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Walden University
2018

Abstract

The Experience of Parenting Stress in Parents of Twice-Exceptional Children

by

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MSW, University of Denver, 2008

BA, California State University, Northridge, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Parenting stress (PS) is a phenomenon experienced by all parents to varying degrees due to the demands of meeting a child's needs. This distinct type of stress is caused by an imbalance between the perceived demands of parenting and the perceived coping resources available to parents. The construct of twice-exceptionality (2E) is defined as the co-occurrence of giftedness and disability or possessing both high cognitive abilities and at least 1 of 13 potential disabilities identified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004. The purpose of this study was to understand how PS is experienced by parents of children who have been identified with 2E. The theoretical perspectives of stress appraisal, coping, and attribution guided this study and provided a framework for understanding the lived experiences of parents and the meaning they ascribe to these experiences. The goals of the study were accomplished through in-depth interviews with 13 participants, an extensive literature review, and reflective journaling. Interview data were analyzed using the phenomenological techniques of epoche, bracketing, horizontalization, and imaginative variation, and several relevant themes and subthemes were developed. High levels of PS described by the parents in this study indicate that further research is indicated for better understanding and serving the significant needs of this population. The social implications of this research include raising awareness of PS and 2E; increasing the potential for positive outcomes for children and families; and addressing misconceptions concerning giftedness, gender bias in the perceptions of parental roles, and the impact of PS on family systems.

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Dedication

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my greatest champions. To my mother, Cheri Campbell, for providing me with a lifetime of unconditional love and encouragement. To my husband, Jason V. Wells, for his tireless love, patience, and support. And to my son, Jack, the extraordinary boy who inspires me and fills my heart with love, joy, and wonder.

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I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the participants who shared their stories with me for this dissertation. I hope that I have adequately described this phenomenon based on your stories.

I would like to thank the members of my committee: Martha Giles, chairwoman; Peggy Samples; Bonnie Nastasi; and also my first chair, Keonya Booker, for their endless patience as I forged this path. I'm grateful also for my cohort of fellow doctoral students, who inspired me to keep trudging forward when I was ready to give up.

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Without the help and hospitality of Christine Turo-Shields I might never have completed this study. Christine and Dave hosted me in their home while I completed several out-of-state interviews, providing food, transportation, and support.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables vi

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study 1

Background 1

Significance 3

Theoretical Framework 5

Research Questions 6

Nature of the Study 7

Limitations 7

Assumptions 8

Scope and Delimitations 9

Implications of the Study 9

Summary 10

Chapter 2: Literature Review 11

Parenting Stress 11

Literature Search Strategy 12

Review of Literature 12

Parenting Stress Defined 13

Overview of Twice-Exceptionality (2E) 22

Understanding 2E 22

Conceptualizing Giftedness and Disability 24

Identification of 2E 25
Parenting Stress in Parents of Children with 2E 26
The Relationship between Parenting Stress and 2E 26
Predictors of Parenting Stress 27
Effects of Parenting Stress 29
Treating Parenting Stress. 31
The Experience of Parenting Stress 31
Marital Issues 32
Mother-Blame and Gender Roles 32
The Importance of Fathers in Child Development 33
Relevant Theoretical Perspectives 36
Attribution Theory 36
Stress Appraisal Theory 38
Coping 38
Phenomenology 40
Summary 40
Chapter 3: Research Method 42
Background 42
Research Design and Rationale 43
Role of the Researcher 44
Methodology 47

Participant Selection Logic 47
Data Collection 50
Data Analysis Plan 51
Issues of Trustworthiness 53
Ethical Procedures 53
Summary 55
Chapter 4: Results 57
Introduction 57
Locating Research Participants 57
Data Collection Processes 58
Reflective Journal 60
Data Maintenance and Security 60
Research Participants 60
Research Questions 63
Interview Questions 63
In-Depth Interviews and Coding 64
Development of Themes and Subthemes 64
Findings 68
Structural Description 114
Child Characteristics 114
Appraisal 115

Attribution and Meaning-Making 116
Misperceptions by Others 116
Trauma 117
Coping 117
Educational Concerns 118
Relationships 118
Summary of Structural Description 119
Discrepant and Nonconforming Data 119
Evidence of Quality 125
Credibility 125
Transferability 126
Dependability 126
Confirmability 127
Summary 127
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations 129
Introduction 129
Overview 129
Parenting Stress and 2E Children 130
Interpretation of the Findings 131
Theme 1: Child Characteristics 131
Theme 2: Appraisal 133

Theme 3: Attribution and Meaning-Making 135
Theme 4: Misperceptions by Others 136
Theme 5: Trauma 137
Theme 6: Coping 137
Theme 7: Educational Concerns 138
Theme 8: Relationships 139
Theoretical Frameworks 140
Stress Appraisal Theory 140
Coping 140
Attribution Theory 141
Limitations of the Study 142
Implications for Social Change 142
Recommendations for Further Study 143
Dissemination of Findings 144
Researcher's Critical Reflection 144
My Experience with Conducting this Study 145
Conclusion 147
References 149
Appendix A: Screening Questions 167
Appendix B: Recruitment E-mail 168

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Overview 61

Table 2. Types of Qualifying Exceptionalities……..62

Table 3. Major Themes and Subthemes……....…….66

Table 4. Thematic Coding Frequencies from QDA Miner…….....67

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background

All parents experience parenting stress (PS) in various degrees because raising a child is a demanding endeavor and at minimum includes providing a child's basic needs such as food, shelter, and emotional support (Deater-Deckard, 2004). Children present a new set of challenges to parents from birth because they are entirely dependent upon their caregivers and require constant attention. Children with twice-exceptionality (2E) need all of the care of a neurotypical child, but parents must learn to handle situational demands above and beyond what can typically be expected (Neumann, 2005; Speirs Neumeister, Yssel, & Burney, 2013). The increased PS experienced by parents of children with 2E is a significant concern because of the impact of PS on family functioning in larger populations, including raising the possibility of negative outcomes for the child with 2E (Östberg & Hagekull, 2000; Theule, Wiener, Rogers, & Marton, 2011). Other consequences of PS include parental depression, marital conflicts, poorer physical health, and increased child behavioral problems (Deater-Deckard, 2004; Neece, Green, & Baker, 2012).

PS is caused by an imbalance between the perceived demands of parenting and the perceived resources available and involves behavioral, cognitive, and affective components (Mash & Johnston, 1990; Raphael, Zhang, Liu, & Giardino, 2009). The phenomenon of 2E is marked by the presence of high cognitive ability as well as one of 13 potential disabilities identified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education

Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 (Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014). Reis et al. (2014) estimated that there are at least 300,000 students in the United States identified with 2E, but the actual number of 2E students is unknown, due to widespread underreporting and a lack of services for gifted children in the United States (Latz & Adams, 2011).

Latz and Adams (2011) described a systemic bias affecting students of racial and ethnic minorities and the lack of educators specializing in gifted education as factors in the inaccurate identification and reporting of gifted and 2E students. A masking effect also complicates identification because children with 2E may appear not to have high cognitive abilities because their disability impedes their performance, or vice versa (Bianco & Leech, 2010). Some children are never identified as either gifted or disabled, and in these cases, children are unlikely to receive services or support for either exceptionality, increasing PS due to parents' awareness that their children are not getting appropriate services for their emotional or educational needs (Bianco & Leech, 2010; Speirs Neumeister et al., 2013). Reis et al. (2014) presented a definition of 2E describing the phenomenon as a co-existence of high ability and talent as well as the challenges of disabilities. Silverman (1997) elucidated the construct of asynchronous development as a qualitative definition of giftedness related to uneven development rather than potential or achievement.

Current models of PS address its chronic nature and the adverse effects of long-term exposure to stress, such as depression and anxiety (Deater-Deckard, 2004). There is a need to help parents gain the skills and support to manage their demanding lives and

learn to cope with stress effectively. The effects of PS can be devastating. Parents of children with 2E are likely to experience very high rates of PS compared to parents of neurotypical children or children with a single exceptionality due to their children's unique needs (Singer, 2000).

Significance

PS is a distinct type of stress occurring when a parent is faced with a demanding situation and lacks confidence in their ability to handle the stressor (Deater-Deckard, 2004; Östberg & Hagekull, 2000). The phenomenon is unique and subjective for all parents, but there are common features experienced specifically by parents of children with 2E. These experiences relate to the asynchronous development found in gifted children combined with the potential developmental issues of various disabilities (Silverman & Miller, 2009; Speirs Neumeister et al., 2013). Parents of gifted children often realize that their child is different based on their early mastery of developmental milestones, and parents of children with disabilities may be aware that their children are developing at a different rate than other children their age (Silverman & Miller, 2009; Speirs Neumeister et al., 2013). Parents of children with 2E experience these issues concurrently, dealing with not only how to help their child, but also navigating the biases of teachers, doctors, and family members. These parents sometimes need to take an assertive role in advocating for their children in order to ensure their needs are met in multiple areas (Besnoy et al., 2015).

The need for an increased understanding of how parents deal with the stress of having a child with 2E is evident by the dearth of literature on this phenomenon, especially the lack of studies including fathers as participants. Over 20 years ago, Phares (1993) made a strong case for increased research on fathers. A decade later, Singh (2003) followed up with a similar call for studies, but the literature discussing fathers and parenting stress remains sparse. The persistent gender bias toward mother-blame and the devalued status of fathers demands that this issue be addressed through research exploring and describing the feelings and needs of fathers.

The vast majority of the research on PS has been conducted with mothers, reflecting a gender bias that is deeply ingrained in American culture (Keown, 2012). This bias results from factors such as gender role expectations and causal attributions about children with nonconforming behavior (e.g., hyperactivity is the result of poor parenting; (Singh, 2004). There is a long history of negative perceptions of mothers whose children are different and display behaviors outside of the norm, perpetuated by misconceptions about the relationship between mothers' competence and the causes of their children's differences (Silverman & Miller, 2009; Singh, 2004). In terms of public perception of mothers of children with disabilities, there is a persistent belief that poor parenting is to blame for children's behavioral issues in the cases of children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or other disruptive behavior disorders (Singh, 2004).

Fathers play a critical part in their children's healthy development (Lamb, 2010). Studies have shown that fathers struggle with the acceptance of their children's status as gifted based on their beliefs about giftedness or disabilities (Chen, Seipp, & Johnston, 2008; Mudrak, 2011; Silverman & Miller, 2009). However, there is a lack of information about their lived experiences with PS. Fathers' perceptions and experiences may have a significant impact on their levels of PS, the way they interact with their children, and their beliefs regarding the causes of their children's behaviors (Singh, 2004).

Understanding the experience of PS in parents of children with 2E has significant implications for social change. Potentially, this increased understanding may increase positive outcomes for children with 2E, considered the most underserved and misunderstood population of students (Bianco & Leech, 2010; Latz & Adams, 2011). Increased awareness of PS and 2E has the potential to alter misconceptions about mothers and fathers that sustain gender bias, such as the belief that fathers are inherently less competent parents compared to mothers (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998; Mueller, Fuermaier, Koerts, & Tucha, 2012). Engaging in further research about parents' lived experiences with PS will add to the knowledge base, address gender bias, and increase understanding of PS and 2E on family systems (Keown, 2012; Phares, 1992; Speirs Neumeister et al., 2013).

Theoretical Framework

Theories concerning stress, coping, and attribution provided the foundation for this study and guided my exploration of PS in parents of children with 2E. The two main

theories that served as the framework for this study were Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) appraisal theory of stress and coping and Weiner's theory of attribution (1985). Coping was also applied to this study as related to parental meaning making (Park, 2011).

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) appraisal theory of stress and coping advanced the concept that stress is transactional and involves a bidirectional relationship between person and environment. Stress results from an individual's cognitive appraisal of an event, determining its potential impact on well-being and their perceived ability to cope with the event (Lazarus, 2006). Appraisals vary widely among individuals due to each person's perception of how serious an event is and what resources they have available to cope with the situation (Lazarus, 2006).

Park and Folkman (1997) addressed the role of meaning in the coping process in both global and situation contexts, including the reappraisal process and the importance of congruence between global and situational meaning in order to adjust to stressful events. Weiner's (1985) attribution theory addresses causal perceptions, the reasons people ascribe to why events occur, which drive motivation and behavior. This theory posits that people have an innate need to make sense of their environment and in order to do this they seek explanations (Eberly, Holley, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2011).

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

1. What is the experience of PS as described by parents of children with 2E?
2. How does this population of parents cope with the demands of PS?

Nature of the Study

Quantitative research has produced a large amount of data about PS, especially from the maternal perspective, but qualitative research allows for a lens that provides a different way of viewing the issue, facilitating new discoveries about the phenomenon. There are many frameworks available for qualitative researchers designing a research study, including case studies, grounded theory, autoethnography, and phenomenology, and each allows for a unique perspective (Patton, 2014). In the current literature, there are no studies providing a rich description of PS in parents of 2E children; therefore, I conducted this study with a qualitative focus using the framework of existential phenomenology. The descriptive nature of phenomenological research is an ideal approach to studying PS due to its capacity to extract meaning from human experiences (see Moustakas, 1994). Focusing on the essence of being the parent of a child with 2E allowed me to gather a detailed description and analysis of the lived experiences of this population. I collected data through semistructured interviews with parents of children with 2E and analyzed their responses using descriptive and thematic coding with the goal of providing a description that captures the essential experiences of the participants (see Saldaña, 2009; Van Manen, 1990). I also used empirically pertinent literature that is relevant to the topic to bolster my analysis and results.

Limitations

This study was limited to parents willing to discuss their experiences of parenting a child with 2E. This restriction may have unintentionally omitted parents who were

reluctant to share because of feelings of doubt or shame regarding their child's 2E status. The restricted sample size and sample selection were also possible limitations of this study (see Creswell, 2007). The use of semistructured interviews may have been limiting because of the potential for a researcher to influence the participants during the interview process (Creswell, 2007). Self-reporting is a limitation because of the possibility of inaccurate information being shared or information being omitted by the participants, possibly from a reluctance to speak openly and honestly. Careful objectivity during data collection and analysis was necessary for me to lessen the risk of researcher bias.

Assumptions

Reviewing the literature led to several assumptions that I addressed in this study. One assumption was that parents struggle to deal with the stigma attached to having a child identified as gifted and disabled. Parents have very personal ideas regarding the definition and meaning of giftedness (Mudrak, 2011). When their children appear to be "bright" as well as struggling with an issue such as a learning disorder, it challenges these beliefs (Silverman & Miller, 2009). Another assumption was that gender bias and mother-blame leads to increased PS in mothers and fathers. The potential results include reduced feelings of self-efficacy and a negative parenting experience (Whalen, Odgers, Reed, & Henker, 2011). A third assumption was that gender bias has devalued the role of fathers in parenting children with special needs and that fathers are not viewed as possessing the same level of competence as mothers and are, therefore, expected to shoulder less responsibility for their children (see Deater-Deckard, 2004). I assumed that

parents of children with 2E have difficulty reaching out for support and finding supportive peers, leaving them without an adequate support system. This is problematic because connecting with a social support system has been shown to be an effective coping strategy for parents (Besnoy et al., 2015; Modesto-Lowe, Danforth, & Brooks, 2008). A final assumption was that parents of children with 2E may be more likely to homeschool their children if they discover a lack of services and support available in local schools (see Jolly, Matthews, & Nester, 2013).

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study included parents of children who have been formally identified as gifted learners and diagnosed with at least one of the 13 potential IDEA disabilities. Parents selected for the study were between the ages of 25–64 years old and resided in the United States. This wide age range allowed me to collect a broader variety of experiences based on contextual and generational differences in parenting. The results of this study can guide further research on populations of parents experiencing PS with children who have other special needs or illnesses as well.

Implications of the Study

Understanding the PS experiences of parents has significant implications for social change. This awareness can potentially increase positive outcomes for children with 2E and correct the misconceptions about the nature of giftedness and 2E as a developmental issue. Gendered aspects of parenting may also be positively impacted through awareness (e.g., the belief that fathers are inherently less competent at parenting

than mothers; Doherty et al., 1998). Engaging in further research about parents of children with 2E and PS will add to the knowledge base, potentially reduce gender bias, and can ultimately improve the identification and provision of services for children with 2E.

Summary

PS is a serious issue for parents of children with 2E, but virtually no research has been devoted to investigating parents' lived experiences of this phenomenon. Parents play a critical role in healthy child development, and learning more about their experience of PS can help improve the quality of life of families and outcomes for children with 2E. The stigma felt by parents of children with 2E is an issue that perpetuates and exacerbates PS (Mueller et al., 2012). While much is known about how mothers are affected, there is a need to learn more about the effect of stigma on fathers. In Chapter 2 I will include a review of the pertinent literature on PS and 2E.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Parenting Stress

In this chapter, I will provide an introduction to PS as a distinct type of stress experienced by parents, especially those with children who are different. PS increases in parents of children with special needs, before and after identification (Neumann, 2005). The focus of this study was the experience of PS in parents of children with 2E, the phenomenon of being identified as both gifted and disabled (Bianco & Leech, 2010; Reis et al., 2014). By definition, children labeled with 2E possess more than one exceptionality, and as a child deviates further from the norm, PS increases (Neumann, 2005). In this chapter, I will introduce and define the concept of PS and place it in the context of parenting a 2E child as well as provide an overview of 2E and what aspects of the intersection of giftedness and disability lead to increased stress in parents.

I will also explore various factors involved in PS in this chapter, including the theories of PS, predictors and effects of PS, the experience of PS in mothers and fathers, and the three theoretical perspectives that I used in this dissertation to view and understand the phenomenon of PS in parents of children with 2E. The theories of stress appraisal, coping, and attribution will be discussed and each theory will be briefly explained and related to PS. I will then apply these theories to PS and its effects on families, helping to guide an understanding of how the phenomenon of PS develops and progresses throughout the child-rearing process. My in-depth discussion of the impact of the traits and characteristics of children with 2E will be at the heart of this chapter, in

preparation for my later description of the lived experiences of parents and the meaning they ascribed to their parenting triumphs and struggles.

Literature Search Strategy

I accessed multiple sources of information while conducting the literature search for this dissertation. The general keywords and keyword combinations I used to search for literature included *parenting stress, stress and appraisal, twice-exceptionality, twice-exceptionality and parenting stress, stress and social support and parenting, parenting self-efficacy, giftedness and parenting, phenomenology, giftedness and attribution, parenting and attribution, labeling,* and other combinations of these keywords and search operators. Nearly 2,000 results were found using these keywords, and the search was narrowed for relevance by specifying peer-reviewed articles, restricting the publication dates, and analyzing abstracts. Following this process, I downloaded and reviewed 220 articles. Databases used included PSYCArticles, PSYCBooks, PSYCInfo, SAGE Premiere, SocINDEX, Academic Search Complete, and ProQuest Central. I used the strategy of bibliography mining to locate works cited in articles that did not appear in search results and discovered 23 articles using this method. Relevant books were also used during the literature review process.

