deeply in everything” (Jessica, individual interview, July 28, 2022). She directly supervised English, fine arts, career and technical education, and discipline. All of her duties were split evenly with her assistant principal.

Jessica found removing roadblocks for students, staff, or parents the most rewarding part of her job. She relished being able to offer parents and students a different path or a different setting that would stimulate student success. She recognized “teachers are humble” (Jessica, individual interview, July 28, 2022) and aspired to provide them with whatever they needed. She

actively sought opportunities to provide teachers with supplies or professional development opportunities. Jessica believed her job was to serve her teachers to help them make a bigger impact on students.

Jessica faced several challenges as an administrator. Primarily, she struggled with juggling everything and avoiding burnout. She described this balancing act of the constant influx of information and requests “like you’re in the circus” (Jessica, individual interview, July 28, 2022). Another issue that challenged Jessica was student mistakes. She stated, “There are just some things you don’t want to have to deal with, like when kids make really big mistakes that critically impact them. I grieve for them” (Jessica, individual interview, July 28, 2022). To combat these challenges, Jessica maintained her focus on removing roadblocks for all her stakeholders.

Stephen

Stephen was an African American male with 15 years of administrative experience. His primary role was to oversee the management of the building and instruction. He supervised faculty, conducted observations, and oversaw athletics and school events. He supervised scheduling, school safety, and security. Stephen also worked closely with his administrative team to manage special education and instruction.

Stephen found his reward in seeing students grow. He had the unique experience of looping up with his students, so he was a building administrator for students he had in middle school where were now high schoolers. Stephen said it was extremely rewarding to “see them as a sixth or seventh grader and being there to watch them graduate” (Stephen, individual interview, March 29, 2022). Seeing students succeed and grow throughout their educational careers inspired Stephen in his role.

When he reflected on his years, Stephen recalled the COVID-19 pandemic as the most challenging experience of his career. Stephen elicited, “We had to change everything, and learning how to navigate that has been very challenging” (Stephen, individual interview, March 29, 2022). Relearning education, adapting instruction, and rethinking the role of technology have impacted Stephen’s administrative role. Transitioning back into school was also challenging, with “students not really knowing how to interact anymore” (Stephen, individual interview, March 29, 2022). This challenge, in particular, was a focus for Stephen in helping students to grow and mature in their high school careers.

Michael

Michael was an African American male with 4.5 years of administrative experience. He supervised English, career and technical education, and athletics. He was also the administrator of the school division’s online program for virtual high school students. Attendance and registration also fell under Michael’s purview.

Michael found several facets of his experience to be rewarding. Most rewarding was “seeing students actually get to graduate, seeing all of their emotions” (Michael, individual interview, April 26, 2022). He also enjoyed witnessing students flourish in athletics and extracurricular activities. Watching students win various accolades for different events built not only school pride but also Michael’s.

While Michael exhibited school spirit, he faced challenges in his administrative role. His principal challenge was “getting teachers to conform to the expectations of administrators” (Michael, individual interview, April 26, 2022). He got frustrated when people “don’t see the full picture” (Michael, individual interview, April 26, 2022). This issue was exacerbated by the post-pandemic staffing problems. Michael was responsible for finding coverage for duty stations to

help monitor the large student population. Michael explained that this was part of the full picture that teachers did not always recognize. While these challenges may have made Michael's role more difficult, he remembered his rewarding experiences for his daily motivation.

Eliza

Eliza was an African American female with 15 years of administrative experience. She was primarily responsible for juniors and seniors, including discipline and overseeing all their events. She supervised the mathematics and science departments and was the building contact for running progress reports and report cards. She created and modified the master schedule. She also directly supervised a secretary, who managed the school's database that housed all student information, from schedules and grades to contact information and discipline.

Eliza believed the most rewarding part of being an administrator was building relationships with students. She often reflected on the bonds she created over the years and still maintained friendships with some of those students. She stated, "I have formed some close bonds with some students and saw them through their transformation from being difficult students to being good students" (Eliza, individual interview, August 17, 2022). For some students, especially those without support at home, she stepped into a mother-like role, going beyond the traditional duties of an administrator to ensure the students had guidance beyond academics and discipline. She felt proud that students had entrusted her with being "in their corner" (Eliza, individual interview, August 17, 2022).

The most challenging part of Eliza's job was dealing with adults. She struggled with teachers who were "not passionate about the profession" (Eliza, individual interview, August 17, 2022). Her job got harder when adults did not "do the simple things they should do" (Eliza, individual interview, August 17, 2022). This had a direct impact on her role. In her eyes, one of

the simplest and most effective things a teacher can do is to build relationships with students. Unfortunately, she found that not everyone subscribed to that philosophy, especially when there were generational differences causing friction. Eliza consistently worked to show teachers the power of building relationships and the impact they could have on schools and students.

Results

Participants were interviewed virtually via Zoom with the researcher. The first interview was conducted on March 7, 2022. The final interview was conducted on August 17, 2022. The 12 interview questions (Appendix F) were asked of all participants, and additional questions were asked for clarity or expansion. Each interview lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. Once interviews were completed, each participant provided the researcher with access to the school or district code of conduct or discipline handbook. As interviews were completed, participants were emailed a Doodle link to select dates and times to participate in the focus groups. Three of the six high school administrators agreed to virtually attend the high school focus group via Zoom on August 19, 2022. Four of the six middle school administrators agreed to virtually attend the middle school focus group via Zoom on August 23, 2022. During each focus group, the researcher asked 12 questions (Appendix G) and additional questions as needed.

Each interview and each focus group was recorded via Zoom and transcribed by the researcher utilizing NVivo qualitative software. Once the interviews were transcribed, they were sent to participants for review (Appendices H and I). The participants did not make any corrections or additions to the transcriptions. The researcher used NVivo to transcribe, organize, and manage data. The researcher edited each transcription to ensure all words and phrases were accurately recorded and the transcriptions were void of identifiers. The researcher manually coded the transcriptions within NVivo. Once the themes were revealed, the researcher sent the

list to the participants. The participants agreed that the themes were evident. The larger themes were created based on these statements and codes. Table 3 displays the specific codes used to create the four themes and sub-themes.

Moustakas (1994) explained that the essence identified the nature of the experience and allowed others to understand the shared phenomenon. Using the significant statements, the essence statement captured the individual experiences while holistically expressing the phenomenon. The essence statement was shared, along with the themes, via email with participants:

The increased usage of social media among adolescents influences their behavior.

Behaviors, both negative and positive, are reinforced through the quantifiability of social media. These behaviors permeate the school environment, affecting discipline at both the middle and high school levels. Even without specific social media policies to guide them, administrators build relationships to leverage the code of conduct to teach students about appropriate behavior and to effectively address negative behaviors that affect the learning environment.

Table 3*Themes from Codes Identified in Phenomenological Reduction*

Codes	Themes	Sub-themes
Behavior Social media and discipline Social media (negative) Social media usage Social media exposure and connection	Changing behavior	Increased social media usage during the COVID-19 pandemic Social media exposure and influence
Action without specific policy Social media (positive)	Acting in the best interest of students	Building relationships Applying consequences to adjust student behavior
Social media exposure and connection Social media identity Social media usage	Inability to disconnect	Sense of identity
Policy Need for education Parent involvement and oversight	Lack of oversight	Need for specific policy Need for education Need for parental involvement and oversight

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand middle and high school administrators' perceived influence of social media on school discipline and student behavior in southeastern Virginia. Data analysis was theoretically grounded in Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory and theory of enactive learning as it explores how humans reciprocate observed behaviors, and in Skinner's (1953) behavioral theory of operant conditioning as it explores how people learn through punishment and reinforcement. Through immersion in the data and coding, four themes emerged: (a) changing behaviors, (b) acting in the best interest of students, (c) inability to disconnect, and (d) lack of oversight.

Theme: Changing Behaviors

During the data analysis, the first theme to emerge was that all 12 participants expressed concerns about the changing behaviors of students with increased usage of social media, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. This theme addressed the central research question, as well as the first and fourth sub-questions of how social media influences student behavior and school discipline. When participants were directly asked about their perceptions of social media's influence on student behavior and discipline, they all replied similarly. The consensus of all participants in both the individual interviews and focus groups was that social media tends to influence student behavior negatively and, as an extension, student discipline. Jessica shared:

Monday mornings used to be quiet. It's been a shift. Kids and adults say things electronically that they wouldn't say face-to-face. This stuff rolls over into Monday, the drama that's been brewing all weekend. We have no chance to intervene. There are more group threads, more kids inviting others into a group. (Jessica, individual interview, July 28, 2022)

All of the administrators cited increased social media usage during the pandemic and constant exposure to negative influences on social media as contributing factors influencing and changing student behavior.