Review of Literature

Parenting is a simultaneously rewarding and challenging experience under the best of circumstances, and the resulting stress is considered a normal reaction to the demands of raising children. Undertaking a daunting task, parents are required to not

simply meet children's basic needs, such as food, shelter, and clothing, but also provide affection and emotional support (Deater-Deckard, 2004). Parents have varying levels of resources available to them to meet all of these needs; some examples include financial stability, support systems, and health care coverage. Regardless of the specific circumstances of parents, PS is inevitable for all parents from time to time and to varying extents, and for some parents the PS is chronic.

When the difficulties of parenting intensify due to increased situational demands of challenging child behaviors, PS can lead to parents experiencing higher levels of stress than average (Theule et al., 2011). In the case of parenting a child with exceptionalities, or "special needs," PS can have deleterious effects to the parent's health, their relationships within the family, and exacerbate the conditions that caused PS to increase (Deater-Deckard, 2004; Jolly & Matthews, 2012).

Parenting Stress Defined

PS is an imbalance between a parent's perceived demands of parenting and their perception of the resources available to help them meet those demands (Åsberg, Vogel, & Bowers, 2008; Raphael et al., 2010). Perceiving that their child is different, or more "difficult" than usual (e.g., disruptive, aggressive, noncompliant), can impact agency and lower their feelings of self-efficacy (Mash & Johnston, 1990). Parents struggling with self-efficacy are less confident about their competence in the parenting role and question their ability to handle their child's issues (Mash & Johnston, 1990; Spratt, Saylor, & Macias, 2007).

PS is subjective and based on the unique experiences of each parent. Responses to emotional distress and anxiety influence parents' beliefs about what is "normal" (Deater-Deckard, 2004). Each parent has a different set of expectations about their child's abilities, and when these expectations are not met, the ability to adapt to the child is affected (Deater-Deckard, 2004). The parent-child bond is a psychologically powerful relationship that shapes a child's development and their future outcomes (Deater-Deckard, 2004). When this bond is strained, parents experience stress that is qualitatively different than non-parenting stressors (e.g., occupational), and it is combined with the other stressors that parents deal with in their lives (Creasey & Reese, 1996; Deater-Deckard, 2004).

The phenomenon of PS became a research interest in psychology roughly three decades ago, as a way to better understand the role and function of parents with children who have disabilities (Abidin, 1992; Åsberg et al., 2008). Recognition of the negative impact that PS has on parent-child interactions led researchers to explore the dynamics of PS. Studies revealed that increased tension within family relationships leads to a cycle of chronic stress, diminishing parental competency (Kadesjö, Stenlund, Wels, Gillberg, & Hägglöf, 2002).

Factors influencing PS include a parent's perceived coping resources, social support (including spousal support), socioeconomic status, severity of child's symptoms, other life stressors, and social isolation (Mash & Johnston, 1990; Theule et al., 2011). Gupta (2007) described the data regarding the impact of the type of disability on PS as

inconsistent, and one explanation for the conflicting results is sample homogeneity. Research on PS has been conducted mainly with middle-class, White participants, with non-White groups historically underrepresented. The body of literature on PS is inadequate considering the number of people worldwide who comprise the population considered to be parents because stress is an inexorable component of parenting. Mothers have been vastly overrepresented in PS research, with fathers conspicuously absent from most studies. Examples of the impact of culture on PS can be found in the literature, such as a study on the caregiving experiences of Latino families with children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD; Blanche, Diaz, Baretto, & Cermak, 2015). Blanche, Diaz, Baretto, and Cermak (2015) described the need for more research on PS in diverse populations and listed factors that place Latino families at-risk for poorer outcomes, such as reduced access to health care, clinicians' difficulty in identifying symptoms of ASD in Spanish-speaking families, and traditions that influence parenting style and perceptions. Cousino and Hazen (2013) discussed the issues that parents face with children who live with chronic disability and the role of parents' illness-related stress appraisals and coping on children's outcomes and noted that managing the care of a child with chronic illness is complicated by PS and its effect on family systems.

Theories of parenting stress. The PS construct is rooted in behavioral, cognitive, and affective components that shape parents' perceptions of their ability to cope (Raphael et al., 2010). Theule et al. (2011) found that PS causes parents to have a more difficult time implementing effective interventions to help children and restore balance because of

the psychological consequences of increased stress. Multiple models of PS have been introduced to explain the connection between parent-child interactions and the determinants of parenting behavior in relation to the child (Deault, 2010). A significant limitation of all the models of PS is that research in this field has ignored fathers and is conducted overwhelmingly with mothers as study participants, primarily focusing on the mother-son dyad (Deault, 2010).

Belsky's determinants of parenting process model. Belsky (1984) introduced a process model of the determinants of parenting focused on understanding why "parents parent the way they do," searching beyond the data usually collected in parenting research, such as socioeconomic status or cultural influences, that were frequently used as variables examined in studying parenting (p. 83). The researcher's in-depth, less superficial investigation uncovered potential origins of parenting strategies and behaviors. Belsky identified three primary sources of influence: parents' origins and psychological resources, children's individual characteristics, and contextual sources of stress and support.

In the process model, parents' developmental history and their current life experiences in marital satisfaction, employment, and social support provide the foundation for determining their level of parental functioning (Belsky, 1984). From these characteristics, which include the parents' personality traits, Belsky posited a view of parenting efficacy as closely, but indirectly, linked to the well-being of the caregiver. This relationship determined parents' ability to function in a manner that led to positive

parenting strategies encouraging healthy development in their children (Belsky). While each factor was important, they did not all carry equal weight in the parent-child relationship (Belsky).

Throughout the child's lifespan, parents adapt to the developmental stages of their children, and each significant period provides an opportunity for parents to give an appropriate and optimal level of care to nurture growth (Belsky, 1984). Examples include infancy, when specific parental traits such as attentiveness, warmth, and responsiveness are critical for growth, and the preschool years, when these attributes can be built upon through parental nurturing with the goal of helping children socialize with peers and adults, learn to be resourceful, and strive for achievement. Belsky went on to illustrate the influence of the parents' continued positive discipline strategies, reasoning, and warmth as a way to aid in building their children's self-esteem, prosocial behaviors, and intellectual achievement. The parent who is sensitive and attuned to their child's needs increases the chance of positive outcomes for their children, such as emotional security, independence, competence in social interactions, and academic success (Belsky).

When parents are not well-attuned to their children and are not aware of the strategies that can best influence their children's development, the introduction of dysfunction can lead to a tenuous and stressful experience for the family (Belsky, 1984). For example, a depressed parent will be more likely to provide an environment with less warmth and more hostility, negative discipline practices, and fewer opportunities for the child to feel secure at home, undermining the child's successful development (Belsky;

Modesto-Lowe et al., 2008). Children's characteristics are also highly influential in this model, especially when parents perceive their children's temperaments as difficult. This negative perception increases the likelihood of a disruption in parental functioning (Belsky).

The third piece of Belsky's (1984) process model is social support, functioning in three general ways: emotional support, instrumental assistance, and provision of social expectations. Emotional support can include the feelings of acceptance and love a parent may receive from others, given through caring words or actions (Belsky). Instrumental assistance encompasses a variety of possibilities such as help with child care or receiving useful information about coping skills (Belsky). Observing the behavior of other parents within their social support network is one way that people learn the acceptable and expected parenting practices in their communities (Belsky). These aspects of the model may not always be positive in their nature and can lead to receiving unhelpful or inconsistent information, especially if a parent's social network is made up of people whose beliefs are incongruent with the parent.

Abidin's parent-child model of parenting stress. Abidin's (1992) initial model of PS featured stress as the central construct, with the premise that increased PS leads to dysfunctional parenting. While developing the Parenting Stress Index, Abidin found that the relationship between stress and dysfunction is not a linear one, and there are multiple factors influencing parenting behavior and child development. These variables are sociological, environmental, behavioral, and developmental and are strongly influenced

by parents' personalities and their experiences of the parenting role (Abidin, 1992). Cognitions and beliefs of parents are essential components of parenting behavior (Abidin). The numerous factors involved in the development of parenting competence provide a buffering effect against the threat of damage from a single source, potentially a protective factor for parents and children (Belsky, 1984). Parental self-reports reflecting their belief systems illustrate direct and indirect relationships between the dyadic interactions between parent and child (Abidin). Parents' beliefs influence their relationships with children, and children's behaviors influence their interactions with parents (Abidin, 1992). Abidin's work on stress and the importance of parental belief systems helped guide this dissertation and my decision to use appraisal theory and attribution theory to understand how these variables shape the experience of PS.

According to Deater-Deckard (2004) the parent-child model of parenting stress is the most widely tested and consists of three components:

> A "parent" domain (P = those aspects of parenting stress that arise from within the parent), a "child" domain (C = those aspects of parenting stress that result from the child's behavior), and a "parent-child relationship" domain (R = those aspects of parenting stress that occur within the parent-child relationship). (p. 7)

Parent-child-relationship (P-C-R) theory posits that there is a bi-directional relationship between the effects of the parent on the child and the child's effect on the parent (Deater-Deckard, 2004). When a child experiences increased emotional and behavioral difficulties PS increases, creating a cycle in which the parent and child affect each other's

negative behaviors and stress levels, causing higher levels of family dysfunction. When PS decreases, parenting quality improves, raising the family's quality of life and helping the child experience a higher level of social-emotional well-being (Deater-Deckard, 2004).

Children's disruptive behavior can result in high levels of stress in the parent domain, parental psychopathology (e.g., depression), marital issues, and isolation/lack of social support (Eyberg, Boggs, & Rodriguez, 1993). Stress in the child domain is related to the child's attributes and externalizing behavioral issues (Deater-Deckard, 2004, Eyberg et al., 1993). The amount of conflict existing within this relationship influences the parent-child domain. Within these three areas, high levels of stress can lead to a lack of parental warmth and affection, inconsistent parenting practices, harsh discipline, hostility toward the child, and in some cases, withdrawal from the parenting role (Deater-Deckard, 2004). Dysfunctional parenting behaviors may cause children to experience further emotional and behavioral problems, as well as increased sadness and anxiety.

The daily hassles model of parenting stress. Daily hassles theory is founded upon the assumption that the daily stressors parents face in their lives build up over time. In order to overcome the potential harm from chronic stressors, parents must learn to adapt and cope with these hassles in order to parent effectively (Deater-Deckard, 2004). This theory complements both Belsky's process model and the P-C-R model but is based less on parental psychopathology and more on the stressors that all parents face. Daily hassles include the annoyances, frustrations, and other transactional distressing events

that are present in parents' environments. Examples include children's behavioral problems, the daily tasks of parenting, and the challenges of balancing work and home lives (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990; Deater-Deckard, 2004).

Belsky, Crnic, and Woodworth (1995) included both mothers and fathers in their sample, studying the relationship between parental personality and mood in relation to parents' ability to cope with daily hassles. They found that personality and mood had a greater impact on maternal parenting than on paternal. Belsky et al. suggested that the expected traditional role differences between mothers and fathers are a factor in the differences between the personality variances found among parents.

All parents cope with daily hassles differently based on their appraisal of the severity of their stressors. What may be a minor annoyance for one parent might be a major problem for another parent. Daily hassles are not static and change regularly due to their frequency or severity, some are situational and not chronic, but when their cumulative effect becomes problematic it increases PS and parental efficacy suffers (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990; Östberg & Hagekull, 2000). The personality and mood factors discussed by Belsky et al. (1995) become a mediating factor when stress levels are high, and parents who possess agreeable and extraverted characteristics (based on the Big Five personality traits) are better able to deal successfully with the effects of daily hassles.

Overview of Twice-Exceptionality (2E)

Understanding 2E

The construct of 2E is modern, but long before there was a term for the phenomenon, the 2E population have baffled parents, teachers, and researchers with their paradoxical behaviors. Even as 2E emerged as an area of study during the 1970s, it was widely assumed across disciplines that giftedness and disability were mutually exclusive (Antshel, 2008; Prior, 2013). Despite ample empirical evidence that it is possible to have high cognitive ability and at least one coexisting disability, there remains doubt among both laypeople and professionals that 2E is a real construct (Reis et al., 2014). There is no consensus definition of 2E, explained partially because it is founded upon the ambiguous constructs of giftedness and disability.

Reis et al. (2014) posited an operational definition of 2E, the results of a collaborative effort on the part of numerous researchers, educators, and practitioners. An excerpt from Reis et al. (2014) summarized the basis of the 2E construct, describing a broad, heterogeneous population:

> Twice-exceptional learners are students who demonstrate the potential for high achievement or creative productivity in one or more domains such as math, science, technology, the social arts, the visual, spatial, or performing arts or other areas of human productivity AND who manifest one or more disabilities as defined by federal or state eligibility criteria. These disabilities include specific learning disabilities; speech and language disorders; emotional/behavioral

> disorders; physical disabilities; Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD); or other health impairments, such as Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). These disabilities and high abilities combine to produce a unique population of students who may fail to demonstrate either high academic performance or specific disabilities. Their gifts may mask their disabilities and their disabilities may mask their gifts. (p. 222)

In the literature, the majority of research on 2E is from the field of education, based on studies with children and adolescents. In the case of students who are gifted and have a learning disorder, school is the setting where the characteristics of 2E may first become apparent and identified as requiring intervention. For example, Baum and Owen (1988) described gifted students with learning disorders as more disruptive than other students. However, the nature of 2E complicates proper identification because it can be difficult to separate the overlapping characteristics of giftedness and other exceptionalities (Besnoy et al., 2015).

Twice-exceptional learners are considered the most underserved and misunderstood population of students (Bianco & Leech, 2010; Latz & Adams, 2011). It is estimated that there are roughly 300,000 American students identified as 2E, but the actual number is unknown and likely much higher (Reis et al., 2014). Even when 2E is identified, there may be no services, or few services, available to help these children succeed (Bailey & Rose, 2011).

Conceptualizing Giftedness and Disability

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide an exhaustive review of the literature on defining giftedness, or the many disabilities students with 2E may face. The study of intelligence was born in 1869, when Francis Galton introduced the study of individual achievement and eminence, and was the first to refer to giftedness in childhood as a predictor of future accomplishment (Morelock, 1996). Galton's work inspired the study of intelligence and giftedness, constructs that have evolved in theory and application over the intervening years, but lack consensus definitions. However, the persistent and inaccurate focus on giftedness as synonymous with achievement and eminence in Western society has created issues such as stigma and bias associated with the concept of giftedness (Cross & Cross, 2015).

Breaking away from the usual discussion of giftedness as measured by intelligence quotient (IQ) or achievement, this dissertation focused on the qualitative aspects of giftedness. Leta Hollingworth (1939) was the first to report differences she noted in gifted children who experienced life with more intensity and a higher "capacity for knowing" than children of average intelligence. Through her insightful observations of gifted children, Hollingworth inspired the field of gifted education by sharing a passionate belief in the need for appropriate nurturance and educational support for gifted children, based on years of close observation and interaction with them (Silverman, 1990).

This study was guided by the concept of asynchronous development, a modern definition of giftedness that departs from the traditional theoretical conceptualizations and aligns well with a phenomenological perspective. Asynchronous development, a qualitative lens through which to view the characteristics of giftedness, provides a framework for describing the seemingly paradoxical behaviors of children with 2E. In 1991, The Columbus Group (as cited in Silverman, 1997), a collaborative group of researchers, practitioners, and parents, introduced this definition:

> Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counselling in order for them to develop optimally. (p. 39)

Identification of 2E

In order to identify 2E, parents, educators, and clinicians require evidence of giftedness and disability, and the United States Department of Education provides definitions of both constructs for students. The government defines students as "gifted and talented" when they:

> "give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who

need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities." (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 [NCLB], 2002).

As mentioned earlier, the United States Department of Education identifies thirteen disabilities that qualify children for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEA], 2004). This broad group of disabilities complicates describing the "typical" person with 2E, because the disabilities can coexist in numerous variations (e.g., ADHD and ASD). The traits are disparate – a child with giftedness and deafness will face different challenges than a person with giftedness and specific learning disorder (SLD) – and unfortunately, defining and identifying 2E is complex.

Parenting Stress in Parents of Children with 2E

The Relationship between Parenting Stress and 2E

Parents of children with 2E face challenges due to inaccurate stereotypes and social misunderstandings about giftedness, as well as disabilities (Silverman, 1997). Many parents are unaware that 2E is the reason behind their children's paradoxical behaviors due to a lack of awareness that it is possible for a gifted child to have behavioral issues or fail to master basic academic skills (Speirs Neumeister et al., 2013). Conceptualizing giftedness as asynchronous development helps both parents and teachers understand the source of the frustration felt by all due to a child's inconsistent behavior and performance (Besnoy et al., 2015; Silverman, 1997; Speirs Neumeister et al., 2013). Little research has focused on adults with 2E, which is problematic from the perspective

of PS. As Comallie-Caplan (2012) and Tieso (2007) pointed out, the parents of children with 2E are frequently people with giftedness or 2E, too.

Predictors of Parenting Stress

Jolly and Matthews (2012) pointed to a relationship between parental involvement in their gifted children's education and the ensuing impact on achievement, attitudes, and behavior. When parents and teachers build positive, collaborative relationships, students' performance improves, including increased graduation rates (Besnoy et al., 2015). Besnoy et al. (2015) also described the barriers and difficulties parents face when trying to establish such a relationship as advocates for their children. Parents' influence on gifted children is powerful and can lead to the transformation of potential into positive outcomes, but parents influence more than their children's educational experiences. Their influence has a global impact, and when it is negative, or indifferent, the effects can be devastating on the child with 2E.

Parenting a gifted child is complicated by factors such as asynchronous development, heightened sensitivities/overexcitabilities, the need for increased educational support, and nonconforming behavior (Jolly & Matthews, 2012; Silverman, 1997). The addition of a second or third exceptionality increases the complexity of an already challenging situation. For example, parents might learn that their child who has been identified as gifted and having ADHD might discover there is another disorder, comorbid with ADHD. This is common, with as many as 75% of children with ADHD

presenting with a second diagnosed disorder, such as SLD or ASD (Tzang, Chang, & Liu, 2009).

Children with 2E often feel that they have no true peers, because they do not relate to children sharing a single exceptionality. A gifted child with ADHD might feel out of place with children who are "purely" gifted or who have ADHD and average cognitive abilities (Silverman, 1998). Each exceptionality sets the child apart and decreases the chances of making friends who have similar lived experiences. This phenomenon affects parents of children with 2E when they try to connect with other parents of children with special needs (Latz & Adams, 2011).