Subtheme: Increased Social Media Usage During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Each administrator, at some point in the individual interview or in the focus group, referred to the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on social media usage among adolescents. "Just by nature of being at home and having no way to communicate with others," students turned to social media to remain connected during the shutdown and virtual schooling (Stephen, individual interview, March 29, 2022). They agreed that this impacted students' social skills as

they transitioned back to face-to-face instruction. It appears students “don’t know how to socially interact without a keyboard or a screen” (Michael, individual interview, April 26, 2022) and struggle “dealing with conflict” (Cassidy, individual interview, March 23, 2022).

Subtheme: Social Media Exposure and Influence

When asked about student social media usage and their perceptions of its influence on student behavior, administrators frequently shared concerns about what students are exposed to on social media. Students “see a filtered, narrow view of the world, that reinforces different ideas, both good and bad. They are constantly bombarded with problematic things” (Jessica, focus group, August 23, 2022). They have “the whole world at their fingertips” (Jessica, individual interview, July 28, 2022), and with everything being “about perception” (Cassidy, individual interview, March 23, 2022), students are inclined to replicate the behaviors that award them with the most likes and shares. Michael shared, “They’re always looking for someone to follow them” (Michael, individual interview, April 26, 2022). The quantifiability (likes, shares, and views) of social media attracts adolescents to viral videos and posts, and, often, they include negative behavior, violence, or sexually explicit content. To gain popularity and recognition, students emulate the behaviors they observe, seeking “instant gratification,” “instant humor,” or “instant answers” (Jarrod, individual interview, August 8, 2022).

Theme: Acting in the Best Interest of Students

The second theme that emerged from data analysis was administrators’ priority in acting in the best interest of students, even in managing disciplinary infractions. This theme addressed the central research question and the third sub-question of how social media influences student behavior and school discipline. When asked about how the administrators manage disciplinary issues that originate in social media posts, Jarrod shared that his initial step is to get students and

parents “immediately involved to build that partnership and to allow them be able to handle the issue as well” (Jarrod, focus group, August 23, 2022). Involving all stakeholders was essential to the administrators because it allows the behaviors to be addressed at school, at home, and in the community. When administrators have to use their district codes of conduct that do not contain social-media-specific policies, they have to weigh situations on a “case-by-case basis” (Jessica, focus group, August 23, 2022). They lay groundwork through building relationships and choose consequences that they sense will best adjust students’ future behavior.

Subtheme: Building Relationships

A resounding message that permeated the individual interviews and focus groups was the importance of building relationships with students. When sharing their most rewarding experiences as an administrator, each participant cited building relationships with students, witnessing student growth, or helping students in some way. One administrator shared that when he must pull students in for difficult conversations, he liked to think of himself “as during the day not really being the principal, being the father of this group rather than principal” (Jarrod, individual interview, August 8, 2022). Stephen explained that, as with any disciplinary infraction, “the first conversation is always hold that conference with the kid, possibly contact the parent to try to make them aware and let them know what you are and what you’re not going to tolerate inside your building” (Stephen, focus group, August 19, 2022). Building relationships provides a foundation for addressing negative behaviors in a positive manner.

Subtheme: Applying Consequences to Adjust Student Behavior

As evidenced by the division codes of conduct, none of the participating school divisions have social-media-specific policies. The codes of conduct include such topics as cyberbullying and threats, but, outside of those topics, there was little to guide administrators when managing

behavioral issues originating in social media posts and interactions. Typically, the participants analyzed the incident that occurred at school to “see what you can make fit” from the code of conduct (Michael, focus group, August 19, 2022). Calvin explained that he must first determine “if it affects the school environment” (Calvin, individual interview, March 7, 2022). The unwritten policy when students’ posts do not fall under the purview of the code of conduct is to have a conversation with the students and the parents to address the nature of the post and the behavior. As Eliza articulated, “That’s not policy. That’s good practice” (Eliza, individual interview, August 17, 2022). After analyzing the incident that impacted the learning environment, the administrators focused on having conversations with students, not just finding codes that applied. Their focus was in reshaping the behaviors and helping students learn from their experiences.

Theme: Inability to Disconnect

The third theme that emerged from data analysis was the inability of students to disconnect from social media and their seeming “obsession” with it (Sarah, individual interview, March 16, 2022). This theme addressed the central research question and the first and fourth sub-questions of how social media influences student behavior and school discipline. Students are exposed to a wide array of behaviors and topics through social media, and it is challenging because “it’s 24 hours a day now” (Marcus, individual interview, July 14, 2022). Conversations continue well beyond the school day, because “once you have my Instagram handle or my Twitter or whatever, you’re constantly in contact with people” (Michael, focus group, August 19, 2022). Group chats, posts, and stories enable students to maintain conversations into the evening that may carry over the following morning at school, “and now we have an issue because of something posted on social media” (Michael, focus group, August 19, 2022). In the case of

something that transpired over the weekend, parents have “immediately brought it to school early on Monday morning” (Isaiah, individual interview, March 30, 2022). This not only affects discipline and behavior at school but also is “negative as far as maintaining a positive mental health” (Eliza, focus group, August 19, 2022). Focusing on maximizing opportunities for students to disconnect from social media has become a priority for the participants.

Subtheme: Sense of Identity

The participants noticed that because students were continually engaging in social media, their identities appeared to be directly linked to it. Jeffrey explained:

It’s kind of like they have two different lives. Like you have one life that’s social media, you have one that, you know, is the real, you know, the real world. I think, at times, a lot of our students struggle to separate the two. (Jeffrey, individual interview, August 3, 2022)

Online personas can drastically differ from students’ identities in the traditional school setting. Students “are tougher behind the keyboard” and “say things they wouldn’t say in person” (John, individual interview, March 7, 2022). Jessica warned her students of the danger of becoming consumed with what they see online because “people share what’s not real” (Jessica, individual interview, July 28, 2022). Identities often collide in the school setting as social media identities face consequences for their posts when they return to the real world.

Theme: Lack of Oversight

The final theme to emerge was the apparent lack of oversight from multiple levels. This theme addressed the central research question, as well as the second and fourth sub-questions of how social media influences student behavior and school discipline. The perception is that the policymakers are detached from the issues occurring in schools. Parents are not actively

monitoring what their children are doing online. This lack of oversight complicates the disciplinary process for administrators. Because of the fine line between freedom of expression and affecting the learning environment, administrators must carefully analyze infractions that originate on social media before applying a code or consequences. Often, “the only way our schools can get involved in social media is if social media involves the school” (Marcus, individual interview, July 14, 2022). The participants recognize the need for more specific policies, the need for education about the impact of social media, and the need for parental involvement and oversight.

Subtheme: Need for Specific Policy

In the participating school divisions, there was no policy that specifically addressed social media posts apart from cyberbullying and threats. Policymakers tread lightly around social media because of its direct link to First Amendment freedoms. Without specific social media policies or codes, administrators are tasked with examining the impact on the learning environment and coding the incident according to what occurred within the school. The participants described the challenge of seeing inappropriate online behavior but being unable to enact any consequences because the post “doesn’t affect the school” (Calvin, individual interview, March 7, 2022). Participants understand the delicate balance in addressing student behavior on social media, but with the prevalence of disciplinary issues that stem from social media, they believe it would be beneficial for them to have more specific or more detailed guidance.

Subtheme: Need for Education

Most of the participants asserted that public education needs to adjust to incorporate educating students about the impact and “ramifications of social media” (Marcus, individual

interview, July 14, 2022). School divisions need to find a way to teach students “what’s appropriate” (John, individual interview, March 7, 2022). Eliza stressed:

When it comes to social media, we have to educate, and we have to explain and help the kids learn, understand that when they post stuff, you can’t take it back. And we have to, you know, talk about the consequences and talk about, you know, what if 10 years down the road, somebody tries to google your name, and who knows what they may find? And is that the image that they want to have out there? And we have to talk about the consequences of the negative talk they put out there. So, we have to educate, not just discipline. You know, not just have a conversation of you should or you shouldn’t because this is not good or appropriate behavior. But what are the consequences other than, you know, you get suspended or something like that, your parents take your phone away, things like that, but what are the possible consequences? (Eliza, individual interview, August 17, 2022)

Currently, the participants take on the role of educating students when they address their behaviors for disciplinary infractions. Unfortunately, administrators must be “reactive when something happens and then trickles into the school day” (Jessica, focus group, August 23, 2022). However, they would like to see a more proactive approach by educating students through a course or a developed curriculum.

Subtheme: Need for Parental Involvement and Oversight

One dilemma the participants frequently faced was the lack of parental oversight or monitoring of student social media accounts. When social media accounts are not monitored, “it’s used for kids to be mean to one another” (Jessica, individual interview, July 28, 2022). Student social media use “isn’t really ours to control. It’s the parents’” (Jessica, focus group,

August 23, 2022). In notifying parents of student conduct, the participants have found that many parents were aware their children were on social media and did not monitor them if “they’re not hurting anybody” (Marcus, individual interview, July 14, 2022). More parental involvement and oversight of student social media interactions could prevent incidents that negatively impact the learning environment.