Perception plays a role in parents' experiences because they may find little comfort in connecting with parents of gifted children or parents with disabled children. Their children may be struggling in ways that are incomprehensible to other parents. Teachers' perceptions affect the child's educational experience, and subsequently, the level of school-related stress experienced by the parents (Speirs Neumeister et al., 2013). A growing number of parents find the traditional educational options available too inadequate and stressful, choosing to homeschool their children (Jolly et al., 2012). Besnoy et al. (2015) suggested that parents' advocacy for their children's education can be thwarted when teachers misinterpret their desire to help as negative or hostile. When this occurs, all stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers, students) become frustrated and experience increased stress.

In the literature concerning children with 2E, it is noted that the severity of symptoms in children with externalizing behaviors is relevant to students' functioning and levels of behavioral dysregulation (Lovecky, 2004). Parents of children with severe disabilities without disruptive behaviors experience lower levels of stress than parents of children who have externalizing behavior disorders, thus indicating that it is the type and nature of the behavior that has more impact on PS than the apparent severity of the condition (Baldwin, Brown, & Milan, 1995; Healey et al., 2011; Spratt et al., 2007).

Effects of Parenting Stress

The effects of PS in this population can have grave consequences for the whole family system. PS is strongly linked to maladaptive parenting behaviors that can exacerbate PS, including aggressive and/or other adverse disciplinary practices, such as an authoritarian parenting style with punitive and high levels of hostile control used to try and change children's behavior (Healey et al., 2011; Lange, 2005; Pelham & Lang, 1999). The more stressful the children's behavior, the fewer positive interactions parents engage in with their children, including a lack of warmth and positive interactions (Mash & Johnston, 1990).

These negative parenting behaviors can intensify when parents find that other members of their family and the community (teachers, neighbors, babysitters) withdraw because they cannot or will not tolerate the child's behaviors (Podolski & Nigg, 2001). Social isolation can cause parents to feel increased PS and a sense of despair from being alone in dealing with their child. Studies have indicated that parents of children with

intellectual disability may find more public validation of their experiences and support than parents of children struggling with the asynchronous development of 2E or giftedness (Silverman, 1997).

When children display behaviors such as high distractibility, irritability, and moodiness they do not reinforce their parents in the parenting role (Gupta, 2007). A lack of positive reinforcement for parents increases feelings of incompetence and helplessness. Self-efficacy is defined as a person's perception or belief that they can successfully perform a task that will lead to an expected outcome (Bandura, 1977). After repeated unsuccessful attempts to control child behavior, many parents end up in a state of learned helplessness, feeling that they have failed as parents, especially parents with older children and adolescents (McCleary, 2002). Despite their need for intervention in order to ameliorate PS and feelings of failure, parents with low self-efficacy may stop reaching out to others for help if they do not see progress after initially seeking assistance (McCleary, 2002).

Parents experiencing a high level of PS may struggle to advocate effectively for their children's educational, medical, or emotional needs, exacerbating the effects of PS on families (O'Brien & Giovacco-Johnson, 2007; Pelham & Lang, 1999). One contributing factor for this phenomenon might be the chronic nature of PS compared to stress that is caused by an acute situation, causing isolation, interpersonal distress, and negative mood states in parents (Pelham & Lang, 1999).

Treating Parenting Stress.

Most of the literature concerning the identification and treatment of PS relates to children with disruptive behavior disorders, such as conduct disorder, due to the difficulty in managing these children's behaviors (Kazdin & Wassell, 2000; Kazdin & Whitley, 2003, Morgan, Robinson, & Aldridge, 2002). One study included stress as part of the overall intervention (parent problem-solving) for parents of children dealing with externalizing behaviors (fighting, stealing, lying, etc.) and found that targeting PS as part of a treatment plan is worthy of further study (Kazdin & Whitley, 2003). Mindfulness training is another intervention found in the literature as a way to intervene with parents of children whose externalizing behaviors are difficult, such as with ADHD (van der Oord, Bögels, & Peijnenburg, 2013; Van de Weijer-Bergsma, Formsma, de Bruin, & Bögels, 2012). These interventions provide parents with knowledge and skills that can make a positive impact in their lives, and mindfulness training is a promising intervention to help parents deal with PS and improve parent-child relationships (Duncan, Coatsworth, & Greenberg, 2009).

The Experience of Parenting Stress

As mentioned, the vast majority of research on parenting and PS has been conducted with mothers, especially the mother-son dyad, resulting in gender bias founded upon negative perceptions of maternal competence (Deault, 2010; Johnston & Mash, 2001; Singh, 2003). More quantitative research than qualitative research has been

conducted in this area, leaving a gap in understanding the feelings of parents and their meaning-making efforts.

Marital Issues

Marital functioning and levels of satisfaction are both influential to positive family relationships, with marital disharmony playing a part in elevated PS levels (Fischer, 1990). Belsky (1984) wrote that the quality of a marriage is not necessarily a determinant of parenting ability, but it impacts the overall well-being of the family, influencing parenting skills. Mothers' perceptions of their husbands' parenting ability, and vice versa, can be a factor in the quality of their marriages (Grossman, Pollack, & Golding, 1988). Ideally, marriage is one of the most critical support systems available to parents. Based on their personal conceptualizations of giftedness, parents may disagree about their child's abilities or disabilities, leading to increased tension within the family (Mudrak, 2011). Marital strain can result in significant damage to parental functioning, especially when one parent perceives the other as less involved, and not emotionally invested in the marriage and parenting responsibilities (Belsky, 1984).

Mother-Blame and Gender Roles

Arnold, O'Leary, & Edwards (1997) stated that a persistent bias has existed in the literature against mothers, insinuating that they are the cause of their children's behavioral issues or mental illness. This bias goes beyond the realm of social scientific research and permeates societal views of motherhood and "good" parenting (Singh, 2004). Singh (2004) described the history of blame placed on mothers, wrongfully

accused of causing disorders that are unrelated to parenting quality, such as autism, schizophrenia, asthma, and epilepsy. This legacy of mother-blame has continued, if not explicitly in the literature, among society at-large. Mothers often judge themselves at least as harshly as others may be judging them, especially if they feel anger toward their child. The consequences of these emotions often lead to maternal isolation and withdrawal from others because of their feelings of incompetence (Singh, 2004).

Keown (2012) captured this bias by describing the expectations of "good mothers" who appear capable of solving their children's problems and handling the responsibilities of parenting with ease. Women finding themselves unable to solve their children's behavioral problems feel inadequate and at-fault for the problem's existence. Within this construct of the "good mother," mother-blame emerged as a bias against women perceived as unable to control their boys' behavior (Singh, 2004). The "good mother," idealized as having a warm and close relationship with her children, is selfless, capable, and a skillful parent (Keown, 2012; Singh, 2004). A sharp contrast to the "bad mother," who is incompetent and unable to meet her children's needs. A perceived "lack of sufficient care, positive emotion, knowledge, insight, and action" contribute to this harmful fallacy of bad parenting (Singh, 2004, p. 1196).

The Importance of Fathers in Child Development

In contrast to these themes of maternal competence, fathers have been let off the hook for parenting responsibility despite the wealth of empirical evidence that they play an important part in children's healthy development (Lamb, 2010). One example of the

diminished value society places on fathers includes the expectation that men should provide financial support for their families, but not concern themselves with the day-to-day responsibilities of child rearing. Another example is the covert lack of support for paternity leave by businesses, despite passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (Phares, 1993).

While mothers may feel an overwhelming burden of responsibility for parenting and caring for their children, less emphasis has been placed on the responsibilities of fathers in the parenting role. Phares (1993) noted that mothers are often reluctant to allow fathers to take a significant role in the everyday responsibilities for their children. There is a mistaken belief that fathers do not possess the requisite skills for successful parenting. Men's employment status outside of the home has long been considered a barrier to their paternal involvement. There is a common assumption that fathers don't have the time or energy to devote to parenting compared with mothers, even though mothers often work full-time as well. Although there has been a shift over the past 30 years toward the ideal of a more involved father who acts as coparent, this has not been realized (Doherty et al., 1998). Fathers are held to different standards of parenting ability and level of involvement, and this variability complicates the ability to adequately understand fathers' impact on their children (Doherty et al., 1998).

Despite the bias of fathers being perceived as less involved and caring parents, there is a significant body of literature illustrating their importance in healthy child development. Grossman et al. (1998) stated that there is agreement in the literature that

the time fathers spend with their children is important not only to the children, but also the father. The concept of fathering is a social construction, one that has led to beliefs that fathers should parent differently because of their role, but fathers are as capable as mothers in developing strong attachment to infants and young children (Deater-Deckard, 2004; Doherty et al., 1998). The assumption, that mothers are inherently more capable of positive and effective parenting than fathers, is false (Deater-Deckard, 2004). It is important to avoid viewing fathers as the "other" parent rather than a valuable partner in the parenting relationship.

Men may enter parenthood hoping to be better at parenting than their own fathers, which is a positive motivating factor that has important implications, especially when the father makes a concerted effort to forge a strong emotional bond with their children (Phares, 1993). There is evidence that when fathers spend time taking care of their children they develop stronger attachments to them, and the children benefit significantly from this connection (Grossman et al., 1988). Spicer (2007) wrote that instead of focusing on what is unique and different about how fathers interact with their children, it is important to study fathers in terms of what they have in common with mothers.

Examining paternal involvement uncovers barriers that are real and also those that have been socially constructed. The barriers of gender bias, as discussed above, are significant, but there are barriers such as time away from the family due to employment that also factor into involvement (Phares, 1993). Paternal involvement is complex, and there are variables such as age and gender of children, marital status, employment status

of both parents, and social support that all play a part in how much time fathers spend with their children as well as the quality of their involvement (Phares, 1993). Grossman et al. (1988) found that there is no direct relationship between the quantity and the quality of fathering, and that the quality of paternal parenting is related to children's emotional well-being more than quantity.

There is evidence that mothers may have an impact on how well fathers parent their children, and that mothers who are able to informally model warm and nurturing parenting skills unintentionally teach fathers how to interact skillfully with their children (Grossman et al., 1988). They saw a relationship between the parental competence of mothers and fathers, by which the more skilled a mother was with her children, the more skilled the father was with the children as well. This complementary style of parenting is ideal but is less likely to exist in families with a 2E child due to the maternal distress caused by PS. Fathers of children with externalizing behaviors are less likely than fathers of neurotypical children to engage in positive parenting, such as providing a supportive presence (Keown, 2012). It is clear that PS presents a barrier to healthy involvement due to the problems both mothers and fathers experience when parenting a child with difficult behaviors.

Relevant Theoretical Perspectives

Attribution Theory

Understanding the causal attributions that parents make when evaluating their child's abilities and behaviors is crucial since these attributions drive parents' emotional

reactions, influencing their parenting practices and disciplinary strategies (Mash & Johnston, 1990). Attribution theory is applicable to the study of PS because it posits that people have an innate need to make sense of their environment and in order to do this they seek explanations (Eberly et al., 2011). During this process of seeking causality, people decide whether or not they believe that the cause is internal or external, and in the case of children's externalizing behavior, it is common for parents to attribute the cause as the child choosing to misbehave on purpose – that the child is willfully choosing to be difficult (Eberly et al., 2011; Kadesjö et al., 2002).

Attribution theory relates to parenting stress in parents of children with 2E on multiple levels from a way to understand parents' beliefs about giftedness to the impact of public perception of giftedness and disabilities. For example, Mudrak (2011) studied parental constructions of giftedness as related to parenting practices and found that parents' personal definition of giftedness varied widely. These perceptions and beliefs related to the type of nurturance they provided their children. Each exceptionality – giftedness and disability – involves constructs with potentially harmful negative attributions from parents, as well as teachers, other involved professionals, family members, and the public (Besnoy et al., 2015). Beyond these sources of misattribution, the 2E child or adolescent may also apply negative attributions to their differences, often leading to negative perceptions of themselves and their abilities (Morelock, 1992).

Stress Appraisal Theory

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional stress and coping model advanced the concept that stress results from people's cognitive appraisals of an event and the subsequent evaluation of their ability to cope with the event. Appraisals vary widely among individuals due to each person's perception of how serious an event is and what resources they have available to cope with the situation (Lazarus, 2006). Within this construct numerous variables exist and influence appraisal, such as personal characteristics and personality traits, event-related concerns such as predictability or duration of the situation, and the timing of the event in relation to the other life stressors that people experience (Lazarus, 2006). In the case of PS, appraisal changes due to other stressors that they are experiencing such as work issues or financial problems (McCleary, 2002). The stress reaction caused by appraisal is also based upon a myriad of circumstances and can manifest in the way that parents respond to the stressor (e.g., harsh discipline); social cognitions (e.g., beliefs about causation); and psychopathology (e.g., depression).

Coping

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping "as an individual's constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (p. 141). The main components of their model included psychological stress, appraisals of stress, coping, and adaptation outcomes (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Adaptation outcomes

result from the resolution of stress when a person's physical and/or emotional health is restored to normal.

During a stressful situation, a constant evaluation process occurs in which coping efforts are undertaken and reappraisal takes place, and throughout this process there is a modification of coping based on available resources and the success of current coping efforts (McCleary, 2002). Examples of coping behaviors that can help reduce PS include positive reframing, reaching out to another person to talk about the situation, and walking away from a heated situation to spend time alone to calm down (McCleary, 2002). There are two main functions of coping: emotional regulation and changing the situation that initially caused the stress reaction (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986). Lazarus (2006) described good coping as choosing the best coping process for the situation, recognizing when a coping process is not working and being flexible enough to abandon it, and sticking with a coping strategy through a trying period long enough to give it a chance to work. An example of a coping strategy that can be effective in reducing PS is building and maintaining a social support network. Isolation in parents of children with behavior disorders can lead to increased maternal negativity and poorer outcomes for children and families (Modesto-Lowe et al., 2008). In parents with children with giftedness *and* a behavior disorder, the potential for increased PS is high, and such a support network of understanding peers is necessary.

Phenomenology

Qualitative research allows for a rich, detailed perspective that offers a different way of viewing the issue, facilitating a new understanding of this phenomenon. Van Manen (1990) describes phenomenology as a systematic method to discover and describe the meaning structures of lived experiences, allowing for a richer, fuller understanding of an experience. The experience of PS is deeply personal, and the dearth of literature on PS with 2E demonstrates a need to illuminate the essence and significance of this phenomenon. Phenomenology is an effective way to study relationships and interactions, which are at the heart of PS, using qualitative inquiry to inform research by providing insight and thick description (Manning & Kunkel, 2014).

An in-depth descriptive study of the experiences of parents will open a window to the feelings of parents who have been underrepresented in the research about PS and 2E or giftedness (Moustakas, 1994). The descriptive nature of phenomenological research makes it an ideal approach to studying PS due to its utility in extracting meaning from human experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The essence of being the parent of a 2E child is best captured by means of in-depth interviews, using a transcendental phenomenological lens to extract meaning, as well as provide the contextual elements of lived experiences that these parents can articulate to the researcher (Moustakas, 1994).

Summary

A review of the literature has illustrated the strain that PS causes parents of children with 2E as well as the need for more research in this area as a way to understand

how parents can better cope with the effect of PS on families. This population of parents struggles with unique challenges due to the difficulty in accurately identifying their children's exceptionalities and a subsequent dearth of resources for families, even when 2E is a known issue. There is a major gap in the literature concerning fathers and PS, one that has been observed and pointed out for 20 years, and it must be addressed. The goal of this study is to describe the wholeness of this phenomenon, the inextricable link between both the experience of PS and its resulting behaviors, which is achieved through bracketing, attempting to eliminate bias and prejudgments, and employing a systematic approach to analyzing the data extracted from interviews (Moustakas, 1994). The themes that emerged from parents' descriptions of their experiences, and the meaning they have ascribed to it, can help guide future research in this area.

The review of the literature showed that shame, guilt, anger, and doubt are likely to factor into many stories of parents who have children with 2E. Chapter 3 will include more detailed information about the research methods used to conduct this study, including further explanation concerning why a qualitative phenomenological inquiry was the most appropriate choice. Also, the population selected for the study will be discussed, as well as the data collection strategy, data analysis plan, and the role of the researcher.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Background

The purpose of this study was to describe the lived experiences of PS in parents of children with 2E using a qualitative research design. My goal was to use phenomenological methods of inquiry to provide a description of the experiences facing this population to increase awareness of the problem. Fathers have long been neglected in the PS literature, but while this gap was first noted more than 20 years ago, this issue has not been adequately addressed despite calls for further research (Lamb, 2010; Phares, 1992). Parents of children identified as gifted or disabled have been studied concerning these individual exceptionalities, but there is very little information about parents of children who are identified as gifted with at least one co-occurring disability. Within the existing literature, a persistent gender bias sustains an imbalance in parenting research that mirrors a larger, societal bias. Mothers have long been blamed for their children's issues (e.g., disruptive behaviors) with fathers viewed as unequal partners in the parenting process (Keown, 2012; Singh, 2004). The results of this study provide insight into the experience of a population of parents that have not been adequately represented in the literature despite raising children considered by researchers to be underserved, misunderstood, and at-risk for school "failure" despite their high potential and cognitive abilities (see Bianco & Leech, 2010; Latz & Adams, 2011).

In this chapter, I will restate the research questions and provide details concerning the design of the study, the role of the researcher, the participants, sampling strategies,

and recruitment methods. Data collection and analysis techniques, issues of trustworthiness, and the ethical protection of participants will also be addressed in this chapter. I will also discuss the reasoning behind the selection of a qualitative method of study, including a justification of phenomenology as the most appropriate methodology for addressing the research problem.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions I developed to guide this study were:

1. What is the experience of PS as described by parents of children with 2E?
2. How does this population of parents cope with the demands of PS?

The central phenomenon under investigation was the lived experiences of PS in parents of children with 2E, including the connection between parents' ascribed meaning and theories of stress appraisal, coping, and attribution. '

I believed that a qualitative phenomenological study was the research tradition best suited to understanding lived experiences and ascribed meaning of my participants. Phenomenology uses an approach that calls for the researcher to suspend their judgment and biases regarding the research problem in order to provide the most accurate account of the phenomenon as experienced by participants (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974). Moustakas (1994) advanced the view of the researcher as striving to understand their own motivations and bracketing out existing beliefs in order to facilitate an objective, reflexive process. Through these processes of purposeful awareness and bias reduction, a

synthesized description of the meaning of lived experiences can be produced based on the analysis of collected data (Moustakas).