Outlier Data and Findings

Two unexpected findings did not align with any specific research questions or themes. After participants’ interviews and focus groups were analyzed for codes and themes, two outlier findings that could not be associated with any of the set questions and themes emerged. One outlier that emerged centered on the benefits of social media posts for investigating disciplinary infractions. A second outlier revealed that administrators do not only face social media challenges with students but with adults as well.

Outlier Finding One

While participants shared the difficulty in navigating disciplinary procedures for incidents that originated on social media, they also discussed how social media could aid the disciplinary process by finding out “things that are going on in the community and with our students” (Isaiah, individual interview, March 30, 2022). Because students are so willing to post and “put it out there,” administrators often have a head start and can “have a plan in place for the morning” (Eliza, focus group, August 19, 2022). Posts can also provide insight into students’ mental health, and administrators are able to get students help. Shawn shared how social media has helped administrators and counselors intervene when students have considered self-harm. Because of the post, an adult or another student informs school personnel and prevents a student from making a fatal mistake.

Outlier Finding Two

Participants found social media not only influenced the behavior of adolescents but also of adults. Stephen explained that he focused on having conversations with students about appropriate online etiquette, and he has had “to talk to the adults, too” (Stephen, individual interview, March 29, 2022). Sometimes, “staff gets bothered by social media posts by groups that are supposed to be supportive, and they’ll share those concerns with admin” (Jessica, focus group, August 23, 2022). A popular social media trend involves groups that operate with the intention of being supportive and creating a better public school system. Sometimes, well-intentioned groups such as these allow posting of unfiltered and biased opinions. Those posts and the comment section can impact morale in the building when teachers are reading accusatory or inflammatory statements about their school or their colleagues. Social media posts can even influence the climate and culture of a school.

Research Question Responses

This section provides a short, narrative answer to each of the research questions used during data collection. The themes that were identified with each question are outlined in this section. The central research question and each sub-question are discussed individually. Participant quotes were selected to support responses.

Central Research Question

What are the shared experiences of middle and high school administrators as they navigate managing discipline as it is influenced by outside interactions on social media?

The participants’ perceptions and lived experiences revealed that managing discipline influenced by social media is extremely challenging. The increased usage of social media among adolescents influences their behavior. Negative and positive behaviors are reinforced through the

quantifiability of social media. These behaviors permeate the school environment, affecting discipline at the secondary level because “kids end up with real feelings over fake things” (Jessica, individual interview, July 28, 2022). Even without a specific social media policy to guide them, administrators build relationships to leverage the code of conduct in a way that allows them to teach students about appropriate behavior and to effectively address negative behaviors. As Marcus shared in the focus group, “There’s no science to it. We get as close as we can” (Marcus, focus group, August 23, 2022).

Sub-Question One

What are the administrators’ perceptions of social media’s influence on student behavior in middle and high school?

All participants agreed that social media is “a contributing factor for sure” (Sarah, individual interview, March 16, 2022). John contended, “It has a direct influence on student behavior” (John, individual interview, March 7, 2022). Due to their inability to disconnect from social media, students are continually inundated with a variety of behaviors that are rewarded with quantifiable social media data, such as likes, views, and shares. To gain their own following, students replicate these behaviors and seem to internalize them and exhibit them in school. Participants witnessed more sudden altercations and arguments that extended from group chats and social media posts that occurred after school hours. In the post-pandemic environment, students struggle more with face-to-face interaction and conflict resolution.

Sub-Question Two

What, if any, are the existing discipline policies and procedures concerning social media interactions that affect the learning environment?

None of the participants have a code of conduct that includes specific social media policies. Each division's code of conduct includes specific consequences for cyberbullying or online threats. However, there is little to no guidance regarding social media posts that do not fall under those two categories. Marcus explained the challenge of having a specific policy:

You know, there's no hard fast 60/40, 70/30 rule, um but just a matter the perception of how much time am I now committing to dealing with this situation that originated with social media and continue to be going on social media. So, I really don't think we have reached that point where our discipline code or policy is designed to incorporate social media. (Marcus, individual interview, July 14, 2022)

John added, "If the school is in the post, then you can use the code of conduct. Otherwise, you can investigate based on what happens at school" (John, individual interview, March 7, 2022). It is up to the administrators to assess the situation, determine whether it applies to an existing code, and act accordingly.

Sub-Question Three

How do administrators manage discipline issues arising from social media interactions that occur outside of the classroom?

Participants stated that they analyzed the situations to determine what infractions occurred at school and which codes and consequences apply to those specific infractions. They must address only those behaviors that directly impact the learning environment that are "severe and pervasive" (Sarah, individual interview, March 16, 2022). Stephen explained, "You really, um, have to balance and analyze the situation to see which code best applies or, you know, um best fits what's going on" (Stephen, individual interview, March 29, 2022). In managing those

situations, the participants shared the importance of conversing with students about the ramifications of their posts and behavior to prevent future incidents.

Sub-Question Four

What are secondary administrators' perceptions of how disciplinary actions and decisions are influenced by students' behaviors as a result of interactions on social media?

Participants noted a difference in student behavior pre- and post-pandemic and attributed the change to the amount of social media usage among adolescents. Because students are continually connected when not in school, altercations can erupt almost spontaneously. Jessica described the contrast in pre- and post-pandemic student behavior:

Now, what I've seen change as a building administrator, Monday mornings used to be quiet. It's been a shift. Kids and adults say things electronically that they wouldn't say face-to-face. This stuff rolls over into Monday, the drama that's been brewing all weekend. We have no chance to intervene. (Jessica, individual interview, July 28, 2022)

The participants perceived their role to be more reactive in dealing with post-pandemic student behaviors and asserted, "we have to find a way to regulate this within the school system" (Michael, individual interview, April 26, 2022).

Summary

This chapter provided the results that originated from the data collected from the 12 participants who shared experiences as secondary administrators in southeastern Virginia. The descriptions of all participants were provided. The four themes that emerged from the data were provided, along with detailed descriptions of each. The themes that emerged were as follows: (a) changing behaviors, (b) acting in the best interest of students, (c) inability to disconnect, and (d) lack of oversight. The participants' experiences were shared through rich textural and structural

descriptions, which allowed the participants' experiences to be presented and the phenomenon to be examined. Finally, the themes and participants' quotations were used to support the narrative responses to the research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand middle and high school administrators' perceived influence of social media on school discipline and student behavior in southeastern Virginia. The theories guiding this study were Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory and the theory of enactive learning, which explore how humans reciprocate observed behaviors, and Skinner's (1953) behavioral theory of operant conditioning, which explores how people learn through punishment and reinforcement. This study attempted to answer the central research question: What are the shared experiences of middle and high school administrators as they navigate through managing discipline as outside interactions on social media influence it? Common themes were discovered by using multiple data collection methods. This chapter includes a summary of the research findings in relation to the literature review presented in Chapter Two. Implications of this study are discussed, and delimitations and limitations are presented. Recommendations for future research are followed by a final summary.

Discussion

The purpose of this section is to discuss the study's findings considering the emergent themes. The discussion highlights the researcher's voice as an expert on this topic. The findings reveal vital points for discussion, summarize the main findings, and compare them with existing literature by supporting the interpretations of findings with empirical and theoretical sources and providing evidence from the study. This section includes the following subsections: (a) interpretation of findings, (b) implications for policy or practice, (c) theoretical and empirical implications, (d) limitations and delimitations, and (e) recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of Findings

The interpretation of the study findings discusses four main themes: the changing behavior of adolescents, how administrators act in the best interest of students, the inability of students to disconnect from social media, and the lack of social media oversight.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The study has identified changing behavior of adolescents, acting in the best interest of students, the inability to disconnect, and lack of oversight as the main themes of the study. The interrelated themes offer an explanatory description depicting secondary administrators' perceptions and experiences of the influence of social media on school discipline and student behavior. The increased usage of social media among adolescents influences their behavior. Negative and positive behaviors are reinforced through the quantifiability of social media. These behaviors permeate the school environment, affecting discipline at the secondary level. Even without a specific social media policy to guide them, administrators build relationships to leverage the code of conduct in a way that allows them to teach students about appropriate behavior and to effectively address negative behaviors. As described in Chapter Four, administrators expressed the challenge in navigating discipline and managing student behavior as it is influenced by social media.

Changing Behavior of Adolescents. During adolescence, teenagers experience many social and cognitive changes; this time is marked by an increase in seeking peer interaction and approval (Shah et al., 2019). Secondary administrators are accustomed to the developmental changes and adolescents' need for opportunities to socialize. The participating administrators shared that some of their most rewarding experiences included seeing the growth of students throughout their academic careers. In talking with each of the participants, I noticed that the

driving force that motivated them each day was student growth and success in some form or fashion.

Social media provides a constant stream of communication for students. Participants believe that during the COVID-19 pandemic, student use of social media increased, allowing incessant access to a wide variety of behaviors. Because of the impressionability, adolescents are more likely to replicate those behaviors that are most reinforced through the quantifiable statistics of social media (Barry et al., 2017). It was evident from the participants' experiences and from my own that many students are more susceptible to changing their behavior if it involves the remote possibility of going viral or being "TikTok famous." Adolescents experiment with their identities and receive feedback via social comparison and social media metrics (Shah et al., 2019). The feedback they receive on posts reinforces or discourages behaviors that are internalized, like body image or externalized, as in cyberbullying (Shah et al., 2019). They will be more likely to emulate behaviors that will gain them followers, likes, views, shares, and viral fame.

Participants shared examples of students recording fights, engaging in slap boxing, and recording TikTok challenges in school. In considering their pre- and post-pandemic experiences, the participants agreed that student behavior has changed and is impacting school discipline. Incidents occur more spontaneously, and administrators often have no choice but to be reactive. It is unsettling to think about the implications of this reactive nature of school leadership. The seeming spontaneity of negative incidents forces administrators to be in a defensive, reactionary mode rather than being able to proactively prevent incidents or altercations from occurring. This could have serious implications on school safety if district leaders and policymakers cannot find an innovative solution to social media's influence on student behavior and school discipline.

Acting in the Best Interest of Students. Despite the advantages of incorporating social media and technology as educational tools, administrators are facing the unintended consequences of social media use—from cyberbullying to infringement of First Amendment freedoms. The problem is that ambiguities in the law require administrators to make disciplinary decisions without specific policies upon which to make them. Social media is creating a complex problem for administrators who are now facing more disciplinary incidents that originate off-campus and must handle situations delicately (Dunn & Derthick, 2013; O’Connor et al., 2016; Sheridan, 2015). Participants shared their challenges in finding a balance in applying specific codes and consequences from the student code of conduct. In each interview and focus group session, I listened to administrators share cautionary tales of addressing incidents that originated on social media without a clear tie to school. Social media is not only influencing students but administrators as well. If they make one wrong or unpopular decision, they face the possibility of being decimated on social media, a potentially career-ending scenario.

While this unsettling possibility looms over them, administrators still address social media interactions that negatively impact the very reason they go to school every day—the students. The primary factor that influences the participants’ decision-making is consideration of the whole child; they have conversations and make decisions that they hope will influence the student’s future behavior. They prioritize building relationships with parents and students to open dialogue and encourage courageous conversations about appropriate behaviors and the potential ramifications of social media posts. Outside of tips about situations, this is truly the solitary method in which administrators can take a proactive approach to addressing such behaviors. Without this type of counseling and conversation, students would continue posting without any thought of potential ramifications for themselves or others. Until some sort of

decision is made about how to better educate parents and students on how social media permeates the school environment, this solution needs to be embraced by school leaders at the secondary level.

Inability of Students to Disconnect from Social Media. According to Tuzel and Hobbs (2017), constant social media exposure presents students with a plethora of multiliteracies and messages within the matter of an instant. The participants agreed that many of the negative behaviors they witnessed in school stemmed from social media posts and group chats that occurred off-campus. Students are inundated with behaviors that they internalize and externalize (Shah et al., 2019). Students' obsession with social media creates an insatiable need to check on what others are posting, a phenomenon known as FOMO (Barry et al., 2017; Franchina et al., 2018; O'Reilly, 2020). Barry et al. (2017) posited that when a person discovers that they have missed an opportunity or has been deliberately excluded from an activity, they can experience feelings of isolation, loneliness, or inadequacy.

Additionally, the inability to disconnect inadvertently results in more social comparison, which can have several negative implications on adolescent mental health (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). Students have reported increased incidents of eating disorders, dissatisfaction with body image, depression, and cyberbullying (Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). The participating administrators are extremely concerned about the mental health of their students and are seeing more reports of mental health crises. I listened after each of the participating administrators shared story after story that revealed an increase in the number of students experiencing mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety. Cyberbullying and social comparison create complex issues for students outside of school, and they become topics of conversation throughout the school day. Many

adolescents fail to realize that much of what they see online is not reality and has been doctored in some way. Comparing themselves or their life to the unrealistic standards presented in social media platforms creates feelings of inadequacy, causing them to feel dissatisfied with themselves, their lives, or their social groups. As the participants shared their experiences, I listened to their grief and worry about the number of students who threatened self-harm or who experienced some sort of mental health crisis. It is difficult enough to manage discipline without specific policies, but it may be even more difficult to navigate the field of adolescent mental health.

Lack of Oversight. The study findings identified lack of oversight from varying stakeholders as a primary concern of participants. Participants believed the current disciplinary policies did not adequately address social media use. The challenges that this presents required them to work closely with parents and students to address inappropriate online behaviors. In their experience, however, many students have little to no parent oversight of their social media accounts. Public educators often must overcome challenges that result from a lack of resources in students' homes. This is common in addressing academic gaps. However, a new layer is being added with social media. As Marcus stated in his individual interview, many students are raising themselves through social media. Despite the availability of controls and monitoring apps, some parents are not aware of their children's social media personas or behaviors.

In fact, according to the participants in this study, parents are often surprised when presented with the incidents in which their children partook. Cyberbullying is a rapidly evolving phenomenon that many school systems are struggling to address, and cyberbullying can be directly linked to specific posts (Conn, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; O'Connor et al., 2016; Rice et al., 2015). Social media allows rumors to spread rapidly; videos and posts can go viral

within a matter of minutes, and students' lives can be impacted almost instantaneously. Students experience cyberbullying, misunderstandings and rumors create altercations, and students experience more mental health issues, all without parents being privy to what is occurring in their children's lives. The participants stressed the need for educating parents and students on the ramifications of social media. My findings corroborate this need as navigating student discipline, and mental health issues becomes a more tumultuous, cumbersome task.

Implications for Policy or Practice

The research findings provide implications for policy and practice when considering administrators' perceptions of the influence of social media on adolescent behavior and school discipline. Social media interactions have complicated the disciplinary process for administrators. This section discusses the implications of policy and practice regarding social media interactions and their influence on student behavior and, as an extension, student discipline.

Implications for Policy

The study's findings led me to conclude that policies that address school discipline, such as codes of conduct, should consider addressing specific social media behaviors. Administrators need more guidance in how to address negative behaviors that derive from social media posts. Among the participants, there was some inconsistency in how they disciplined various behaviors. More specific policies and guidelines would provide consistency in disciplinary data across school divisions. In addition, policymakers should consider including training on disciplining social media interactions for administrators to help them better understand how to navigate the complex issue. Findings from this study suggest training administrators on restorative practices and building relationships could be a proactive approach to curbing some negative behaviors.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study indicated that for public schools to address the influence social media has on student behavior and school discipline, there must be a commitment to policies that help support secondary administrators. There must also be a commitment to educating stakeholders on the ramifications of certain social media posts and interactions. With the push for providing students with 21st-century learning skills, educational leaders strive to find a balance between disciplining inappropriate behaviors that disrupt the learning environment while also evaluating what constitutes freedom of speech or expression rather than a disruption. Administrators recognize that social media is creating a complex problem as they face more disciplinary situations that originate off-campus and require a delicate hand (Dunn & Derthick, 2013; O'Connor et al., 2016; Sheridan, 2015). Division leaders may consider options for educating students on the long-term consequences of negative online behaviors. In considering options for more deeply addressing digital citizenship, school systems may also consider opportunities to collaborate with parents and the community to increase involvement and monitoring of adolescent social media usage. This would aid administrators by decreasing the frequency of behavior incidents.

This study's findings have important implications for future practice and research. This study's findings are significant in understanding the types of challenges middle and high school administrators face when disciplining students for behaviors that are influenced by social media. The results and implications from this study move researchers and practitioners to a deeper understanding of how the perceptions and lived experiences of middle and high school administrators can promote disciplinary policies to address the influence of social media on student behavior and school discipline.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This research utilized Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory and theory of enactive learning (1986), and Skinner's (1953) behavioral theory of operant conditioning as the theoretical framework. Using Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory and theory of enactive learning prepared the investigation on understanding how adolescents reciprocate the behaviors they observe outside of school via social media and their influence of the school environment. Skinner's (1953) behavioral theory of operant conditioning prepared the investigation on understanding how punishment and positive reinforcement affect learning and adolescent behavior. The theoretical and empirical implications compare findings and patterns to existing literature to examine how social media interactions, observations, and activity influence student behavior and school discipline. Social cognitive theory is grounded in observational learning (Bandura, 1986), and enactive and vicarious learning can provide some insight into the perceptions of student behavior as shared by secondary administrators. Skinner's (1953) behavioral theory of operant conditioning posits that operant conditioning aids in learning through reinforcement and punishment. These facets of the theories provided the theoretical foundations for the study.