The goal of this study was to provide a rich, detailed description of the essence of experiencing PS as the parent of a 2E child. Phenomenology was the methodology best suited to discovering the essence of a phenomenon by using reflection to help distinguish between objective and subjective realities (see Moustakas, 1994). Participants are the only ones who possess the true experience of how they live in and relate to the world, and their subjective descriptions of life within the phenomenon allow the researcher a way to describe the meaning ascribed to the experience (Moustakas, 1994). As I mentioned earlier in the study, there is a dearth of literature concerning parents of children with 2E and their experience of PS. Phenomenology was an appropriate way to explore PS and provide a rich, detailed description of the lived experience of these parents.

Role of the Researcher

The topic of this study was inspired by the struggles that my husband, Jason, and I experienced prior to our son Jack's diagnoses of ADHD and dyslexia at age 6. While taking a class in my doctoral program called, Stress and Coping, the concept of PS as a distinct form of stress resonated with me as the parent of a special needs child. Jason's experience seemed very different than mine, and when I searched the literature for more information about PS in fathers, I found very little research.

My decision to study the experiences of PS in relation to 2E came later, after I discovered that the construct of 2E helped explain some of the struggles that I had

experienced growing up identified as gifted but not diagnosed with ADHD until adulthood. Understanding 2E and asynchronous development also helped me make sense of Jack's learning difficulties. My narrow understanding of giftedness had prevented me from objectively perceiving my son's abilities. I felt confident that I would know if my son was gifted, and I believed that he could not be gifted because he was unable to read fluently in first grade.

Studying 2E was a life-altering endeavor, and as I investigated my history with giftedness and disability using autoethnography, I began challenging my assumptions and biases as related to these constructs. Accepting the diagnosis of ADHD at age 40 and treating it with medication, helped me put the pieces of my own 2E puzzle together and also helped me understand my child. Unlike Jack, I had been an "easy" child during elementary school, and my cognitive deficits had not been problematic until middle school. Jack displayed classic symptoms of ADHD, including hyperactivity, and while he was clearly a bright, curious child, he did not behave like a stereotypical gifted child. He could not maintain attention on tasks, even pleasurable ones, for more than a few minutes. Therefore, it did not appear that he had above-average ability or the passionate interests seen in many gifted children. Understanding the impact of 2E on my life helped me learn to relate to my son and has altered my career path. As I continued to review the literature and conducted an autoethnography about 2E, the work of Dr. Linda Silverman was instrumental in restructuring my perspectives on giftedness and 2E.

Moustakas (1994) described the researcher in a phenomenological study as a coresearcher who is participating in research with a community. My role as the researcher in this study was complex, and because of my intimate connection with PS and 2E, I was aware that I have personal biases concerning the experience of living with 2E and parenting a 2E child. Prior experience as an interviewer in qualitative research studies has helped me develop techniques of mindfulness and empathy, which I drew upon in this study. During interviews, it was crucial to maintain an intentional focus on the participants' words as well as nonverbal communication, and to be open to their experiences without judgment (see Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990).

Epoche requires the researcher to view the phenomenon using a new perspective by removing judgment and prior beliefs as a way to avoid projecting biases onto the data (Moustakas, 1994). A researcher can set aside their biases and prejudgments through the process of bracketing, a conscious awareness and effort to set aside judgment and view the phenomenon with a fresh perception (Moustakas, 1994). One technique that I employed in this study was reflective journaling to record and process my thoughts about the study and maintain objectivity during data collection and analysis. In this way, I separated my existing personal beliefs and theoretical knowledge in order to give my full attention to the essential experiences of the participants (see Patton, 2014; Van Manen, 1990).

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

In this study, I focused on the experience of PS in parents of children with 2E and employed purposeful sampling to represent this population. Patton (2014) defined this type of sampling as case selection based on strategically locating information-rich sources and outlined many approaches that are considered purposeful. I used criterion-based selection for maximum variation to illuminate the diversity of experiences within the 2E construct in this study. Creswell (2007) described the ideal number of participants in a phenomenological study of this nature as ranging between one and 325 in various existing studies but implied that at least 10 participants would be an appropriate number for a proposed phenomenological study. The goal of synthesis from collected data is applicable to the determination of participant number since the researcher needs to consider how many participants would be necessary to provide enough rich data to write a meaningful description of the population (Moustakas, 1994). The proposed number of participants for this study was expected to consist of 15 individuals or as many participants were necessary to reach saturation. This number aligned with Creswell's suggested number of participants and was appropriate in the case of purposeful sampling in a phenomenological study. Each participant recruited with a criterion sampling strategy must meet the same criteria, ensuring that the participants have all experienced the phenomenon of PS as parents of children with 2E (see Patton, 2014). I recruited

participants using both criterion sampling as described earlier, based upon participants meeting specific criteria for eligibility.

Recruitment took place with the assistance of two agencies in the Midwest that work with clients who are gifted. One agency specializes in testing children for giftedness and the other is a counseling practice. A recruitment letter was distributed to parents who met the criteria for this study based on the screening questions, and both of those documents can be found in the appendices.

The factors used to determine study inclusion included a willingness to participate in a semistructured interview with me and meeting the following criteria: (a) a biological parent of a child who has been formally identified as both gifted and diagnosed with at least one of the 13 categories of disability outlined by the U.S. Department of Education and (b) the participant was between the ages of 25–64 years old. The child with 2E had to be at least 7 years old, and participants had to have been at least 18 years of age at the time of birth. I determined evidence of the child's status as 2E from the results of psychological testing as well as documentation of the child's disability from applicable sources. These criteria were specified in an informed consent document that was reviewed with the prospective participant; a copy of this form was provided by me.

Selection of respondents was based on their responses to the screening questions as a way to determine their eligibility for the study. These screening questions can be found in Appendix A. The review of informed consent with participants, documentation

of meeting inclusion criteria, and the provision of verbal and written consent demonstrated that they were appropriate study participants.

My contact information, including an e-mail address created solely for this dissertation and my personal cell number, was provided to participants directly and within recruitment messages and profiles. Participants were able to initiate contact with me directly through e-mail, cell phone, Facebook message, or Twitter direct message. When contact was initially made from a social media network, I requested that subsequent communication occur through private e-mail or phone.

Once participants made contact with me to inquire about the study, I gave them a brief summary of the study and its purpose, the expectations of participation, and encouraged them to ask questions concerning any aspect of the study. Contact was made by phone and/or e-mail, and participants were screened using the questionnaire from Appendix A during first contact to determine their eligibility. If eligible, an arrangement to meet for an interview was scheduled.

An informed consent form was provided at the beginning of each interview that discussed relevant ethical and practical issues concerning this study. I went over the informed consent form with each participant and offered an opportunity for asking questions before signing the document. Each participant was provided a copy of the informed consent form. The form contained a description of the study and its purpose, the researcher's role and contact information, procedures for the study such as the interview

time guidelines, the voluntary nature of the study, potential risks, issues of privacy and confidentiality, and my role and contact information.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study consisted of semistructured interviews, conducted face-to-face, between myself and the participant. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and member checked to ensure accuracy. Member checking was accomplished by providing participants a copy of the interview transcript in order to allow them a chance to review it and comment. More specific information regarding member checking is addressed below. The semistructured interview format encouraged the discovery of relevant questions based on participant answers (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008) as central questions guided the interview, but emerging questions resulted from participants' responses, allowing their perception of the experience to light the path for increased understanding and meaning. Interviews were conducted in neutral locations where privacy was ensured based on the participant's location.

One interview, lasting for approximately sixty minutes, was required of participants. These interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Member checking prior to coding improved accuracy by providing a copy of the transcribed interviews to participants for review. This afforded them the opportunity of following up with a second interview if they wanted to add more information or discuss any misunderstandings that may have resulted from my perception of their

responses. Communication with the participants following transcription occurred via phone and/or e-mail. Issues of confidentiality were addressed by assigning each participant a pseudonym along with their code number to eliminate the chance of any identifying information from being disclosed inadvertently within the text of the study. I was the only one who knew which participant corresponded to each code number. Following the semistructured interviews and any follow-up communication and/or interviews, participants were offered the option of receiving a copy of the study following completion. The parents were thanked for their contribution as participants and provided a $10 retail gift card.

Data Analysis Plan

Data collected from interviews were related specifically to the research questions guiding this study:

1. What is the experience of parenting stress in parents of children with 2E?
2. How does this population of parents cope with the demands of PS?

Phenomenological processes described by Moustakas (1994) and Van Manen (2014) were used in the organization and analysis of data for this study. Van Manen wrote that an important aspect of discovering meaning from a phenomenological study is reduction, which is addressed in two complimentary ways: Epoche and bracketing. Epoche means abstention, or to stay away from, and it allows the researcher to avoid assumptions as a way to view data from a new perspective, viewing a phenomenon without taking for granted that existing beliefs are accurate (Van Manen, 2014).

Bracketing involves isolating the data specifically related to the research question in order to separate the other information that is not directly associated with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Another aspect of phenomenological reduction is horizontalization, advancing the position that open-endedness of one's experience can never be complete, even as one mindfully reflects upon past events (Moustakas, 1994). In this way, I assigned all statements with an equal level of importance, until later analysis indicated that a new horizon has appeared. Each horizon is part of the thematic analysis, leading to a clear view of what is and is not relevant to the research problem, ultimately uncovering the meaning of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Imaginative variation followed the reduction process, and involved drawing on my own creativity, senses, and memories to use intuition to facilitate discovery of the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). It is a step in which one must acknowledge that there is no final answer or way to experience a phenomenon because endless variations exist, preventing the possibility that there will be any one truth (Moustakas). Rereading transcripts and continuously examining data are ways that imaginative variation was accomplished in this study. The synthesis of data was related to this process, as the perspective was broadened by my ability to take data and provide a rich description of a phenomenon and its foundational conditions. Synthesis was the product of data collection and analysis, bringing together what was discovered and providing the basis for a final description of the phenomenon (Moustakas).

Issues of Trustworthiness

In order to establish the credibility of this qualitative study, three strategies were employed: triangulation, member checks, and reflexivity. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) wrote that there are various ways to triangulate data, using multiple sources, as a way to enhance the validity of a study. As part of this project I wrote a reflective journal documenting the procedures being followed, discoveries made while reviewing the literature, and other notes. I completed a review of the literature and continued searching the literature to be certain that all available data related to the phenomenon had been studied. The ongoing literature review included searching for discrepant research as well. Another strategy was sharing my work through peer review in order to obtain another colleague's perspective and any challenges to assumptions made by the researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe). Member checking, which provided a way to ensure that researcher bias did not influence the data, was completed by providing participants a copy of the transcript interviews so that they could review the data and have an opportunity to provide feedback. Reflexivity, particularly through journaling, allowed me to maintain an awareness of potential biases that might influence data collection and analysis, as way to remain as objective as possible (Creswell, 2007).

Ethical Procedures

In studies involving human participants, it is imperative to ensure that ethical safeguards are implemented in order to protect participants from harm. The study was approved by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to any

engagement with potential participants. All participants were made aware of the voluntary nature of the study, and that they could withdraw at any point with no repercussions. The initial message sent to potential study members included the statement that the study is voluntary and discussed the purpose of the study, the criteria for inclusion, and how confidentiality was safeguarded.

Initial contact from people interested in participating occurred through e-mail or by telephone. A dedicated e-mail account was used for this project that only I have access to, and messages were deleted from the server once they had been downloaded and saved to an external hard drive containing project files. My personal cell phone number was available for people who wished to speak on the phone rather than electronically, and any messages were be deleted from the phone once the information had been transferred to a document listing participant contact details. An informed consent form was provided to each participant and was reviewed orally to explain the study and discuss how their confidentiality would be protected. Following a verbal review of the informed consent form, participants were provided with their own copy of the document which covered the study information, ethical procedures including voluntary participation and the safeguarding of confidential data, as well as my contact information.

Data collected were confidential and kept in a password-protected folder on my computer, as well as in a password-protected external hard drive. Only I had access to the data, which referred to participants using only the number and pseudonym they have been assigned. Audio files of the interviews were transcribed by me. I alone had access to the

recordings and transcripts. Transcript data were kept in a password-protected folder at all times and hard copies of any collected data were kept in a locked cabinet in my home. I was the only person with access to the passwords and locks.

Summary

In this chapter I addressed information concerning the research design, methodology, data collection and analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. The study's purpose was to investigate the phenomenon of PS in parents of children with 2E in an attempt to describe the meaning parents ascribe to their experiences. In order to effectively describe the participants' lived experiences, reflective journaling was employed as a strategy for remaining mindful of minimizing the personal biases identified during the bracketing process.

Also addressed in this chapter was a discussion of the phenomenological methodology and why it is appropriate for this study. The issues of sampling, participant selection, and recruitment were addressed. Purposive sampling was used to identify biological parents of children with formally identified as 2E, with the goal of interviewing at least 15 participants meeting the study's criteria. Participants were recruited through two agencies that work with gifted individuals.

Data collection included conducting semistructured interviews with biological parents of children who were formally identified as 2E. Informed consent, IRB approval, and member-checking were some of the ways that ethical considerations were addressed. The steps in the phenomenological process were covered, including Epoche, bracketing,

horizontalization, imaginative variation, and synthesis. These methods were used in order to collect and analyze data, resulting in a rich description of the lived experience and meaning as told by parents of 2E children.

Issues of trustworthiness were addressed in this chapter and included triangulation, member-checking, and reflexivity. These strategies helped establish the credibility of the study. The ethical considerations related to this study were also discussed. The provision of a verbal explanation of the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and explanation of informed consent occurred at the time of the first interview. The participants were provided a copy of the informed consent form, which included my contact information. In Chapter 4 I will present the findings of the study. The findings will be accompanied by a discussion of the specifics of settings, participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis. I will also address issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

I designed this study to address a gap in the literature concerning the experience of PS in parents of children identified as 2E. Although more than 2 years passed between writing the proposal and collecting data, there have been few additions to the literature about this population of parents (e.g., Dare & Nowicki, 2015; Vialle, 2017). The purpose of this research was to understand how these parents experience PS and I selected a phenomenological study in order to illuminate their experiences using in-depth interviews.

The goal of this chapter was to report the findings of this research study. In the chapter, I will discuss the data collection processes and the methods used in locating participants. A delineation of the research questions and participants' responses will also be reported in this chapter as well as the major themes, subthemes, and discrepant and nonconforming data. I will also address the evidence of research quality through reviewing issues of trustworthiness, member-checking, and triangulation of data.

Locating Research Participants

I located participants for this study with the assistance of two partner agencies. Initially, my plan was to attempt to recruit 15 participants through one partner agency. A recruitment message and a copy of the informed consent form were sent to 20 potential participants who met the requirements for the study. Only one interview was completed following this process. A second agency offered to help with recruitment and I submitted

a revised IRB application to Walden University reflecting this change. Participants were contacted via e-mail, introduced to the study, and invited to participate with a recruitment e-mail and letter of informed consent. Using the protocol that I established in the approved IRB application allowed me to avoid coercion in the recruitment process.

Recruiting an adequate number of participants was challenging. The initial plan for this dissertation was to focus on interviewing fathers, but it was not easy to recruit men to talk about PS. It was not until I expanded the recruitment efforts outside of my own state that I was able to find an adequate number of participants, and ultimately, there was only one father interviewed. During the process of data collection, I attended the annual conference for a national organization for families dealing with social and emotional issues related to giftedness. Several parents learned of this study and voluntarily identified themselves as candidates who were willing to participate in an interview. This manner of participant acquisition adhered to a similar protocol as the one I described earlier in this section. These potential participants were sent the recruitment e-mail, screening questions, and letter of informed consent.

Data Collection Processes

The purpose of the study guided my decision making during the data collection process. In order to understand the experience of PS in this population of parents, it was necessary to collect stories from parents of 2E children. The phenomenological approach allowed for a method of data collection that facilitated storytelling through personal interviews. I collected interviews in two ways: in-person and using Internet phone

applications such as Skype and Zoom. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in two Midwestern states, in neutral locations, over a period of 9 months between March and December 2017. I changed the interview protocol following the first interview and a review of the literature on interviewing participants for phenomenological research (see Van Manen, 1990). The number of semistructured questions was adjusted to allow participants to tell their stories in a less directed manner. In this way, interviews were able to remain at a manageable length and the essence of the phenomenon was revealed naturally.

To ensure that confidentiality was addressed carefully in this study, I took a mindful approach to following the same protocol with communication via phone and e-mail and with language. Initial contact was made via e-mail, using an e-mail address I created strictly for this project. One meeting with each participant was held to go over the informed consent and conduct the interview. I reviewed the letter of informed consent with each participant prior to beginning the interview. Two questions were planned and I prompted participants to expand on or clarify statements as warranted during the interviews. Participant names were changed immediately following each interview, and real names were never attached to the transcribed documents produced from the interviews. Each participant was given a number as a unique identifier. Identifiers of location were removed from each transcript following the initial verbatim transcription of an interview. The length of interviews ranged from 39 minutes to 77 minutes. The

difference in length reflects the difference in style between participants, some of whom were more talkative than others.

Reflective Journal

During the course of this study, I kept a research log as part of the process of reflective journaling. The journal was used to reflect on observations from reading in the literature as well as from the interviews, and it was helpful to have a single place to record thoughts about the process. At times, the interviews were intense and emotional, and the journal was a place to safely write about and contemplate these experiences.

Data Maintenance and Security

The research log, digital audio files, and transcriptions will be kept in my home office under lock and key. Computer files were password-protected and saved on an external hard drive that was also protected with a password. I kept paper copies of the printed documents, such as interview transcripts and informed consent forms, in a locked file cabinet. Only I have access to the passwords and key to the filing cabinet.

Research Participants

All 13 of the participants in this study were the biological parents of 2E children, between the ages of 25–64 years old, and resided in the United States. Table 1 provides an overview of participant information. Only one of the participants was a man, the remaining 12 participants were women.

Table 1

Participant Overview

Participant #/pseudonym	Number of children (age, gender)
P 1 – Marcia	2 (30 M, 16 F)
P 2 – Camille	3 (32 M, 28 M, 18 M)
P 3 – Tina	2 (20 M, 18 F)
P 4 – Erin	2 (10 M, 6 F)
P 5 – Rebecca	2 (18 M, 16 F)
P 6 – Elizabeth	1 (31 F)
P 7 – Matt	3 (31 F, 21 M [deceased], 21 F)
P 8 – Heather	1 (12 F)
P 9 – Kristen	2 (13 M, 9 M)
P 10 – Janice	2 (29 F, 14 M)
P 11 – Laura	2 (19 F, 17 F)
P 12 – Mary	2 (16 M, 14 M)
P 13 – Rachel	2 (15 M, 10 F)

There was heterogeneity within the types of conditions that meet the criteria of 2E, and these are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Types of Qualifying Exceptionalities

Participant	Child	Exceptionalities
P1 Marcia	Alex	Depression, bipolar disorder
	Becky	SLD - dyslexia, CAPD
P2 Camille	Mason	Anxiety, PTSD
P3 Tina	David	ADHD, anxiety
P4 Erin	Luke	Being tested for ADHD
P5 Rebecca	Mark	ASD
	Angela	Generalized anxiety, OCD, hypersomnia, ADHD
P6 Elizabeth	Megan	ASD, anxiety
P7 Matt	Sarah	Depression, bipolar II disorder
	Richard	Schizophrenia
P8 Heather	Emma	ADHD, anxiety
P9 Kristen	Thomas	Sensory processing disorder
	Elliott	SLD (dyslexia), cerebral palsy, hemiplegia
P10 Janice	Kyle	Epilepsy
P11 Laura	Kate	Depression, generalized anxiety.
P12 Mary	Owen	ADHD, CAPD, sensory processing disorder
P13 Rachel	Ethan	Generalized anxiety disorder, panic attacks
	Hannah	Anxiety

Note. The following abbreviations were used in the above table: ADHD = attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, ASD = autism spectrum disorder, CAPD = central auditory processing disorder, OCD = obsessive/compulsive disorder, PTSD = posttraumatic stress disorder, SLD = specific learning disorder.

Research Questions

The two principal research questions were:

1. What is the experience of PS as described by parents of children with 2E?
2. How does this population of parents cope with the demands of PS?

Interview Questions

Prior to the start of the interviews, I held a discussion with each participant concerning informed consent, confidentiality, and compensation. This provided me with an opportunity to establish rapport with the participants and answer any questions they had about the study. Individuals who participated using audio or video software were asked to sign the form and e-mail me a copy of the signature page. Participants were encouraged to introduce the characteristics of their family as a way of beginning their discussion of parenting stress.

The interview questions were the same as the two research questions:

1. What is your experience of parenting stress?
2. How do you cope with the demands of PS?

In-Depth Interviews and Coding

I began the interviews by thanking the participants for their time and willingness to participate in the study. As we went over the informed consent, I reminded participants of their rights, the purpose of the study, and confidentiality. Adherence to this protocol and asking the same questions of each participant allowed for constancy and consistency in the process.

Data collection yielded a significant amount of data. Interviews produced 13 hours of digitally recorded interviews which I transcribed verbatim into 259 pages of text. This was supplemented by my reflective journal entries, field notes, and e-mails.

Development of Themes and Subthemes

The development of themes began during the transcription process. Prior to transcribing the audio files, I listened to each interview and made notes about broad themes and issues that were described. After interviews were transcribed, I listened to the audio once more with the text before me on a monitor to check for errors. Therefore, I have listened to the audio recording of each interview at least three times. At this point, each interview transcript was proofread for errors in preparation of member checking. After member checking with the first three participants, I received feedback from a participant that the member checking was somewhat laborious and that it might be helpful to provide a cleaner transcript for future participants. My intention was not to make the process of member checking labor intensive, and therefore, made the decision to remove most of my comments from each transcript prior to sending it to the remaining

participants for member checking. The transcripts without the minor interviewer comments (e.g., “mm-hmm,” “right”) were referred to as transcripts “cleaned for coding” and can be read as first-person narratives.

After repeatedly listening to the interviews, transcribing and proofreading the transcripts, and then producing a cleaned for coding version of each interview, I was able to get a sense of the gestalt of each individual story. The processing of text into significant statements and meaning units was accomplished with the help of QDA Miner. QDA Miner is computer-aided qualitative data analysis software, which provides an interface for organizing and coding textual data (Cuva, 2014). I also made use of the WordStat module, which allows for detailed content analysis of the text in QDA Miner.

Using computer-aided qualitative data analysis software, one can work with the text in a way that allows for a different perspective. Following three rounds of reading the transcripts, I placed each cleaned transcript into QDA Miner, which automatically created a “case” for each participant. During the Epoche process, judgment is suspended and the participants’ stories were reviewed without presupposition. QDA Miner allowed me to work with the text and create memos while abstaining from judgment concerning the content of each transcript. At first, simply formatting text and open-coding by identifying what was observed in the participants’ words, without an agenda or theoretical lens.

Initially, all statements were reviewed as containing equal importance. Moustakas (1994) described this process as “an unfettered stance” in which one approaches the data with openness and a willingness to see “just what is there” (p. 85). Following Epoche is a

process of horizontalization. Transcripts were reviewed multiple times in order to uncover as many layers of experience as I could detect. This is an open-ended process of discovery and awareness. In QDA Miner, meaning units were created by coding statements for each participant. In this way, data was organized by case, allowing for sorting during the horizontalization and imaginative variation processes. The themes and subthemes developed for this study can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Major Themes and Subthemes

	Research Question	Themes	Subthemes
1	1	Child characteristics	Milestones and differences
			OEs and intensities
			Sibling differences
2	1	Appraisal	Evaluation
			Unexpectedness
3	1	Attribution and meaning-making	Parental giftedness
4	1	Misperceptions by others	
5	1	Trauma	
6	2	Coping	Advocacy
			Strategies
7	1, 2	Educational concerns	Academic performance
			Goodness of fit
8	1, 2	Relationships	Extended family
			Marital issues
			Social Issues

Note. OE is an abbreviation for overexcitabilities.

Table 4

Thematic Coding Frequencies from QDA Miner

Theme	Frequency	Cases	% of Cases
Appraisal	73	13	100%
Attribution and meaning-making	29	13	100%
Child characteristics	115	13	100%
Coping	119	13	100%
Educational concerns	90	12	92%
Misperceptions by others	20	10	77%
Relationships	83	13	100%
Trauma	32	8	62%

Findings

Verbatim excerpts from participants' interview responses, unedited and unaltered by the researcher, are offered in this section as representative of the lived experience of parents of 2E children.

Research Question 1. What is the experience of PS as described by parents of children with 2E?

Theme 1: Child characteristics. All participants in this study discussed their children's characteristics, from descriptions of developmental milestones to the vast differences between their children. Therefore, the theme of child characteristics was developed to show the types of characteristics and the resulting impact on parents' stress. Three subthemes were developed based on these characteristics: milestones and

differences, overexcitabilities and intensities, and sibling differences. A wide range of characteristics were reported by participants, but there were some themes within these descriptions. For instance, a love of music was reported by most parents, and these parents shared both strengths and challenges about their children:

> P5 Rebecca: Mark plays percussion. He was in the pit. He plays marimba...he's pretty good at it. I think that's where the intelligence comes in, too, because he can memorize really, really, really long songs. It is amazing how long his songs are, with the marimba, that he is able to do. The counting and the time doesn't always come real easy to him, but because the music part comes really easy to him, he's able to focus more on that counting and that timing.

The characteristics took many forms, providing a rich foundation of data about these children with multiple exceptionalities. The differences between siblings can be a source of stress, particularly when children are strikingly different. Parents identify with their children in various ways, such as in their academic achievement (e.g., P3, P7) and sometimes struggle to identify with their children as reluctant learners (e.g., P8, P10). Examples follow:

Subtheme 1: Milestones and differences. One clear feature of this subtheme included early developmental milestones, particularly with early verbal proficiency such as early speaking and reading. Only one participant, P6 Elizabeth, noted a late talking milestone in her autistic daughter. Several parents also described their children's differences from the norm as a part of the experience of parenting stress apart from

developmental milestones.

> Some participants noted that early verbal precocity had its own set of problems:
>
> P7 Matt: People would see her physical height, and hear her speak, and assume she was a year and a half. And that caused problems for her in school. Because all the kids made fun of her.

Janice described the disbelief of her husband when their son began to read as a toddler:

> P10 Janice: My husband was traveling, and I told him – I called him on the phone – and I said, your son's reading to me, you're going to have to have him read to you when he gets back. And he said, no, he's just memorized pages in a book. He's just telling you the story because he's memorized the pages…I would pick a book and say to my son, read this to your dad. And then I had to go pick another book and say, read this to your dad. It was just random, right? So even if he were memorizing a certain page from a certain book, the fact that I could pull them out, independently, and he could still read the words. He was definitely reading.

Heather, who has had to keep up with her daughter's voracious reading habits, discussed the problem of selecting appropriate material for an early reader:

> P8 Heather: At her 2 year checkup, she had a vocabulary of over 200 words. Including four syllable words. So we knew that she was going to be…at least, at this age, exceptional for her age…But we had expected the opposite. She was born very early. We expected delays...She's always been very good with words. A

> big reader. Big reader. Struggling to find books that are age appropriate, and a good fit – reading capability-wise.

Subtheme 2: Overexcitabilities and intensities. All 13 participants described their children's overexcitabilities (OEs) and intensities in language that speaks to these concepts as they are found in the gifted education literature (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009; Piechowski, 2014). In some cases, parents described their own experiences in terms of OEs as well (e.g., P7, P11, P12, P13). Most common in the data were emotional, intellectual, and psychomotor OEs. As OEs are a part of the heightened intensity described in the asynchrony definition, it is interesting to note that parents who perceive giftedness as asynchronous development (e.g., P 9, P12) articulated behaviors that align with this subtheme. Camille described her youngest son's strong emotional overexcitability:

> P2 Camille: I knew Mason was oversensitive…There was this muddy 4-wheeler, in the bed of a truck with a dead deer strapped to the 4-wheeler, and Mason caught sight of that and just fell apart. I had to turn around and drive him back home, he refused to go to the birthday party...And it wasn't that he was sad that the deer was dead…he was upset because of how disrespectful this was to that animal. How undignified this was. That they could've at least covered him, not used him like a trophy, strapped across the 4-wheeler.

Tina and Elizabeth both told stories that captured well their children's intellectual OEs:

> P3 Tina: Well, at like two and three years old, he was completely consumed with sump pumps, and the rotation…He would climb up on the drier, and he would watch the wash cycle, and then, as it dumped the water, he would flip around, and watch the sump pump go up and down. And…studied it. Literally, he was two years old, two and three. And so then, every time he went to anyone's house, he would say, "Do you have a sump pump?" And "is it a submergible sump pump? Or…"…So, he would interview them, and then he would ask to see it.

Mary had a similar story to tell about her son's interest in how things work:

> P12 Mary: I taught an intro to instruments music class, where all the kids would come, and they would learn about all the instruments…My kid had zero interest in listening to the music, and zero interest in playing it. He wanted to stick his face into the mechanisms of all the instruments. He's 2, 2 and a half, maybe 3. And, I mean, all the other kids are playing the piano, he is literally crawling under the piano – to see where the pedals go – and then following up the pedals into the mechanism of the piano, to see what it did. He's still like this. He is working on computer servers. He is taking them apart and putting them back together. He has always been, "How's it work?"

Elizabeth's daughter has shown great interest in languages. Note that Megan's linguistic interests are based purely on her love for learning:

> P6 Elizabeth: She loved languages…The first language she ever took, she took Lakota – the language of the Sioux. And then she took German. And then she

> took French. And then in high school, she did three years of Japanese. In college – three years of Zulu. And it was just because it intrigued her. It was interesting. Same with music. That's the kind of exceptional she was. And she doesn't use any of those skills. I always thought, well, she could be a translator, at the UN. I can see it now. Yeah, no. I don't want to do that shit, mom. That was just for fun. She was always that way. She was never a straight A student. Because I'm not gonna be one of those. You could be A++! Yeah, but I don't really want to be one of those, mom. I just want to have fun. I just want to learn. I just like to learn.

Both Tina and Rachel described somatic symptoms of emotional OE, manifesting as chest pain from anxiety:

> P3 Tina: Within the first week or two [of college], he called and said, "I'm having chest pains. Should I go to the health clinic?" Now, at one point, I think it was in high school, he was talking about chest pains, so we went and had his heart checked out. And it was all clear, and so then we began to talk about that anxiety and probably some slight panic attack. So when he talked to me when he was in college, those first couple weeks, I said, "Sweetheart, I really think this is anxiety."…He did end up going to the counseling center on-site, got some support, for a little bit.

Rachel also described her own chest pain related to anxiety:

> P13 Rachel: I mean, there's plenty of anxiety that I haven't solved yet. That one's actually pretty easy. Chest pain happens when I shrink down into myself and I

> don’t breathe as much. And so putting notes around the house, reminding myself to breathe, and working with that with Ethan and with Hannah. That seems to have helped that. I don’t have the chest pain as much, and when I do, it’s a signal. It’s a red flag that I need to stop and breathe and catch what I’m thinking about. That I’m just like so hunched down and not breathing well. That I’m so anxious or worried, or thinking hard about something.

Multiple participants described sensory issues with their children and themselves. For Elizabeth, sensory processing was perceived as a missed symptom of her daughter’s autism spectrum disorder:

> P6 Elizabeth: Independent. Smart. Frustrating…I can think, when I missed signals for autism. Because I had no frame of reference. I didn’t know autistic kids when she was growing up. I didn’t know it…She wouldn’t buy clothes from anywhere but JC Penney boys’ department. Big baggy slacks and t-shirts that were really soft and had no tags. She would go back and forth, she’s really gender neutral. Doesn’t matter. What’s comfortable? Always been that way. But I can look back, now, and there were so many days when she wouldn’t put her shoes on. Because her socks weren’t right in her shoes. And I thought she was just being obstinate. Didn’t want to go to school.

Heather discussed her own sensory issues:

> P8 Heather: I fully admit to having a very hard time with sounds and smells. And textures. And I was wearing a shirt and it was kind of creeping up on my neck and

> I was like, I'm dying! Inside my head, I'm dying, I'll be the first person to die by Hanes. Like, it was just getting too hot, and Cindy was there – my sister-in-law – and she was like, oh, yeah, because you're autistic. There's a huge gap in knowledge out there. Between autistic and exceptionally intelligent.

Kristen's son struggles with sensory processing. Note that questions and comments from me are noted as "R":

> R: What sort of sensory triggers did he struggle with most?
>
> P9 Kristen: Sound, smell, the tags on his clothes. The fabric. He also is a kid who when he was younger, he ran warmer than most of us. Instead of fighting about what clothes you had to wear, we just made a chart that said when it was this temperature, you had to have these things on. It was always less than what any of us would be wearing, but as long as he wasn't going to get frostbite, it didn't matter.

Other OEs were also described, such as this excerpt from Mary indicating psychomotor OE:

> P12 Mary: High intensity psychomotor. And it wasn't even the physical psychomotor. He did have ADD, and I was asking the doctor about it, you know, before his third birthday. He was like, "Well, it could be, but he's also three." I'm like, we're sitting here in an office and we are watching him trying to climb the walls. At some point, we have to actually discuss this. But it was like his mind never fucking shut off. Ever.

Subtheme 3: Sibling differences. Two participants (P6 and P8) have only one child, but the other 11 participants reported having two or three children. The differences between siblings were quite extreme, in some cases, and worth developing into an entire subtheme as these stories were often related to stress. In the first example, Tina describes the challenge of lifting up both children when one is in the spotlight and the other is not:

> P3 Tina: I love them both. And it used to be, when David was a sophomore in high school, he had the opportunity to travel Europe, with a national honor band. At that time, everything was about him, and he was interviewed for the newspaper, and he was getting all these accolades. And I think she felt shadowed. Then, as we're getting ready to launch her to Uganda, and we get her written up in the newspaper, and everything is about Marie, there are times when I feel like David is just standing by, as a bystander. And really, it's both…at what point do you guys, kind of your gold-ness get to shine?...That may be important for parents. How do we really reinforce that? Especially when you may over-identify with one kid. And not the other. How to really bring them both up.

Erin's children show different strengths, and her son's early reading has set up expectations for his sister's development:

> P4 Erin: Two and a half years later, she's still not piecing words together. Very unnerving. Because…she feels dumb. And especially because her brother says things to her, like, you should be reading by now! Why aren't you reading? You

must not be gifted. It's like, OK, she has different strengths right now. We haven't even had her tested.

More than one parent described children who seem to be opposites:

P9 Kristen: If you could have two different kids, that are like polar opposites, it's crazy. When our younger son lost all of his language, he did not pick it back up readily. So we sang everything to him. Because music was his world. We would just sing what we needed to say. So you put it to music. Not actually music, but you sing it. It's very interesting, and music is still his world. He is a dancer and a musician and incredibly creative. He also loves math and science and programming. He is a very well-rounded person. Where Thomas is more math and science. It's interesting to watch how different they are. (P 9)

Multiple participants described having a first child who was gifted but not 2E, and felt that 2E children seemed more difficult by comparison:

P10 Janice: I have a 29 year old daughter and a 14 year old son. I didn't realize that my daughter was "gifted," or even profoundly gifted. She was just my daughter…She wasn't bothered with 2Es, as near as I could tell. Maybe she was overly sensitive, to some things, but not to the degree where it would hinder her. She always had a coping mechanism. So that was my introduction to parenting. Pretty much pretty easy.

For others, the situation was reversed, and the first child was the one with multiple exceptionalities:

> P12 Mary: Owen was the high intensity one and his brother's considerably more laid back. Which is interesting, because in this house of four people, we have two parents and one kid who are all first born, type-A, highly gifted people. And then we've got one, second born, laid back, kind of a B+ person.

Summary of theme 1: Child characteristics. Parents had much to say about their children's characteristics, as seen in the above excerpts. The characteristics were broken down into three subthemes: milestones and differences, overexcitabilities and intensities, and sibling differences. The early milestones, such as precocious verbal ability, offer a window into what it is like to have a child who is an outlier, and these characteristics are congruent with the literature on gifted children.

Theme 2: Appraisal. All 13 participants described their parenting stress using language that indicated a process of appraisal, or an evaluation of the demands of parenting. Metacognitive processes were observed in the responses of many participants who were able to articulate the ways that they think about their own thinking. During the reduction process, excerpts related to appraisal were sorted into subthemes of evaluation and expectations. In the first example, Marcia describes stress as related to a feeling of isolation:

> P1 Marcia: Part of feeling stress is that nobody else is experiencing what you're experiencing. Feeling isolated that way. And then feeling helpless, you don't know how to get resources for your kid.

Camille described her process of challenging existing beliefs about giftedness:

> P2 Camille: I would drop him off, I would cry all the way home, and sit in a chair and just research the internet for gifted…I still didn't want to believe it, but then I did, because after I started reading, it was like, oh, my gosh! That's my child. I didn't know. As a teacher, gifted kids were the straight As, they were the ones that did everything right. They were the teachers' pets, they were the valedictorians, they were the ones that got the awards at the end of the year. Gifted kids weren't my kid.