This study contributes to understanding specifically how social media is influencing adolescent behavior. If administrators and educational leaders can understand just how students are learning behaviors that are negatively impacting the learning environment, they can create educational opportunities and partnerships to counteract the behaviors students are internalizing and change their behaviors to a desired outcome. As students understand the consequences for their actions, their thinking and behavior may change, causing them to demonstrate new levels of cognition and learning (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2016). However, if students watch more

inappropriate behaviors on social media and do not observe negative consequences for those behaviors, they are inclined to repeat them. Bandura (2001) explained that people choose their behavior based upon what is sanctioned by authority. Administrators can utilize operant conditioning to reinforce the desirable behaviors they wish to see (Skinner, 1953) and change the trajectory of student behavior and discipline within the school.

The results of this study are beneficial to administrators in middle and high school, as well as public school policymakers, as these findings validate the need to address social media's influence on student behavior and school discipline. The results indicated that social media is having a direct impact on student behavior, causing increased disciplinary issues. The findings of this study also support the growing body of literature surrounding social media and its influence on adolescents. Existing research reveals that the frequency of adolescent social media use is correlated with a variety of behavioral changes (Mingle et al., 2016; Tang & Patrick, 2018). Adolescents who frequently use social media have demonstrated fluctuations in academic performance (Bulu et al., 2016). Teenagers who frequent social media platforms are more inclined to engage in social comparison, to experience eating disorders, and to exhibit depressive symptoms (Bittar & Soares, 2020; McClean et al., 2017; O'Reilly, 2020; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Shah et al., 2019; Wilksch et al., 2020). While existing research supports the theory that social media influences adolescent behavior, a gap exists in the research when examining social media's influence on student behavior as it pertains to school discipline. The findings of this study address this gap by allowing administrators to share their perceptions of how managing student discipline has been influenced by social media interactions and posts. Because of the complexity of disciplining social media, administrators are challenged with disciplining behaviors without infringing upon personal freedoms. This phenomenon is important to consider

when updating policies and when creating programs of studies if student behaviors are going to be addressed.

Limitations and Delimitations

Research limitations are the aspects of methodology or design that influence the interpretation of the findings from research and are possible weaknesses that are usually out of the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). This study's findings were analyzed and interpreted in the context of some limitations. The qualitative nature of the study provided participants with the opportunity to provide detailed descriptions of their perceptions and experiences. However, there was a limitation regarding the participants used in the study. Due to the geographic location and the limited number of participants in the study, the findings should not be generalized to all secondary administrators in the United States.

My experience as a teacher and as an administrator may have created biases and preconceived notions about the study and its findings. While I bracketed to eliminate preconceived notions and biases (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015), they may have influenced the study. Another related limitation in this study is that I assume participants shared their honest, lived experiences and perceptions; however, it is difficult to ensure whether participants bracketed their own preconceived notions and biases. If participants did not bracket their own biases, the data could be incomplete.

This study also has delimitations, which are purposeful decisions I made to define and limit the study's boundaries (Patton, 2015). The first delimitation was that each participant had to be a middle or high school administrator. Since the theories guiding this study were Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory and theory of enactive learning (1986) and Skinner's (1953) behavioral theory of operant conditioning, it was important that all participants were secondary

administrators who have experience with managing and analyzing student behavior. The second delimitation was that all participants had to serve schools in southeastern Virginia. Therefore, purposeful criterion sampling was used to ensure that participants had experienced the phenomenon within the specified region (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). To provide an accurate description of the essence of the experiences of secondary administrators in this region, a transcendental, phenomenological approach was used.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was limited to middle and high school administrators in southeastern Virginia. In the future, researchers could replicate this study in various regions across the nation. This study focused on overall social media use and its influence on student behavior and school discipline. Future research could expand the study to focus on specific social media platforms or specific disciplinary infractions. All of the participants in this study were principals, assistant principals, or deans of students. It would be informative for future researchers to expand this study to include other groups, such as counselors, teachers, and parents. Future researchers may also consider various training or education models that may benefit schools, such as partnering with parents to teach them about managing social media in relation to its influence on school.

Conclusion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand middle and high school administrators' perceived influence of social media on school discipline and student behavior in southeastern Virginia. The theories guiding this study were Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory and theory of enactive learning (1986) as they explore how humans reciprocate observed behaviors, and Skinner's (1953) behavioral theory of operant conditioning as it explores how people learn through punishment and reinforcement.

This study answered the central research question: What are the shared experiences of middle and high school administrators as they navigate through managing discipline as it is influenced by outside interactions on social media? Data collection methods included individual interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. Data were gathered from 12 participants, and Moustakas' (1994) methods, which were designed for transcendental phenomenology, were used to analyze data. Four themes emerged: (a) changing behaviors, (b) acting in the best interest of students, (c) inability to disconnect, and (d) lack of oversight.

In the future, it would benefit educational leaders in public schools to examine the influence social media is having on student behavior and school discipline. Based on this study and potential future studies, policymakers at federal, state, and local levels could have an opportunity to learn from the shared experiences of administrators and the challenges they face in managing behaviors with specific policies and procedures to guide them. This could lead to the creation of educational courses or activities for helping students and parents understand the ramifications of social media posts and interactions. Overall, this research provides a foundation for schools, communities, and educational leaders to expand their knowledge base and implement best practices that address the complex disciplinary issues facing administrators in middle and high schools today.

References

- Al-Naibi, I., Al-Jabri, M., & Al-Kalbani, I. (2018). Promoting students' paragraph writing using Edmodo: An action research. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, *17*(1), 130-143.
- Andrzejewski, M. E., Schochet, T. L., Feit, E. C., Harris, R., McKee, B. L., & Kelley, A. E. (2011). A comparison of adult and adolescent rat behavior in operant learning, extinction, and behavioral paradigms. *Behavioral Neuroscience*, *125*(1), 93-105.
- Balakrishnan, V., Teoh, K. K., & Liew, T. K. (2017). Social media and their use in learning: A comparative analysis between Australia and Malaysia from the learners' perspectives. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, *33*(1), 81-97.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. Freeman.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory of mass communication. *Media Psychology*, *3*, 265-299. doi:10.1207/S1532785XMEP0303_03
- Bartow, S. M. (2014). Teaching with social media: disrupting present day public education. *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association*, *50*(1), 36-64. doi: 10.1080/00131946.2013.866954
- Barry, C. T., Sidoti, C. L., Briggs, S. M., Reiter, S. R., & Lindsey, R. A. (2017). Adolescent social media use and mental health from adolescent and parent perspectives. *Journal of Adolescence*, *61*, 1-11. doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2017.08.005

- Bartholomew, S. R., & Reeve, E. (2018). Middle school student perceptions and actual use of mobile devices: highlighting disconnects in student planned and actual usage of mobile devices in class. *Educational Technology & Society, 21*(1), 48-58.
- Bethel School District No. 403 et al. v. Fraser*, 478 675 (S. Ct. 1986).
- Bittar, C., & Soares, A. (2020). Media and eating behavior in adolescence. *Brazilian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 28*(1), 291-308. doi:10.4322/2526-8910.ctoAR1920
- Bowen, G. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal, 9*(2), 27-40. doi:10.3316/QRJ0902027
- Bulu, S., Numanoglu, M., & Keser, H. (2016). Examination of the attitudes of middle school students towards social media. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences, 11*(1), 43-48.
- Burnette, C. B., Kwitowski, M. A., & Mazzeo, S. E. (2017). "I don't need people to tell me I'm pretty on social media": A qualitative study of social media and body image in early adolescent girls. *Body Image, 23*, 114-125. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2017.09.001
- Carr, C. T., & Hayes, R. A. (2015). Social media: Defining, developing, and divining. *Atlantic Journal of Communication, 23*(1), 46-65. doi:10.1080/15456870.2015.972282
- Chenail, R. J. (2011). Ten steps for conceptualizing and conducting qualitative research studies in a pragmatically curious manner. *The Qualitative Report, 16*(6), 1713.
- Conn, K. (2010). Cyberbullying and other student technology misuses in K-12 American schools: The legal landmines. *Widener Law Review, 16*(1), 89-100.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.