Like Marcia and Camille, Mary also struggled with feeling unprepared and somewhat unsupported in the task of parenting a 2E child:

> P12 Mary: I remember taking a breastfeeding class, and the nurse was saying, you know, "Babies haven't read the books, and they don't know that you've read the books. And they don't care that you read the books." My kid wasn't even in the books I read. Eventually, I just stopped reading them, and the magazines, because he wasn't in there. They'd be saying X, Y, and Z, and I'm like, um…no. We're not even close.

Subtheme 1: Evaluation. The subtheme of evaluation was observed in every case. Each parent articulated processes of evaluating the circumstances surrounding their child's exceptionalities. For Marcia, part of the stress included that her evaluation of the situation was not affirmed by her first husband:

> P1 Marcia: So there was this imbalance that I noticed very early on, and even my husband at the time was saying, nothing's wrong. You know, it's you, you're

> perceiving these things. So I think that was the biggest stressor, was that intuitively, as a parent, I knew something was not the norm.

Both Camille and Janice evaluated their experiences in terms of the quality of their parenting:

> P2 Camille: Because he was in such contrast with my other two, the oldest one did the step-by-step. He did everything he was told. The second one, he struggled, but he still behaved. He still did what he was supposed to do, although he struggled. Number 3, Mason, just broke all the rules. I had to come to grips with, I wasn't that good of a mom after all. You know? Because I wasn't that good of a teacher, either. Homeschooling, I thought, was hard, as far as raising, disciplining, and educating him…He just wouldn't do the book report. We never finished a workbook. But, yet, he was passing all the tests.
>
> P 10 Janice: I just thought I was doing something wrong. Clearly, I was not a good mom. But she survived it and I survived it. I didn't necessarily need a lot of sleep, so I thought, oh, yeah, whatever. Then my son comes along and the same thing happened.

In the next example, Tina describes her PS as overwhelming:

> P3 Tina: The constant need for stimulation, for both of them, and the intensity was completely draining for me…After I had kids, I started saying, "I now know how child abuse happens." I now know how somebody completely loses it…I used to say, I now know what people mean when they say I can feel my blood

> pressure rise. I never knew what that meant before, but I could feel this surge of heat and temperature, and there were times when I was just worried. Like, I'm going to kill them.

Erin repeatedly invoked the metaphor of a puzzle to describe her process of evaluating the effectiveness of interventions:

> P4 Erin: One step at a time. And I feel like every day is just another day to try to fit together a puzzle piece for our kids. If I figure something out for one of them, I feel like it's a win. But it's just a constant…shuffling. Brainstorming as to what could be happening, and what's their next need, and how do we change…like, at home, the ADHD piece, is really taking its toll on some of the positive feeling in our home.

Matt took a reflective view of events and discussed his deep regret for misunderstanding periods in which his daughter was ill:

> P7 Matt: Looking back on it, I'm terribly ashamed. Just terribly. I made a mistake, as a parent, and started treating it as a mental illness, rather than physical, and it caused problems in our relationship. And it caused problems in our marriage. It caused problems with me personally.

Heather described what it was like to evaluate her daughter's abilities and realize that the challenges of parenting were more complicated than she had anticipated:

> P8 Heather: OK, I'm a very by-the-book person. So we had all read – and by we, I mean me – had read that at a year, they should not have their bottle anymore. And

> they should not have their pacifier anymore. So I was like, OK! So at 6 months, she only got her pacifier at night. And at nap time. That was it. But I would go make her a bottle, and I would come back out, and she would have a pacifier…I couldn't figure out where they were coming from, was the thing. I got her up from her nap, took her pacifier out of her mouth, put it in the bed. Reminded her – pacifiers are for nap time, and bed time only…Put her in her little area, went to the kitchen, came back around, and she had opened up her onesie…like, her snapped pajamas, and had been hiding extra pacifiers. And I was like, oh my God, I'm screwed! I am so screwed.

As a nurse practitioner, Laura's process of evaluation naturally becomes one of assessment:

> P11 Laura: We have a very significant family history of mental health issues as well…She definitely has some attributes of, I would say, on the spectrum. But doesn't really fit clear diagnostic criteria. Definitely ADHD, but again, it's not in multiple settings. She definitely has some OCD tendencies, some generalized anxiety, and has experienced some depression as well.

Mary's evaluation of the situation includes an awareness that had she been given more appropriate information, she could have made better informed decisions about her children:

> P12 Mary*:* If I had not seen things as a problem to fix, so that things would be better, things would have been better faster. It took until he was about twelve,

> twelve and a half. About the time that his whole body and his whole system and things sort of came together, things were firing better. Which, you know, I guess puberty does that for a lot of kids. That's when it happened. I think if we had just started off, right from the get-go…if I had known more about giftedness, and adult giftedness, and all of that – from the beginning – I think it would have been a lot easier on all of us.

Subtheme 2: Unexpectedness. A subtheme that ran through each case was that these parents found the journey with their 2E child to be full of surprises. Participants often described discrepancies between what they had expected their children to be like and how their children actually behaved or performed. In some cases, this was how the children were eventually identified as 2E. One expectation shared by multiple participants is the expectation that a gifted child will perform well in school:

> P3 Tina: To this day, quite honestly, I have not even seen her high school transcript, nor do I know what her GPA is. But part of it was…So I'm a high achiever, I was academically gifted, I enjoyed learning, she is not so much. It pains me to know that she probably has, I don't know, a 3.3. I just had to let that go. I wasn't pressured to get that document.

In Erin's case, expectations based on having a first child who was an early reader has led to some uncertainty due to the second child not sharing this experience:

> P4 Erin: Now our daughter, I don't know where she falls... She hasn't been tested, but we were thinking of going out to the GDC, and have her go through the

> thorough eval, because I'm thinking there might be a little piece of dyslexia going on for her. Because she's in the middle of first grade and not doing so well with piecing words together at this point. Her phonics…they're just not quite where they should be.

For Elizabeth, as well as other participants, certain expectations began prior to birth:

> P6 Elizabeth: I laugh because I always said, when I was pregnant, I said, I don't know how to parent boys. And I said, if I have a boy, I'm sending it back. The whole time I was pregnant, I said that to myself. I am not having a boy…I got the biggest tomboy on the face of the earth. And I love it! But it isn't what I pictured…I'm really not unhappy with that. It's just…different. I didn't know how to do that. I didn't know how to do that…I was not going to give her any complexes about that. I learned. I adapted. I adjusted. I adjusted and I adjusted.

Heather has also struggled to adapt and adjust to a child who experiences existential depression as a parent with her own mental health issues.

> P8 Heather: I just wasn't ready for these issues as a parent. I just wasn't. I wasn't ready for the difficulties…I wasn't ready for my 6 year old to have an existential crisis. Why are we here? And she's had two more. She's in the throes of one now…As someone who suffers with mental health issues – treading that very fine line, for me, between assuming that she really does want to end her life, and is struggling with the point of life in a way in which she would commit suicide, or try to, or whatever, and just her natural curiosity.

In the following excerpt, Janice describes a feeling of loss due to the way her son's enthusiasm for learning was altered by epilepsy:

> P10 Janice: The more research I do, the more I realize that, as normal as he was before his seizures – and, by normal, I mean…the kid that is excited to learn, and just that sponge, soaking everything in – after he had his seizures, after they began, he really took a turn. He really started being that kid that didn't care, and that kid that wasn't interested. Part of me feels cheated, because I want my son back from before the seizures. I want that person that's so excited to learn and just wants to share everything with the world.

Summary of theme 2: Appraisal. In this theme, one can observe the evaluative processes that the participants go through with their children and their children's place in the world as possessing both gifts and disabilities. Parents talked about the imbalances they perceived related to PS based on their expectations of parenting and academic performance. Depending on the ages of their children, some parents were more reflective about appraisal as experienced in the past, with some distance, and other participants discussed their processes of appraisal with issues they are currently experiencing with their children. For instance, parents with adult children were able to look back on their parenting strategies, and evaluate their performance and what they might do differently.

Theme 3: Attribution and meaning-making. This theme contains excerpts from interviews in which participants discussed their views of why and how events occurred in their children's lives, and it was observed in 100% of cases. These examples illustrate

how participants made sense of their experiences. For instance, Marcia describes the relief of discovering that Becky has central auditory processing disorder, which helped explain events from their past:

> P1 Marcia: She was compensating very well until about third grade, and then she couldn't compensate very well anymore. You know, that happened with Becky when we found out about the super hearing. It explained everything. It explained why when we took her to the movie, to this wonderful movie, she just lost it. And we'd take her out for dinner, and it was a horrible experience.

In the next example, Camille describes the way that she explained Mason's differences based on his having older siblings who modeled behaviors, "We kept chalking it up to him just trying to keep up with his much older brothers. They were ten and thirteen years. Still, the gifted never sunk in."

Rebecca made sense of her son Mark's behaviors as related to both his autism diagnosis and the influence of his father:

> P5 Rebecca: That's how he gets into some of the situations he gets into when he's challenging his teachers. I think it's the Asperger's part of it, but I also think it's coming from his dad, the always having to be right part of it, as well.

Elizabeth's description was reflective and includes the memory of what it was like to perceive her daughter through a different lens:

> P6 Elizabeth: Feeling how hopeless you felt, and how helpless, and how you interpreted everything through a totally different lens. And then you look back

> and feel like, oh my God, what kind of damage did I do to my child? Thinking…I still will cry over the fact that I was so mad at her one day I made her walk outside to the car barefoot, because she wouldn't put her frickin' shoes on.

Matt also discussed meaning making from a reflective view, and noted the influence of doctors on his explanation of his daughter's illnesses:

> P7 Matt: As a parent, I was hearing from different doctors. I was hearing, this is all in her mind, she has mental illness and that's what this is. And she needs to get help…Because this was stressful on us. And it was stressful on our marriage. We didn't know who to believe.

For Heather, who has battled her own mental health issues, we find that she had worried about the possibility of passing down this problem to her daughter:

> P8 Heather: When Emma was 6, we went for our walk, and she said, "I wish I was dead." And I thought, OK. Interesting. So I immediately freaked out. I have a history of severe treatment-resistant depression. With suicidal ideation and high anxiety. I was like, OK, this is what I get…Which is why I had eventually become OK with not having children. I didn't want to pass this down. So now I officially had.

Subtheme 1: Parental giftedness. One subtheme was developed, parental giftedness, based on the way that parents make meaning of their children's giftedness and exceptionalities based on their perception of their giftedness, or that of the other parent. With few exceptions, most parents were reluctant to embrace the idea of their own

giftedness and were more willing to ascribe the other parents' giftedness as relevant. Despite this reluctance to discuss their own giftedness, participants were able to recognize its characteristics in themselves and in their family members.

> P1 Marcia: I remember sitting in the library just crying, because first of all I recognized that I had similar things going on, I recognized my brother did, my dad, and yet, I felt so overwhelmed at how I was going to deal with this kid.

The next example from Elizabeth also speaks to giftedness as a family issue:

> P6 Elizabeth: My mother was extremely brilliant. My mother was really, really smart…she always wanted to be a doctor. She met my dad and had six kids. Didn't ever get to do any of that. So yeah. I think there's some brains on both sides for her. I don't think I'm anywhere near her dad's level, and I don't think I'm anywhere near Megan's level. But we're both good problem solvers, and think outside boxes, and are pretty quick… I don't know where I am on that spectrum. I know that I was an A student, and I can remember the school, in like fourth or fifth grade, doing IQ testing, and it was pretty damn high at the time. Her dad…I think he was brilliant. I didn't know enough about him to know more. But I suspect he had an IQ over 150. But totally unable to cope with the world.

Erin discussed a lack of identification for herself as well as her husband:

> P4 Erin: My husband is…he probably grew up being highly/exceptionally/profoundly gifted – we don't know exactly where. And never had his needs met, was just stuck into a public school system in Chicago,

> and good luck. And that's just how it was. Now that we have identified our son as profoundly gifted, he's kind of looking back on his life like, Oh! Wow! My life makes so much more sense. But yet I am frustrated, because I feel like there's all this lost potential.

Kristen has discovered more about her abilities as she helped her son work through his own learning struggles:

> P9 Kristen: As I look back, and I start to look at – oh, I see characteristics, and one of the things is, I didn't know this as a thing until we started talking with Thomas about learning how to learn. And I realized that I've never learned how to do that. Things just come naturally to me. I just get it.

Although Mary grew up identified as a gifted student, that label had little meaning for her until she had a child who was identified as 2E:

> P 12 Mary: I'm like, yeah, gifted, OK, I was in the gifted program in middle school, or elementary school, what of it?

Summary of theme 3: Attribution and meaning-making. It is natural for parents to attempt to explain why their experiences of PS manifest the way they do as part of the meaning making process. Part of this process involved reviewing their own histories as gifted individuals, as well as their family background and the child's other parent. Other areas in which text was coded for attribution involved the cause of the children's other exceptionalities, and the ways that their meaning making has changed over time. This theme was very much related to other themes, such as child characteristics,

misperceptions by others, overexcitabilities and intensities, and trauma.

Theme 4: Misperceptions by others. Nine out of 13 cases (69%) involved participants' stories of people who misunderstood their children, or their parenting practices, as a part of their stress. Sometimes the person misperceiving the situation was a spouse, or family member, and at other times it was a professional, such as a teacher or therapist. Since there is a substantial body of literature documenting the misunderstanding of gifted children by other children and adults, it was not surprising to learn that the parents in this study have experienced feeling misunderstood by other people when it comes to their children's 2E experience. As seen already in these examples, spouses are sometimes the ones who misunderstand:

> P1 Marcia: The hardest part for me was getting the credibility. And being told by my husband, at the time, that I was pushing him in ways he didn't need to be pushed…And then being told, on the other side, that oh, well, he's not that bright. Well, it turns out he's extremely bright.

There was also a minor subtheme of misperception by other parents who believed that the participant was bragging or exaggerating about their children's giftedness and exceptionalities. One example was given by Camille:

> P2 Camille: It was the other parents…They would ask, what are you doing…it must be because you're a teacher…your first response is, but, well, he's a handful. You had to set down with something bad, to balance it out. But it was upsetting that they thought I was…you know, hothousing him.

Janice also experienced this problem:

> P10 Janice: First of all, you don't even think about not sharing – if it's your first one – you don't even think about not sharing that your kids are reading. Because of course your kids are reading, and you're so excited about it, and you share it with your peers. And the parents are like, you're either showboating, like bragging on your kids, or there's no way possible for that to happen. So you learn not to say it, because you alienate those people…But after you do it so many times, then you feel uncomfortable. Because you never know what you can say – that's going to offend someone. Or sort of put them on the outside.

Tina described the problem of being misunderstood by a principal, and related it to a story about one of the authors of a classic book for parenting gifted children, *Guiding the Gifted Child* (Webb, Meckstroth, & Tolan, 1982):

> P3 Tina: We decided to get him tested before kindergarten, and then when we saw where his IQ was, we opted just to put him in the first grade. Now the interesting thing, we sat down with a principal, and this was of a parochial school, and I made the mistake that Stephanie Tolan did, which is, don't go in there wagging, or flashing your IQ scores. So I sat down with her, and she saw the IQ, and she was flipping through the page, and there's some history there, as far as her reputation. But anyway, so she said, as she's looking down, flipping through the page, going, "So why did you get him IQ tested?" Somewhat condescending.

Erin described being misunderstood by extended family members:

> P4 Erin: My mom the other day was, "Well, don't you think he'd be better off just putting him in a public school?" I thought we went through this a few years ago. Now it should be that simple, in her head, and it's not. I don't think they understand the speed at which our kids learn, or can learn, if given the information.

Heather also has experienced misperceptions by extended family:

> P8 Heather: I have a sister-in-law who's a speech pathologist…She was also the first one to give me parenting advice…She's 100% convinced that my daughter and I are autistic. 100% cannot be deterred from that at all. So we brought this up to Emma's doctor, who literally laughed out loud.

A final example from Elizabeth deals with misperceptions by well-intentioned friends:

> P6 Elizabeth: I have this girlfriend…with the two autistic kids…She thought I parented my kid totally wrong. And that my kid should've left home – her kids were going to leave home when they were 18, and they were gonna be independent. And damn it, she was gonna do it this way. Well, not so much. They still live at home, they're 19 and 20 – they're going to college, don't get me wrong – but they're not independent.

Summary of theme 4: Misperceptions by others. The issue of being misunderstood by others, due to a lack of awareness about the nature of 2E and giftedness, as well as societal biases, was described by most of the participants in this study. In this theme, one can see that when other people do not understand, it leads to

increased stress for parents and can damage relationships that might otherwise be supportive. Another problem is that these misperceptions often undermine parents' sense of competency in the parenting role.

Theme 5: Trauma. Eight participants, or 62%, discussed traumatic life events in their own lives and in the lives of their children. Different types of trauma were described: the death of a spouse (P6), the death by suicide of a child (P7), and medical crises (P6, P9, P10, P11) were all represented. Other participants mentioned symptoms of PTSD in their children as well as themselves (P2, P12). Elizabeth dealt with the death of her spouse when Megan was two years old:

> P6 Elizabeth: I was, myself, trying to recover from the trauma of losing my husband. Despite the trauma of being with him. The trauma of trying to get back in school, and get enough degrees that I could provide for my child, as a single parent. The trauma of trying to start out new in your career, and balance a kid with challenges, that you don't even know are challenges – until she's in high school. But you know they're there….you think she's just reacting to the trauma. Of everything you're going through. And she was always so attached at the hip. She was just…was really dependent. Yeah, you get pulled in a lot of directions. I think that's how a lot of people probably feel. You get pulled in lots and lots of directions.

Elizabeth reported other serious traumatic events, as well, including the traumatic brain injury of her second spouse, a fire that destroyed her home, and medical emergencies.

Matt was another participant with a serious trauma history, including the death by suicide of his son, Richard, at age 21:

> P7 Matt: I adored my son. I loved my son because he was imperfect. Because he struggled. I loved him even more. And he was gone. The funeral came and went, and hundreds of people showed up. Hundreds. I just remember, I couldn't stop crying. For hours…And for the first year…I blamed myself for so many things…I prayed for death. I went to the chapel – there's a little chapel connected to our church here – and every single day for a year, I wept. Every single day for a year. Without fail. That's how devastated I was.

Kristen and Janice both experienced trauma with their sons related to medical issues:

> P9 Kristen: He was in occupational therapy and she set up this exercise in a room that was about 30 feet. He was supposed to run across the room and jump and dislodge a ball that was up on top of beanbags, and theoretically land in the beanbags. He did that and landed head first into a wall. I was not in the room, but I heard it happen. That resulted in him…he is my math kid. He taught himself to read at two. Math is his world, and postconcussion there was no math. He could not add two and two, he could not…he could still read, but it was very challenging. So I spent 2 years being a stay at home parent with him, and homeschooling him – to the extent that there was any schooling happening – and there was…no one really believed us. Because he's so gifted. So he passes everybody's…you know, he's doing fine.

> P10 Janice: He was having a seizure and he was face down on the rug…That is the only episode where I thought maybe I needed to call the paramedics as I didn't have a sense as to how long he was struggling to breathe on that rug. I pulled him up and breathed right into his face so he could get the extra oxygen from my breath…I never felt like I could leave him alone for long with his dad. Scott asked me once about why, what could happen? Kyle would be fine. Well, no he wouldn't be fine. He could die…The doc said there is a very small chance that Kyle could die from one of his seizures. And that warning never leaves you.

Laura discussed a history of trauma as well:

> P11 Laura: All of the kids, and myself – we've all had mental health stuff. We're just geared for it. It's just the way it is. And my approach has always been, OK, I have blond hair and blue eyes and I have a history of trauma, it's part of me and I deal with it. It's not going to define who I am.

Summary of theme 5: Trauma. Eight participants described traumatic events from a variety of perspectives, and also discussed very different ways of coping. These adverse events complicate the experience of PS, particularly in cases in which multiple family members are going through the same traumatic events. One can see the effect of trauma at the family level in the description of how other family members cope, and the effect of coping on connection between individuals.

Research Question 2. How does this population of parents cope with the demands of PS?

Theme 6: Coping. A wide range of responses was elicited from the question, "How have you coped with the demands of PS?" and this theme was developed based on participants' descriptions of how they manage their stress. In terms of effective or ineffective coping, there was a diversity of responses, but even when parents described their coping efforts as ineffective, it is notable that they are aware of the existence of the problem. Two strong subthemes emerged, including advocating for one's child and coping strategies. As an introduction to this theme, note that Camille describes how she learned that increased support, knowledge, and experience facilitate coping:

> P2 Camille: Without all the support of other parents, who understand, and without having a therapist everywhere we've been. Throughout his life. We would've never survived. I don't know if he would've survived. I think the moment I realized that gifted kids didn't make all As, that they did have these…you know, I wasn't quite familiar with overexcitabilities, but being overemotional, oversensitive, knowing that they were, was such a relief. Like, OK, there is nothing wrong with him. I kept thinking there was something wrong with him.

Mary also mentioned a connection between increased connection, knowledge, and healthier coping:

> P12 Mary: The difference I'm seeing is that I now am more capable of handling it. I have better skills. I have better coping mechanisms. I have better resources. I

> have better connections. So that's been very helpful. Whereas when they were younger, I'm like, I literally do not know what to do. And now I'm like, OK, I can call this person, I can call this person, I can call this person. It's better.

The parents who had fewer social supports sometimes described coping behaviors that caused harm, such as an eating disorder, alcoholism, and drug addiction. Participants discussed severe depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts. In the following example, Rebecca is candid about how difficult it is to cope:

> P5 Rebecca: It's a difficult situation. I don't handle the stress well. I'll be the first to admit, it's…I mean, I take it a day at a time. But there are a lot of days where it's really tough. Because I don't have those outlets that I know I need. But I just don't have them.

Janice discussed lack of self-care as an obstacle for coping:

> P10 Janice: From the time that I married my husband I've put on about 60 lbs. So definitely the stress, and not being able to lose the weight, it part of that. The idea that you never have time to take care of yourself. I'm not that person. My husband was great at – I'm tired, I just need to go to bed. And I never was great about leaving stuff undone. Because you were tired. No, you work through it, you get it done. Then you go to bed, and you sleep well. I never did get why, or how, he could just stop. And just go to bed, and then pick up and do it later. I just never did get that.

Several participants described therapy as helpful for learning to cope in healthier ways, both for themselves and for their children:

> P6 Elizabeth: She's a brilliant child. But in high school she was starting to really struggle. That's when it became apparent to her that she didn't know how to make friends, she was all alone, she got really depressed. She e-mailed me, at work… and said, "I want to die." Yeah. And, you know, we got it then. And that's actually how we got hooked up to [counseling].

Mary described the difference between seeing a therapist who has no experience in working with gifted clients and one who knows this population well:

> P12 Mary: So, you know, I got into therapy, when he's 18 months old, and it helped. But the woman – and looking back, I'm like, yeah, it helped. But it didn't help, because she didn't know giftedness, and I didn't know that I was dealing with that, as an adult…And my big thing was like, I have so much on my to-do list. She's like, just take it off the to-do list. I'm looking back at that now like, you don't understand…it's also reminding me of the all the things I want to do. Because I can't keep track of all the thoughts in my head. So that was the first time I went into therapy. The second time we worked with [a clinician who knows giftedness]. And no shit, she saved us, in 2009. She…saved us.

Subtheme 1: Advocating for one's child. The parents who participated in this study are all fierce advocates for their children. Little introduction is needed for this subtheme because truly the words of the participants tell the story of their commitment to

their children's well-being in every aspect of their lives. Some participants had especially difficult experiences with their children's education, and this is where their advocacy was needed most:

> P1 Marcia: When I worked with administrators, and counselors, and other specialists…I tried to be realistic. I can't ask for everything. And, somehow, we can maybe reach a consensus about what we could do to help them.

Camille's words were often similar to Marcia's, and both women described their children's school experiences as fighting:

> P2 Camille: Parenting a gifted, 2E kid, especially in a traditional school system, it's fighting. It's fighting. It's crying. It's risking your child's confidence, and emotional stability. It's just….heartbreaking. It was a full-time job for me. To make sure. That people tried to understand him. That he had what he needed.

Tina's role as an advocate was seen not only with her children, but also in her clinical work as a therapist:

> P3 Tina: Part of the stress was always thinking, well, I've got to advocate. Which because of what I do for a living came naturally, and also because of my extraversion, but you know, I coach parents on, you really need to figure out and perfect how to advocate, not alienate. Because you can make it very difficult for your child and you can work yourself out of a school system.

Parents were able to identify with their children and their sensitivities, drawing on their own experiences to empathize with the need for a safe place. In the next example,

Rebecca is discussing Mark's recovery from a serious concussion, which interfered with band practice and required accommodations for his safety:

> P5 Rebecca: I knew that all the doctor had to say was he needs accommodations, and they had to provide them…At one point they said to me – which upset me – "well, maybe he needs to quit band." And I'm like, you know he's been in band for 4 years, we are not quitting band... I made it very clear to her that we changed our schedules around such that there is always somebody there at every competition, so that if he collapsed, with a headache, we were always there. So it did not put it back on the school, it was on us, that we would take care of him….Taking that away from him would've been devastating to him. After being in band for three and then he was starting in his fourth year. That's where he identifies, that's where his friends are, that's his identification.

Rachel described what it is like to advocate for her 15 year old transgender child, Ethan:

> P13 Rachel: The bathroom's a whole other issue for transgender kids. The teacher goes, well you're only allowed to go to the bathroom six times during the trimester. Are you sure you want to use up your second time this week?
>
> R: They limit them for the amount of times they can go to the bathroom?
>
> Rachel: This is what this teacher decided to do…There are two types of teachers, and educators – there are the law and order folks, that believe that children need to be…behavior needs to be controlled. And then there are human…intelligent, empathetic human beings. That try to think about why the kid might be asking

> that way. So I had to send an e-mail to the teacher, explaining that Ethan's cramps and period were so bad that they needed to use the restroom extra. And that the bathroom was a tough situation for them anyway, because they don't like going into the girls' bathroom when it's full of girls. Because it's awkward.

In Erin's case, she struggles with the reality of having a child whose high ability does not necessarily protect him from potential harm:

> P4 Erin: I think with some of the 2e things, you even think, I'll be happy if he's not homeless someday…I just want him to be a healthy, mentally healthy, happy individual. At peace with himself. There are days when I doubt that, and that's sad. It's really sad and hard. So then you try to get all the supports in place for him, to feel better about himself.

Subtheme 2: Coping strategies. This subtheme includes both personal coping strategies employed by the participants as well as the strategies they taught their children for coping. Several participants mentioned self-care as a critical coping strategy:

> P6 Elizabeth: Not a day goes by when we don't have some crisis or something. That she just needs to talk through…She talks to me, she talks things through…And on the other hand, can you just keep that to yourself for 2 fucking days, please? (Pause) Yet, you wouldn't not have that. If you didn't have this incredibly special human being. It's really exhausting…I have to make a point, this is self-care. I make a point of at least once a year, going away for at least a week. This last year I actually went for 3 weeks. Where I'm not reachable.

Kristen discussed the importance of family as a part of her self-care:

> P9 Kristen: I just did a presentation at the gifted conference today about self-care. Somebody volunteered that they put their 5 year old to bed at 7:30, and that's it, door's closed, and they have their time with their husband…I still sit with my kids. I like them. I like reading the books with them. I signed up for that as a parent. I signed up for getting to have this relationship with them, and I only get it once…So what it means is that we do a lot of things together. We also have summer vacation where we spend the summer in [another region] with my partner's family.

Relationships were also important for Laura's self-care:

> P11 Laura: I see a therapist, and I have for a long time. I find that incredibly beneficial. I've done some EMDR as well, so that's part of my self-care as well, my exercise, my spirituality, talking to my husband. Talking to other people.

Mary described a need for balance:

> P12 Mary: You develop your network and your tribe as you're able, and try to have a balance in it. Because you can't rely on just your spouse, for everything, because you'll go insane. You need more than that. So I watch what I eat, I watch what I drink. I have a support network, I journal like a madman.

Tina offered many strategies for coping, with the highest frequency of excerpts coded in this subtheme, such as:

> P3 Tina: The other way that I coped was humor. We used humor a lot. So when Lee was with them, or if I was with them, one of us would threaten to kill the kids, I'd say, "OK, I'm digging a ditch, in the backyard." And he would say, "Just keep them alive until I get home." I would say, "I can't promise." So I really used a lot of humor.

Summary of theme 6: Coping. In this theme, it is clear that for these participants, effective coping means taking action on behalf of their children. The subtheme of advocacy illustrates how the participants take seriously their children's needs and work to meet them at any cost, literally and figuratively. Also evident is the importance of relationships for coping and the benefit of feeling that one is supported in the parenting role.

Research Questions 1 and 2. What is the experience of parenting stress as described by parents of 2E children? How does this population of parents cope with the demands of PS? The final two themes are directly related to both research questions.

Theme 7: Educational concerns. With the exception of two participants with older children (P6, P7) all of the participants described educational concerns. Responses that described issues related to children's education were grouped first into this theme, and later, these concerns were grouped into two subthemes: academic performance and goodness of fit. It was interesting to note that these concerns and stressors about education were very much related to the children's disabilities and the need for accommodations within school settings, which was expected based on the research about

2E children.

Subtheme 1: Academic performance. There is a natural tendency to equate giftedness with high achievement, and therefore parents of gifted children tend to expect their children to perform well at school. For some participants, achievement was simply a fact to report about their children:

> P5 Rebecca: He's done very well, straight As through high school. Right now he's fifth in his class of over 600.

Standardized tests were also mentioned:

> P11 Laura: Don't get me wrong, they're both very bright girls, smarter than we are, but Kate got like a 1450 on the PSAT…she's really good at test taking.

Other participants expressed concern over their children's lack of performance at school:

> P8 Heather: She's invisible at school. It's really bothering me, as a parent. She has never been picked for anything. She's never been student of the month. She's never been anything like that. Never, ever, ever. She causes no trouble, she's never been in any trouble…There's never any attention. She's just not the squeaky wheel. She does what she has to do. The minimum of what she needs to do.

Subtheme 2: Goodness of fit. This subtheme highlights the difficulties of finding an appropriate educational setting for 2E children. For instance, more than one participant discussed the challenge of finding advanced mathematics courses for their children:

> P1 Marcia: He was going to the [local university], when he was 12, taking trig classes. And then he'd go back to elementary school, and he was taking calculus and trig over at the high school, and everywhere we went there were barriers. You can't enroll him in the elementary school and the high school at the same time.

Camille found that moving to a new region presented more opportunities:

> P2 Camille: [Midwestern state] had a much more progressive, balanced, level-headed approach to education, and as a homeschooler, they were part of the school system. If you wanted them to be. So they could take classes, at any of the schools, from kindergarten through high school. They even had gifted services for homeschoolers. So there was a lot of opportunity there for him.

In an example that could also be placed in the unexpectedness theme, Tina describes moving her children from private to public school:

> P3 Tina: I went through 12 years of Catholic education, did not expect that my kids would not be in Catholic education. That was one of the first stressors of…I don't know if this is going to work. By his second semester, or first semester, in second grade, it became apparent that it was just not gonna to be a good fit, at all. And so that began, what are we going to do?

Erin expressed disappointment with the lack of structure at her son's school for gifted learners:

> P4 Erin: I don't love the school. I feel like it's summer camp. I don't feel like it's giving the educational piece that he needs at this point. Or, if they are, they're not

> communicating it to the parents very well, but from what I've seen, it's not really happening. There's a lack of rigor. There's a lack of structure. There's a lack of direction. There's a lack of planning. There's just a lot of pieces that are missing from this school. But he loves it. Because it's so unstructured.

Kristen described a positive experience with her son's private school for gifted learners:

> P9 Kristen: There's been some teachers who've really understood where he's at. The kids are at a level, and it's a small enough place, where he has made some school friends at least. Nobody that we're hanging out with outside of school, but he feels like he's getting some of that community. Which I think is really important.

Summary of theme 7: Educational concerns. Educational concerns were prevalent in these interviews, and especially concentrated on the areas of academic performance and goodness of fit between child and environment. Participants have high expectations for their children's performance and are concerned when these expectations are not met. It can be very challenging to find a school that is a good fit for 2E children due to their diverse and specific learning needs, based on areas of high ability and concurrent disability.

Theme 8: Relationships. It was expected that parents would discuss relationships, since PS is very much a problem that is based in one's relational interactions with people within and outside of their family. Each participant discussed relationships: with their child/children, spouses, extended family, and friends. Therefore, subthemes were

developed for family, marital issues, and social issues. When discussing their relationships with their children, the participants gave a range of responses from very close to currently being out of touch.

***Subtheme 1: Extended family*.** Participants talked about the support, or lack of support, from their extended family members. Few participants described having supportive family members in their day to day lives. Relationships with parents seemed especially difficult:

> P5 Rebecca: I have my mom and dad, which are about 2 hours away from here. I have a sister in Georgia, but we don't have a really good relationship. And that's my family. John's family lives in this area, and that's kind of where we located, because we were able to get teaching jobs. I came from small rural farm community… John's family lives here, but that's kind of been a disaster in itself as well. We rarely see his sister or brother, or his mom and dad…His mom and dad maybe see the kids twice, and they live maybe a half hour from us. My parents who live 2 hours away are always coming back and forth. But that's the difference in personalities. So there is really no family support here.

Three participants mentioned growing up with parents who were alcoholics or abusive. Matt described the way his father inspired him to be a different type of parent to his children:

> P7 Matt: I wasn't a hard liquor drinker, but I was pretty well-established in alcohol. When he was born, I looked at him, I was watching my dad drink himself

> to death. My dad drank at least one fifth a night, sometimes two. Every night. For 15 years, and he was dying from it. So when my son was born…in my mind, I said to myself, it's time to get help. Because this beautiful boy will not see a drunken father, ever. Ever. And that was the beginning of my sobriety.

Elizabeth also discussed learning lessons from her parents:

> P6 Elizabeth: I look back, and I had a decent mother and a decent father. You know, they were older, and they weren't perfect, but that was how they parented. That was what they did, I've long ago given up on being pissed off about that.

Heather struggles with how her mother has changed over the years:

> P8 Heather: I was like who is this woman that raised me? Where did she go? What happened to her? So I found that fascinating. What triggered this change in my mom?... Now I'm like, Emma, we don't spend time with my family. Ever, at all. We just can't. I can't have you exposed to that way of thinking. Because they don't keep it to themselves. You know what I mean? It would be one thing if they were like, how was your day, Emma? Instead of like, Trump's the best!

From a more positive perspective, Erin finds her family supportive, if in an imperfect way:

> P4 Erin: What do I do to cope? Luckily, I have a family – a mom and a sister – that try to understand what's going on in our family, and are there to support me in any way that they can. But there are times when they'll say something and it's like, OK, you still don't understand the full picture of this.

Rachel struggles with disconnection from her mother, but her father has been supportive:

> P13 Rachel: When Ethan came out…my dad's really deaf, and so he didn't hear the word…he wasn't sure if he heard bisexual or not, when Ethan goes, "Grandpa, I'm bisexual." And so he paused, with a confused look on his face, and Ethan goes, "Grandpa, I like boobs." And my dad pauses, for a few seconds, and then his face turns red, because you know he really heard it this time. And he goes, "Oh, well I do, too." And then he turns, and he pauses, and he goes, "Well, if I get that job at Duluth Trading Company, I'll have to get you more flannel shirts."

Subtheme 2: Marital issues. There were four participants who were widowed or divorced from their children's other biological parent, and one is currently separated. Eight participants are currently married to the parent of their child/children, but these relationships are not necessarily harmonious. Rebecca and Janice described especially difficult problems in their marriages, which have led to significant levels of parenting stress:

> P5 Rebecca: They have a father, I'm married to him, but it's a very difficult situation. Not the best of relationships. I would say that both of my kids have grown up in a pretty dysfunctional type of family…It is a trying and difficult situation at home, on a daily basis. With the arguing and him always having to be right. And the constant put downs, with both of my kids.

Janice and her husband are currently separated:

> P10 Janice: At this point it's easier having him out of the house than having him in the house…Talk about parenting stress…Of having to deal with my son, trying not to badmouth his dad in front of him, or to have something to say. Or to have him catch me on the phone with my girlfriend. Or in a puddle of tears in the bedroom, because things aren't going well.

In some cases, the marriage was solid, but the spouse did not necessarily understand the child. Heather described the tension between her husband and their daughter:

> P8 Heather: They don't get along. At all. At all. They love each other, very much. They also don't get along at all. They're so similar, personality-wise, and so different in the way that they need to be spoken to. And shown things, and interacted with…It's hard, because as a mother, my one biggest thing was like, you're going to have a father. You're going to have a great dad. And I felt like I did that. Then I see them together, and I'm like, why? Why are we fighting about everything?...That dynamic is very difficult to watch. They just do not understand each other. They don't understand how they need to speak to each other. How they interact with each other. So we're working on that.