- Danker, B. (2015). Using flipped classroom approach to explore deep learning in large classrooms. *The IAFOR Journal of Education*, 3(1), 171-186.
- de Calheiros Velozo, J., & Stauder, J. E. A. (2018). Exploring social media use as a composite construct to understand its relation to mental health: A pilot study on adolescents. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 91, 398-402.
- Dunn, J., & Derthick, M. (2013). Digital discipline: We aren't sure if you can say that. *Education Next*, 13(3), 7-7.
- Franchina, V., Abeele, M. V., van Rooij, A. J., Coco, G. L., & de Marez, L. (2018). Fear of missing out as a predictor of problematic social media use and phubbing behavior among Flemish adolescents. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15(10), 1-18. doi:10.3390/ijerph15102319
- Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2015). *Applying educational research: How to read, do, and use research to solve problems of practice* (7th ed). Prentice Hall.
- Galvan, J. L. (2017). *Writing literature reviews: A guide for students of the social and behavioral sciences* (7th ed.). Routledge.
- Garner, B., & Chan, M. (2019). Student perceptions of learning and engagement in a flipped versus lecture course. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 82(3), 357-369. doi:10.1177/2329490619833173
- George, M. J., Russell, M. A., Piontake, J. R., & Odgers, C. L. (2018). Concurrent and subsequent associations between daily digital technology use and high-risk adolescents' mental health symptoms. *Child Development*, 89(1), 78-88. doi:10.1111/cdev.12819

- Gilstrap, D. L. (2007). Phenomenological reduction and emergent design: Complementary methods for leadership narrative interpretation and metanarrative development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 6(1), 1-12.
- Hayes, S., & Burkett, J. R. (2018). Social media and the First Amendment: Educators' trap game. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 21(2), 52-64.
doi:10.1177/1555458917728762
- Hershkovzt, A., & Forkosh-Baruch, A. (2017). Teacher-student relationship and Facebook-mediated communication: Student perceptions. *Comunicar*, 53(25), 91-100.
- Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. W. (2011). Cyberbullying: A review of the legal issues facing educators. *Preventing School Failure*, 55(2), 71-78.
- Hodge, E.-L., Robertson, N., & Sargisson, R. J. (2017). Mobile technologies in schools: The student voice. *Teachers and Curriculum*, 17(2), 71-76.
- Irawan, V. T., Sutadji, E., & Widiyanti. (2017). Blended learning based on schoology: Effort of improvement learning outcome and practicum chance in vocational high school. *Cogent Education*, 4, 1-10.
- Islam, M. N., Salam, A., Bhuiyan, M., & Daud, S. B. (2018). A comparative study on achievement of learning outcomes through flipped classroom and traditional lecture instructions. *International Medical Journal*, 25(5), 314-317.
- Jena, S., & Mohanty, N. (2015). Understanding the mental health of adolescents: An empirical study on school students. *Indian Journal of Health & Wellbeing*, 6(10), 968-972.
- Jones, J. S., & Rice, M. L. (2017). Exploring classroom microblogs to improve writing of middle school students. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, 15(1), 26-41.

- Jones, K. (2013). #zerotolerance #keepingupwiththetimes: How federal zero-tolerance policies failed to promote educational success, deter juvenile legal consequences, and confront new social media concerns in public schools. *Journal of Law & Education*, 42(4), 739-749.
- Kimmons, R. (2015). Online system adoption and K-12 academic outcomes. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 31(4), 378-391. doi:10.1111/jcal.12101
- Lee, J., Lee, Y., & Kim, M. H. (2015). Perceptions of teachers and students towards educational application of SNS and its educational effects in middle school class. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 14(4), 124-134.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE.
- Martin, F., Wang, C., Petty, T., Wang, W., & Wilkins, P. (2018). Middle school students' social media use. *Educational Technology & Society*, 21(1), 213-224.
- Mason, G. S., Shuman, T. R., & Cook, K. E. (2013). Comparing the effectiveness of an inverted classroom to a traditional classroom in an upper-division engineering course. *IEEE Transactions on Education*, 56(4), 430-435.
- McClellan, S. A., Wertheim, E. H., Masters, J., & Paxton, S. J. (2017). A pilot evaluation of a social media literacy intervention to reduce risk factors for eating disorders. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 50(7), 847-851. doi:10.1002/eat.22708
- Merrill, R. A., & Liang, X. (2019). Associations between adolescent media use, mental health, and risky sexual behaviors. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 103, 1-9. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.05.022
- Metzger, R. (2014). Blended learning apps that can make you flip. *Journal of Research and Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary, & Basic Education*, 3(3), 71-73.

- Mingle, J., Adams, M., & Adjei, E. A. (2016). A comparative analysis of social media usage and academic performance in public and private senior high schools. *Journal of Education and Practice, 7*(7), 13-22.
- Morse v. Frederick*, 127 2618 (S. Ct. 2007).
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. SAGE.
- Nesi, J., Choukas-Bradley, S., & Prinstein, M. J. (2018). Transformation of adolescent peer relations in the social media context: Part 1—a theoretical framework and application to dyadic peer relationships. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 21*(3), 267-294. doi:10.1007/s10567-018-0261-x
- Nesi, J., & Prinstein, M. J. (2015). Using social media for social comparison and feedback-seeking: Gender and popularity moderate associations with depressive symptoms. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 43*(8), 1427-1438. doi:10.1007/s10802-015-0020-0
- O'Connor, K. W., Schmidt, G. B., & Drouin, M. (2016). Suspended because of social media? Students' knowledge of university social media policies and practices. *Computers in Human Behavior, 65*, 619-626. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2016.06.001
- Oggers, C. L., & Jensen, M. R. (2020). Annual research review: Adolescent mental health in the digital age: facts, fears, and future directions. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 61*(3), 336-348. doi:10.1111/jcpp.13190
- Oltman, G., & Surface, J. L. (2017). Living education law in 2017: How Facebook, prayer, toilets, and guns impact today's teachers. *The Clearing House, 90*(5), 172-176.
- O'Reilly, M. (2020). Social media and adolescent health: The good, the bad, and the ugly. *Journal of Mental Health, 29*(2), 200-206. doi:10.1080/09638237.2020.1714007

- O'Reilly, M., Dogra, N., Hughes, J., Reilly, P., George, R., & Whiteman, N. (2019). Potential of social media in promoting mental health in adolescents. *Health Promotion International*, 34(5), 981-991. doi:10.1093/heapro/day056
- O'Reilly, M., Dogra, N., Whiteman, N., Hughes, J., Eruyar, S., & Reilly, P. (2018). Is social media bad for mental health and wellbeing? Exploring the perspectives of adolescents. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 23(4), 601-613. doi:10.1177/1359104518775154
- Patton, M. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Pilgrim, K., & Bohnet-Joschko, S. (2019). Selling health and happiness how influencers communicate of Instagram about dieting and exercise: Mixed methods research. *BMC Public Health*, 19(1), 1-9. doi:10.1186/s12889-019-7387-8
- Rice, E., Petering, R., Rhoades, H., Winetrobe, H., Goldbach, J., Plant, A., Montoya, J., & Kordic, T. (2015). Cyberbullying perpetration and victimization among middle-school students. *Research and Practice*, 105(3), 66-72.
- Rodgers, R. F., Slater, A., Gordon, C. S., McLean, S. A., Jarman, H. K., & Paxton, S. J. (2020). A biopsychosocial model of social media use and body image concerns, disordered eating, and muscle-building behaviors among adolescent girls and boys. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 49(2), 399-409. doi:10.1007/s10964-019-01190-0
- Rosenthal, T. L., & Bandura, A. (1978). Psychological modeling: Theory and practice. In S. L. Garfield & A. E. Bergin (Eds.), *Handbook of psychotherapy and behavior change: An empirical analysis* (2nd ed., pp. 621-658). Academic Press.

- Rousseau, A., & Eggermont, S. (2018). Media ideals and early adolescents' body image: Selective avoidance or selective exposure? *Body Image, 26*, 50-59.
doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.06.001
- Salomon, I. & Brown, C. S. (2019). The selfie generation: Examining the relationship between social media use and early adolescent body image. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 39*(4), 539-560.
- Sampasa-Kanyinga, H., Chaput, J., & Hamilton, H. A. (2019). Social media use, school connectedness, and academic performance among adolescents. *The Journal of Primary Prevention, 40*(2), 189-211. doi:10.1007/s10935-019-00543-6
- Schunk, D. H. (2016). *Learning theories: an educational perspective—With access* (7th ed.). Pearson.
- Scott, C. E., Green, L. E., Etheridge, D. L. (2016). A comparison between flipped and lecture-based instruction in the calculus classroom. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education, 8*(2), 252-264.
- Shah, J., Das, P., Muthiah, N., & Milanaik, R. (2019). New age technology and social media: Adolescent psychosocial implications and the need for protective measures. *Current Opinion Pediatrics, 31*(1), 148-156. doi:10.1097/MOP.0000000000000714
- Sheridan, P. M. (2015). "Tracking off-campus speech: Can public schools monitor students' social media?" *Southern Law Review, 25*(1), 57-76.
- Shimoga, S. V., Erlyana, E., & Rebello, V. (2019). Associations of social media use with physical activity and sleep adequacy among adolescents: Cross-sectional survey. *Journal of Medical Internet Research, 21*(6), e14290. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.2196/14290>

- Skinner, B. F. (1938). *The behavior of organisms: an experimental analysis*. Appleton-Century.
- Skinner, B. F. (1953). *Science and human behavior*. Free Press.
- Skinner, B. F. (1975). The steep and thorny way to a science of behavior. *American Psychologist*, 30(1), 42-49.
- Skinner, B. F. (1988). The operant side of behavior therapy. *Journal of Behavioral Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, 19(3), 171-179.
- Skinner, B. F. (1989). The origins of cognitive thought. *American Psychologist*, 44(1), 13-18.
- Steinmetz, A. (2013). Lecture is dead in the 21st century. *Ohio Social Studies Review*, 50(2), 2-4.
- Sugimoto, N., Nishida, A., Ando, S., Usami, S., Toriyama, R., Morimoto, Y., Koike, S., Yamasaki, S., Kanata, S., Fujikawa, S., Furukawa, T. A., Sasaki, T., Hiraiwa-Hasegawa, M., & Kasai, K. (2019). Use of social networking sites and desire for slimness among 10-year-old girls and boys: A population-based birth cohort study. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 53(2), 288-295. doi:10.1002/eat.23202
- Tang, S., & Patrick, M. E. (2018). Technology and interactive social media use among 8th and 10th graders in the U.S. and associations with homework and school grades. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 86, 34-44. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.04.025>
- Theofanidis, D., & Fountouki, A. (2019). Limitations and delimitations in the research process. *Perioperative Nursing*, 7(3), 155-162. <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2552022>
- Tiggemann, M., & Slater, A. (2017). Facebook and body image concern in adolescent girls: A prospective study. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 50(1), 80-83. doi:10.1002/eat.22640

Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, 393 US 503 (1969).

[https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/search/?pdmfid=1516831&crd=42698838-2762-44a3-8317-346667be1882&pdsearchterms=Tinker+v.+Des+Moines+Independent+Community+School+District%2C+393+US+503+\(1969\)&pdstartin=hlct%3A1%3A1&pdtypeofsearch=searchboxclick&pdsearchtype=SearchBox&pdqtype=and&pdpsf=&pdquerytemplateid=&ecomp=g7pgkkk&earg=pdpsf&prid=0909f5a3-dfe9-45e2-a237-611f883b6be5](https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/search/?pdmfid=1516831&crd=42698838-2762-44a3-8317-346667be1882&pdsearchterms=Tinker+v.+Des+Moines+Independent+Community+School+District%2C+393+US+503+(1969)&pdstartin=hlct%3A1%3A1&pdtypeofsearch=searchboxclick&pdsearchtype=SearchBox&pdqtype=and&pdpsf=&pdquerytemplateid=&ecomp=g7pgkkk&earg=pdpsf&prid=0909f5a3-dfe9-45e2-a237-611f883b6be5)

Tuzel, S., & Hobbs, R. (2017). The use of social media and popular culture to advance cross-cultural understanding. *Comunicar*, 25(51), 63-72.

Underwood, M. K., & Ehrenreich, S. E. (2017). The power and the pain of adolescents' digital communication: Cyber victimization and the perils of lurking. *American Psychologist*, 72(2), 144-158. doi:10.1037/a0040429

Vannucci, A., & Ohannessian, C. M. (2019). Social media use subgroups differentially predict psychosocial well-being during early adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 48(8), 1469-1493. doi:10.1007/s10964-019-01060-9

Virginia Department of Education. (2018). *School quality profiles*.

<http://schoolquality.virginia.gov/schools/>

Virginia Department of Education. (2019). *School quality profiles*.

<http://schoolquality.virginia.gov/schools/>

Virginia Department of Education. (2020). *School quality profiles*.

<http://schoolquality.virginia.gov/schools/>

Virginia Department of Education. (2021). *School quality profiles*.

<http://schoolquality.virginia.gov/schools/>

Virginia Department of Education. (2022). *School quality profiles*.

<http://schoolquality.virginia.gov/schools/>

Wilksch, S. M., O'Shea, A., Ho, P., Byrne, S., & Wade, T. D. (2020). The relationship between social media use and disordered eating in young adolescents. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 53, 96-106. doi:10.1002/eat.23198

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 10, 2021

Stephanie Cox
Karla Swafford

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-861 EXAMINING ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ADOLESCENT SCHOOL DISCIPLINE: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Stephanie Cox, Karla Swafford,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

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

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

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

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate degree. The purpose of my research is to understand the shared experiences of middle and high school administrators as they navigate managing student discipline and behavior as it is influenced by outside interactions on social media. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be middle or high school administrators within the school district. If you are willing to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview and focus group to share your experience with student social media use and interactions, student behavior, and managing school discipline in the age of social media. You will also be asked to provide a copy of your school's code of conduct and/or discipline policy manual. Member checks will also occur, which will allow you to verify that the information captured in the interview and focus group is accurate. It should take approximately 30-60 minutes for each interview and 45 minutes-1 hour for the focus group. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but you will be given a pseudonym so that your information will remain confidential.

In order to participate, please click here <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6MFJ7BL> to complete the online survey or contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

After reviewing the screening survey, I will contact you via the email you provide to let you know if you have been selected as a participant. If you are selected, a link to the consent document will be provided in that email. 1. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please click the button to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Cox,
Doctoral Student

[REDACTED]

Appendix C: Screening Survey

Below are the questions included in the screening survey that was shared via SurveyMonkey with the following link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6MFJ7BL>.

The Perceived Influence of Social Media Phenomenological Study Screening Survey

1. What role do you serve at your school?

- Principal
- Assistant Principal
- Other (please specify)

2. Which of the following best describes the school at which you serve?

- Elementary School
- Middle School
- High School
- Other (please specify)

3. Does your school or school district currently have policies in the Code of Conduct regarding student social media activity?

- Yes
- No

4. How often do you encounter disciplinary issues that originate with student social media activity?

- Every day
- A few times a week
- About once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month
- Other (please specify)

5. Do you believe that social media influences student behavior and, thus, school discipline?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

6. Are you willing to virtually participate in a research study and share your perceptions and experiences regarding adolescent social media use and its possible influence on student behavior and school discipline?

- Yes
- No

Appendix D: Emails to Selected and Potential Participants

Dear [Recipient]:

Thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my research study. A consent form is attached below. Please electronically sign in the designated spaces to provide your consent to participate in the study. You have scheduled your interview for the following date and time:

_____. You will receive a Zoom invitation via email. Our focus group will meet via Zoom on [INSERT DATE] at [INSERT TIME]. You will receive an email with Zoom information for this as well. Again, thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, and I look forward to hearing about your experiences.

Sincerely,

Stephanie N. Cox,

Doctoral Student

Dear [Recipient]:

Thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my research study. At this time, I have reached the maximum number of participants and will not require your service. However, should a participant decide to leave the study, I may contact you again to solicit your participation. Thank you for your interest in this study.

Sincerely,

Stephanie N. Cox,

Doctoral Student

Appendix E: Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: Examining Administrators' Perceived Influence of Social Media on Adolescent School Discipline: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Stephanie Cox, Graduate Student, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study on middle and high school administrators' perceptions of social media on adolescent school discipline. You were selected as a potential participant because you serve as administrator in a middle or high school in southeastern Virginia. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of this study is to discover middle and high school administrators' perceptions on how or if social media influences discipline and student behavior in their respective schools.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to participate in the study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in a one-on-one Zoom interview that will be recorded. This will last between thirty and sixty minutes.
2. Participate in a focus group with other school administrators where you will be encouraged to share your experiences and opinions regarding social media use and your perception of its influence on student behavior and school discipline. The focus group interview will also be conducted and recorded through Zoom and will last approximately 60 minutes.
3. Provide a copy of your school's code of conduct or discipline policy manual for review.
4. Participate in transcript review of the interviews and focus group as part of the member-checking process.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive any direct benefits from participating in this study. However, you may benefit from taking part in a collaborative conversation with other administrators during the focus group to discuss how social media influences discipline in their respective schools.

Benefits to society include learning from the shared experiences of middle and high school administrators as they pertain to social media, adolescent behavior, and school discipline.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal. This means they are equal to the risks you encounter on a daily basis.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. In any report that I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share that data, I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. I will assign pseudonyms to each participant and site.
- Data will be stored on a password-protected computer. Recordings will be stored on a thumb drive that will be secured in a safe. Data may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer and backed up on a USB thumb drive, which will be stored in a safe. All recordings will be stored for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

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

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

The researcher conducting this study is Stephanie N. Cox. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have any questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Karla Swafford at [REDACTED].

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

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

Your Consent

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

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

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

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix F: Interview Questions

Stephanie N. Cox

Examining the Perceived Influence of Social Media on Adolescent School Discipline: A Phenomenological Study

1. Please state your name and with which school you are employed.
2. How long have you been an administrator?
3. Please describe your roles and responsibilities at this school.
4. What do you consider to be your most rewarding experiences as a middle or high school administrator?
5. What do you consider to be your most challenging experiences as a middle or high school administrator?
6. How did a typical day look prior to the pandemic? What does a typical day look like now?
7. How would you describe the integration of technology in this school prior to the pandemic? Would you classify it as a positive or negative experience? Why?
8. How often do you believe your students used social media both in school and out of school prior to the pandemic?
9. What is your perception of social media's influence on student behavior and discipline?
10. What are the existing discipline policies and procedures concerning social media interactions that affect the learning environment?
11. How do you manage discipline issues that arise if there is no existing written policy?
12. Please share anything else you believe would be beneficial for the purpose of the study.

Appendix G: Focus Group Questions

Stephanie N. Cox

Examining the Perceived Influence of Social Media on Adolescent School Discipline: A Phenomenological Study

1. Please introduce yourself to the group.
2. Please describe your current roles and responsibilities at your school.
3. What experiences have you had concerning social media in your school?
4. What culture has your school established regarding adolescent social media use?
5. What is your perception of social media's influence on adolescent behavior?
6. Please provide an example of an instance in which you perceived social media to have positively influenced a student's behavior.
7. Please provide an example of an instance in which you perceived social media to have negatively influenced a student's behavior.
8. What is your perception of social media as it pertains to discipline at your school?
9. How does your school manage disciplinary issues that originate on social media?
10. How do you use the school's discipline manual or code of conduct to guide your decisions in determining appropriate consequences for discipline? How does this change when dealing with social media issues?
11. As social media becomes more prevalent, what would you like to see concerning school management as it concerns social media and discipline?
12. Please share anything else you believe would be beneficial for the purpose of the study.

Appendix H: Sample Interview Transcript Approval Letter

Dear [Recipient]:

Thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my research study. In this email, you will find an attached copy of the transcript of your one-on-one interview. I ask that you please review this document within the next two weeks and let me know if you have any questions or comments. If I do not hear back from you within the next couple of weeks, I will assume that you are satisfied with the transcribed document. Thank you again for your help!

Sincerely,

Stephanie N. Cox,

Doctoral Student

Appendix I: Sample Focus Group Transcript Approval Letter

Dear [Recipient]:

Thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my research study. In this email, you will find an attached copy of the transcript of the focus group interview. I ask that you please review this document within the next two weeks and let me know if you have any questions or comments. If I do not hear back from you within the next couple of weeks, I will assume that you are satisfied with the transcribed document. Thank you again for your help!

Sincerely,

Stephanie N. Cox,

Doctoral Student

Appendix J: Reflexive Journal

February 17, 2021	In my experience in an administrative role in the secondary setting, I have seen firsthand how class disruptions and student altercations can result from a social media post that originated outside of the school setting. However, the situation boils over once those students see each other in person. I must remember that while this has been my experience, my goal is not to prove my experience to be true but rather to explore whether this is a shared experience among other area administrators.
August—December 2021	I applied to conduct my study in the three proposed school divisions. I check in with them monthly. Independent District approved the study the quickest. At the end of the semester, I received approval from Unified District and denial from Northern District. This has been extremely frustrating as I have not been able to complete any more work on the study.
January 2022	I have submitted the application to conduct my study in Southern District. I'm hopeful this process is quicker. I have sent recruitment emails to potential participants in other districts. After gaining consent, I will schedule interviews.
February 28, 2022	Southern District approved my study. I will begin reaching out to participants.
March 7, 2022— Calvin interview	I have had similar experiences with the difficulty of changing the mindsets of teachers in the building. It can make it extremely difficult, especially in situations in which there are disagreements about disciplinary actions. It seems that this administrator can only address social media issues if they affect the school environment. He shared that it is a tricky situation, and I'd have to agree with him.
March 7, 2022— John interview	I also believe building relationships is the key to everything in a school building. I think it's interesting to see the perception of the effect the pandemic had on student behavior. There are definitely opportunities to go deeper here. The emphasis on the need for education is very impactful.
March 16, 2022— Sarah interview	Sarah was so kind and offered to help me with the coding process and offered advice on qualitative data analysis. She even asked about my central research question to ensure she addressed the research. I'm so appreciative of the help. Sarah is also the only participant I was able to secure from Unified District. So far, I'm noticing that administrators are sharing similar experiences and challenges.
March 23, 2022— Cassidy interview	Cassidy was very assertive and passionate about this topic. She has strong opinions about social media and what it's doing to our students. She shared that students have zero socialization and conflict-resolution skills. Like the other administrators, she applies codes to the situations presented to her, but she tries harder to address the online activity. Cassidy used very strong language, such as when she stated that social

	media is destroying our kids. This will be important to consider when analyzing her transcription for themes.
March 29, 2022— Stephen interview	Stephen was the first administrator to discuss the impact of social media on students' mental health. I wonder if this is unique to high school. Other administrators discussed the challenge of dealing with adults' mindsets, but Stephen is the first to address the problems with adult/teacher usage of social media. This is something I hadn't considered as I've been so narrowly focused on students.
March 30, 2022— Isaiah interview	Isaiah is the first administrator to embrace social media. He recognized the challenges but focused more on how social media can be used as a communication tool and a way to connect with students. I absolutely loved the example of doing TikToks with students at their awards ceremonies, and I even shared my own instructional example of leveraging TikTok for research projects.
April 26, 2022— Michael interview	Michael emphasized the inability of students to disconnect from social media. Other administrators acknowledged this as a problem, but Michael really stressed its impact on student behavior and mental health. He also stressed the need for building relationships with students and educating them. The need for education is starting to be a common theme.
May 2022—July 2022	With state testing and end-of-the-year wrap-up, I haven't been able to secure participants. I'm still sending recruitment emails and reminders. Hopefully, I can get some more interviews scheduled soon. In the meantime, I am preparing to interview for my administrative role.
July 5, 2022	I began my job as assistant principal today. I will need to be more conscientious about bracketing, especially in the fall when students return.
July 14, 2022— Marcus interview	Marcus is convinced that the key to fixing the challenges he faces is through educating students about the legalities and consequences of social media posts. He believes policy has a long way to go to catch up to the technology we see today, and I have to agree with him. Looking at these documents, administrators have very little to guide them.
July 28, 2022— Jessica interview	Jessica openly shared her bias against social media and her hesitation to use it. She focused more on the need for parental involvement and oversight. This is another commonality emerging among the administrators.
August 3, 2022— Jeffrey interview	Jeffrey was excited to share his experiences. He shared something that really stuck with me. Jeffrey, like others, talked about how students' identities are wrapped up in social media. However, he discussed how students are having to balance and navigate two lives, their social media persona and their real-world identity. The tension of these diametrically opposing identities could be causing some of the behavior problems administrators are seeing.
August 8, 2022— Jarrod interview	Jarrod was very succinct. He was the first administrator to share frustration with public school politics. He emphasized building relationships as the key to adjusting student behavior. He also

	recognized social media as an influence on student behavior and the need for education and parental oversight.
August 17, 2022— Eliza interview	Eliza focused on building relationships and on student mental health. She talked about how students never get a break and the impact this can have on their mental health. She talked about more positive aspects of social media and how it can help with discipline by providing intel. This was very interesting.
August 19, 2022— High School focus group	I was only able to secure three administrators for the high school focus group. I sent out three different Doodles, each with four or five different appointment times. Options included during school hours, after school hours, and on days off. After three attempts to get a consensus, I picked the date for the majority of the participants, and three showed up for the virtual focus group interview. I'm disappointed, but they shared interesting perspectives and were in agreement with one another.
August 23, 2022— Middle School focus group	I was only able to secure four administrators for the middle school focus group. I sent out three different Doodles, each with four or five different appointment times. Options included during school hours, after school hours, and on days off. After three attempts to get a consensus, I picked the date for the majority of the participants, and four showed up for the virtual focus group interview. I'm disappointed, but they shared interesting perspectives and were in agreement with one another.

Appendix K: Audit Trail

August 10, 2021	IRB Approval
December 6, 2021	Research study approved by Unified School District
December 7, 2021	Research study declined by Northern School District
December 8, 2021	Research study approved by Independent School District
February 28, 2022	Research study approved by Southern School District
March 7, 2022	Zoom interview with Calvin
March 7, 2022	Zoom interview with John
March 16, 2022	Zoom interview with Sarah
March 23, 2022	Zoom interview with Cassidy
March 29, 2022	Zoom interview with Stephen
March 30, 2022	Zoom interview with Isaiah
April 26, 2022	Zoom interview with Michael
May 2022—July 2022	Attempting to solicit more participants
July 5, 2022	Job change—began role as assistant principal—important consideration for bracketing
July 14, 2022	Zoom interview with Marcus
July 28, 2022	Zoom interview with Jessica
August 3, 2022	Zoom interview with Jeffrey
August 8, 2022	Zoom interview with Jarrod
August 17, 2022	Zoom interview with Eliza
August 19, 2022	High school focus group via Zoom
August 23, 2022	Middle school focus group via Zoom
September 2022	Downloaded NVivo; began learning the platform
October—December 2022	Uploaded files and edited transcriptions; coded transcriptions
December 2022—January 2023	Described findings and details in Chapters 4 and 5