Participants who were able to describe their spouses as a large part of their support system described some of the most positive coping strategies. Kristen and Laura both listed their spouses as their partners in parenthood:

P9 Kristen: The other thing I would mention about how my wife and I cope – one of the things that we learned early on in our relationship, through therapy and some recovery stuff…I'm a recovering alcoholic and drug addict, as well. So we talk about being allies. And that is really, really helpful. Because in those times of stress, you have to remember that the person opposite you is your ally...we're in this together, as a partnership.

P11 Laura: He's just an amazing man. Just an amazing, loving husband. Always has been. I think my life would be in a different place if we hadn't intersected. He grew up in a very loving, normal, nurturing home. He's brought that stability and that calmness to us. Ella's more like him – the oldest is more like him – calm, steady, whereas Kate and I are more like this. I think we just complement each other, we always have. I think my challenge is being too controlling, so I think we meet each other in the middle.

Subtheme 3: Social issues. The subtheme of social issues describes the struggles that parents observe in their children's ability to develop and maintain friendships, as seen in the following examples:

P2 Camille*:* He would play alone, he would play with all of them, but even if he played in a group, you could see that he was not included, in a way. He was happy, and he was having fun, but he was not connecting.

P4 Erin: Just to help them in the social world is a challenge. That piece is stressful. You want other kids to understand where he's coming from. And they don't. To try to facilitate that friendship is…It is heartbreaking.

P5 Rebecca: Mark was one of those kids where he kind of bounced around, but he never really had a group of friends – that social piece of it. And so there was really no best friends, or no things going like that.

Participants with older children, such as Elizabeth and Matt, were able to reflect on their children's progress with connecting socially:

P6 Elizabeth: But she is much better now at how to have people in her life. On her terms. Because she can't maintain it like normal. She would say to people, I don't even have time to see my really good friends…To see them more than once every 6 months…(laughs) And they get that. They're OK with that. So she doesn't have people she sees every day. Except she has people she sees at work. But she doesn't have friends that she goes out with. She's really an introvert. She gets home, she spends time with her dogs, video games, her room. She's got her comfort zone. And any break in routine is very challenging for her.

P7 Matt: She didn't date at all, through high school or college, never had a date. Not a single date. And I was so sad about that. I struggled with it, and once again, I didn't know how to help her. But now she's got a serious boyfriend, and they're living together, and they're in love. She found true love. And this just happened in the past year.

Some participants discussed their own issues with maintaining friendships and social support:

> P13 Rachel: I've made a couple friends in the neighborhood this fall, for the first time. Because I just didn't feel like meeting anybody, when I moved here...I didn't even know how to…who am I? And what am I doing with my life? I had no fucking clue. I just wanted to crawl in a hole and sleep. So it kind of makes it hard to meet people.

More than one parent has found it helpful to connect with organizations for profoundly gifted children as a way to connect with age peers:

> P9 Kristen: It was really, really helpful to start to hang out with other people – even online – who were profoundly gifted. It gave us a lot of understanding of not being so alone.
>
> P10 Janice: Academically, Kyle had a hard time finding anybody to be interested in what he was interested in. For the longest time, well, before [program for PG families] he just really had a hard time finding kids to hang out with. To feel like he fit in. Because he just didn't.

Summary of theme 8: Relationships. A variety of relationship concerns were described in this theme's examples. Participants talked about their relationships with their children, families of origin, the state of their extended families in adulthood, and their marriages. Several participants also discussed social issues in their children as well as themselves, sometimes based on traits and other times on life circumstances. Multiple

participants were currently experiencing disconnection with their own children, and in at least one case, with a parent. How participants are experiencing relationships is very much related to overall levels of stress as well as parenting stress in particular.

Structural Description

Parenting stress is an imbalance between the perceived demands of parenting and one's perceived resources for coping. This phenomenological investigation of PS in parents of 2E children led to eight major themes: (a) child characteristics; (b) appraisal; (c) attribution and meaning-making; (d) misperceptions by others; (e) trauma; (f) coping; (g) educational concerns; and (h) relationships. Six out of 8 themes had subthemes, with misperceptions by others and trauma as the exceptions. Each theme included responses from a minimum of 62% of participants, and subthemes were also created from closely related topics coded by a significant percentage of participants. These themes and subthemes illuminated both the struggles and difficulties of parenting 2E children as well as the more joyful and rewarding aspects of parenting for this population.

Child Characteristics

When asked to describe their parenting stress, participants shared a variety of descriptive characteristics about their children, and there were many similarities among these reports. For instance, early verbal precocity, observed in several cases, frequently caused stress for parents. Two of the models of PS discussed in chapter 2 described the importance of child characteristics in levels of stress (Abidin, 1992; Belsky, 1984; Deater-Deckard, 2004).

The subtheme of OEs and intensities provides a striking view into what it is like to parent children who experience the world in a qualitatively different way. Characteristics of giftedness and 2E are often misunderstood, sometimes even pathologized, and one can see in the responses of participants the challenge of parenting children who have highly reactive nervous systems, and therefore appear to overreact to stimuli (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). For some parents, it was unclear that their child was vastly different from the norm until formal education began and the child started breaking stereotypes (Baum & Owen, 1988; Gilman & Peters, 2018). The parents of profoundly gifted children discussed the relief of connecting with organizations specializing in this population, as it is not easy to meet other families of PG children without help. The final subtheme described the variation among siblings, which is also the cause of stress in its own way, particularly when parents have had a child (or two) who is less intense first. A feeling of isolation and aloneness is not uncommon in parents of children who are very different (Kane, 2013; Neumann, 2008).

Appraisal

Appraisal is a key construct in this study and all of the participants described the mental processes of evaluating stressors in the parenting role. It is notable that the metacognitive processes discussed by some participants provide examples of parents' intellectual OE (Tieso, 2007). One clear aspect of appraisal is noticing that a child is different and does not fit in, and determining potential causes for this variation. Even coming from a background in which one is identified as gifted does not prepare parents to

consider giftedness as a reason behind differences. When the child is both gifted and disabled, the picture is more complex (Postma, 2017). Participants described the ways in which they have struggled with feeling alone and isolated. One obstacle for parents is finding others, including spouses, who can affirm and validate their evaluation of the circumstances (Silverman, 1997). Feelings of being pushed and pulled in different directions, of being unsupported by one's partner – these feelings create real barriers to effective coping. The unexpected nature of their children's exceptionalities, and the reactions of others, was a strong subtheme of appraisal (Lazarus, 2006).

Attribution and Meaning-Making

All participants discussed their beliefs surrounding why things have happened the way that they have happened in their lives (Eberly et al., 2011). Perception of causation was not always accurate, and this was sometimes mentioned in interviews as well when a parent was able to see that they had misattributed reasons in the past. These memories created guilt and shame for many participants when they reflected on their parenting stress experience. The ways in which participants have made meaning from their experiences varies widely, but it is clear that their beliefs about what it means to be gifted have an impact on their perceptions (Mudrak, 2011). Many parents are able to see giftedness as shared within families and not simply about individual achievement.

Misperceptions by Others

For the majority of participants, other people's beliefs and perceptions were a cause of PS. Teachers and clinicians were often reported as the source of

misunderstanding with participants' children, but other family members, and spouses, were not exempt from this category (Besnoy et al., 2015). For some participants, other parents were the cause of stress from their misperceptions, such as parents who assumed that the participants had somehow coached their children to giftedness. Indeed, there are many common myths concerning the gifted and this certainly came through in the interviews as the cause of much grief (Peterson, 2009). When participants have been able to connect with people who understand their children's exceptionalities it has been a source of strength and related to effective coping (Neumann, 2008).

Trauma

Unfortunately, trauma has been part of the experience of PS for most of the participants in this study, as well as for their children. Several types of trauma were discussed by participants, ranging from medical trauma in both adults and children, to the death a child and a spouse, to serious accidents, a house fire, and more. Some participants reported childhood adverse events and others reported chronic adverse events in adulthood. This theme adds a layer of complexity to the description of other stressors which is essential to acknowledge and represent as present in the story (Abidin, 1992; Sheeran, Marvin, & Pianta, 1997).

Coping

Another key construct of this study, coping was described by every participant in the context of their parenting stress. When participants discussed coping they described both people and behaviors in their attempts to handle stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

One way that parents coped was through advocating for their children's educational needs (Besnoy et al., 2015; Speirs Neumeister, 2013). Other strategies were described by parents as well, such as the need for support from other adults, regardless of whether it is a spouse, friend, therapist, or someone else. The fewer supportive influences available, the more difficult it is to cope effectively. Psychological resources, such as social support, are a critical aspect of the coping process and have been observed as related to PS (McCleary, 2002; Thoits, 1995)

Educational Concerns

The participants with children who are still in primary or secondary schools voiced educational concerns which were broken into subthemes of academic performance and goodness of fit. For some participants, homeschooling was the result of a lack of fit between the child and any appropriate educational options (Jolly et al., 2013), and it was also an option for parents whose children have significant medical issues. Some participants have had major problems with their children's schools, with multiple parents using language that describes a battle with the school (Besnoy et al., 2015). Other participants described their children's experiences in college and in careers.

Relationships

The theme of relationships encompassed a wide range of social connections as well as problems in interpersonal relationships in participants' children and themselves. From the nuclear family relationships, with children and spouses, to extended family and even the community, participants described a wide range of relational experiences as

related to parenting. Within this theme, there were clear subthemes of extended family members, marital issues, and social issues. Social issues was less about direct relationships and more about the mechanics of relationships and the difficulties in connecting children with peers and, in some cases, parents struggle in relationships themselves. Relationships are inextricable from appraisal and coping (Deater-Deckard, 2004; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Summary of Structural Description

PS in parents of 2E children can feel isolating and overwhelming, but it is also a source of deep satisfaction and joy. The themes in this study were developed based on participants' descriptions of the challenges of raising children identified as both gifted and disabled as part of the journey of being a parent. Despite sometimes feeling isolated and misunderstood by family members and others, the participants identify with their children and their struggles, and are willing to work as fierce advocates on their behalf.

Discrepant and Nonconforming Data

There was diversity among the participants in this study and no one case stood apart as highly divergent from the others. If all participants had children closer in age, it is possible that responses would have been more similar based on having children in elementary school, or adolescents, or adults, but the ages of the children of participants ranged from 6 to 32 years. Although the cases did not present clear discrepant data, there were nonconforming data that nearly qualified as subthemes concerning three issues: profound giftedness, bullying, and homeschooling.

Five out of 13 families have children who have been identified as profoundly gifted (PG), or in the top 1% of individuals in terms of IQ. Historically, there has been variation in the definition of profound giftedness, but it is generally considered to be an IQ score that is four or more standard deviations from the norm (Makel, Kell, Lubinski, Putallaz, & Benbow, 2016).

More than one parent described the problem of teasing out the characteristics of profound giftedness from pathology:

> P3 Tina: This was part of the stress, too, of just kind of navigating what's gifted/profound giftedness, what's disability, and labeling, and certainly being in the field, we didn't want to rush into that.

A common thread among these parents is choosing to pursue psychological testing as a way to better understand their children's differences:

> P4 Erin: We sent our son for testing, thinking that maybe we would find something – ADD, or something along that lines. Now we're finding out that could be, but we also in the meantime, we sent him for testing and they discovered that he was profoundly gifted. It was shocking. We went in to the interview, or after he'd done the tests, and she drew the bell curve. She draws one standard deviation, two standard deviations… (laughs) It's like, stop, stop, stop! Then she explained to us what that looked like, and that our best bet was probably to start homeschooling.

In this example, Kristen compares the stresses of profound giftedness as similar to those faced for a child with physical disabilities:

> P9 Kristen: And then you've got the stress of having a PG kid. I talk about having to navigate for my older son as much as I do for my younger son for his cerebral palsy. Because needing to get him into an academic environment, and academic classes, that actually challenge and engage him takes a lot of work. People don't get it. When he was in fifth grade, he did Algebra II at the high school that's right here by us, and they invited him to just come and be in high school. And he didn't want to, because he wanted to be around age peers. But understanding that he could do that. And navigating that has its own level of stress as well.

The final examples of discrepant data are related to educational concerns. Peterson and Ray (2006) explored the issue of bullying in gifted students, and therefore it was not unexpected to find that five participants described bullying as a significant concern for their children, and the bullying occurred by both adults and children:

> P8 Heather: She has trouble with friendships. Especially when her friends aren't into her current obsession. So she's totally into manga, and her one friend is like, well that's dumb. OK, well you just called the thing she exists for right now dumb. So, we struggle with friendships, and bullying. She's been the butt of a lot of bullying. And it made her…kind of mean. I watched my very sweet, very open daughter become a little bit mean.

Marcia described the problem of teachers' influence on children with regard to bullying:

> P1 Marcia: The teacher's…the body language is like, "Oh God, how am I going to deal with this child? I don't like this child. This is causing all sorts of problems in the classroom" and on and on and on. But…by doing that, she's giving implicit permission for other kids, and the other parents, to treat your child less than. It took Becky years to get through that.

Camille also talked about bullying by teachers:

> P2 Camille: He had one teacher...she took a disliking to him. He never told us, until maybe December, that she was bullying him. Calling him Mr. Zero…And laughed, and let the other kids laugh at him.

Matt was able to empathize with the bullying his daughter suffered through:

> P7 Matt: I was picked on. And here I was, this giant hulking kid, but I was so gentle. I wouldn't hurt a fly, and people expected me to be this…Well, I was an athlete, but I wasn't aggressive. Here Sarah was, going into high school with all these challenges. She began gaining weight, and of course, we all know what happens there – you get fat shamed. She wasn't fat, she was just big. Tall. Thick-boned. But her glasses were really thick, and people made fun of her.

For Laura's daughter, the bullying led to a severe depressive episode:

> P11 Laura: I think schools walk a fine line of what do they really do, because most kids who are bullies are very sneaky about it….Kate has also learned to kind of let it ride and see what happens. As opposed to…there was a significant

episode in junior high. And then one last year. That we actually…she had a major depressive…we almost had to hospitalize her.

For various reasons, some families found that none of the options for educating their children worked and instead chose to homeschool. For Camille, homeschooling provided a way to meet other families:

P2 Camille: The school system was terrible. So there was a large homeschooling community. Every museum, every library, every child-oriented organization had homeschooling classes or homeschooling activities, or homeschooling PE, or you know. So, I learned from a lot of other moms…There were some unschoolers, and there were some unschoolers whose kids went to college, and that was my saving grace.

Two participants (P9 and P 10) homeschooled their children because of medical concerns:

P10 Janice: I just knew he was going to be the kid that was overlooked. So every time that he was in school, he was the kid who was overlooked, because he could do it. He didn't cause any problems, he wasn't a behavior child, and I didn't want him to become a behavior child. So pretty much after his seizure diagnosis, I just homeschooled him pretty much. Because when he'd have his seizures, they'd cluster, and they were at night, so he wasn't getting any sleep.

As mentioned in Camille's excerpt, some parents worry about how their homeschooled children will fare in college:

> P12 Mary: So that's what I'm freaking out about him, with his older brother, I'm freaking out about, oh my God, I'm ruining him as a homeschooler. Oh my God. He wants to go to like, Michigan Tech. OK, Michigan Tech is a damn fine technical school. Grade-wise, because he's homeschooled, he could probably get in. I mean, there's not a huge humanities requirement for graduation, for them, they don't require a foreign language.

A final area in which discrepant data was seen was within the relationships theme. Unfortunately, two participants (P7 and P10) in the study described experiencing disconnection with one or more of their children. Matt described the joy of recently reconnecting with his youngest daughter:

> P7 Matt: She initiated the contact, that's right. First time in 5 years. She sent me a text and said, "Dad, thank you for the gift and the card. I love it." I literally almost fell out of my chair. My heart fluttered. I couldn't speak. I was like….you know, God had parted the Red Sea. Because I never thought I'd have a connection with her again in my life.

The discrepant data reported here is based on groups of similar statements from participants. Once I discovered a potential subtheme, QDA Miner was used to retrieve relevant text in order to fill out the responses. Ultimately, this was an especially effective way to reveal discrepant and nonconforming data, as these potential subthemes were found not to carry through a majority of participants' stories, and yet they were still representative of aspects of the phenomenon.

Evidence of Quality

A qualitative approach was selected for this study in order to gain a rich and multifaceted view of the phenomenon of parenting stress. Such a method of inquiry is appropriate for exploratory studies about which little is already known, which is true for the population of parents of 2E children. Using phenomenological methods, it is possible to extract the essence of a phenomenon. Trustworthiness in qualitative research is measured differently than in quantitative studies, and as Patton (2014) writes, "qualitative rigor has to do with the quality of the observations made by an inquirer" (p. 725). In this study, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were the elements of interest in determining trustworthiness.

Credibility

Three strategies were employed to ensure credibility: triangulation, member checks, and reflexivity. Triangulation of data using multiple sources included documenting procedures in a research log, and continued review of the literature, including a search for discrepant research. Another strategy for credibility was to obtain the perspective of a colleague as a way of checking my process and assumptions. Member checking was completed with each participant. Reflexivity was approached with the use of reflective journaling, and it was helpful to keep a list of my original assumptions as part of the bracketing process. These expectations were documented prior to data collection and included: (a) parents struggle to deal with the stigma attached to having a child identified as gifted and disabled, (b) gender bias and mother-blame lead to

increased PS in mothers and fathers, (c) gender bias has devalued the role of fathers in parenting children with special needs, (d) parents of children with 2E have difficulty reaching out for support and finding supportive peers, leaving them without an adequate support system, and (e) parents of children with 2E may be more likely to homeschool their children if they discover a lack of services and support available in local schools.

Transferability

Due to the nature of phenomenological research, transferability is limited to the population selected for study. Transferability from this study is limited to parents of 2E children who have accessed services from agencies dealing with gifted individuals. This is a critical point to make, because the experience of parents who are unaware of services applying to their children would be much different. One of the limitations of this study is a lack of diversity among participants' socioeconomic status, as these participants are people who have been able to pursue private psychological testing or counseling for their children.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research is closely related to the measure of reliability in quantitative studies which can be addressed by means of an audit trail documenting a process of inquiry (Golafshani, 2003). Part of this audit trail consisted of my reflective journal as a research log. The goal of dependability is to ensure consistency in research, and documenting the transcription and examination of raw data, keeping files

with data reduction products from QDA Miner, and recording process notes were all ways in which dependability was addressed in this study.

Confirmability

I kept detailed notes about the process, including decision making surrounding meaning units and the development of themes and subthemes. Each round of coding was done in a separate project file in QDA Miner in order to preserve the integrity of each round's results. Throughout the study, I acknowledged and worked to minimize bias through bracketing and reflective journaling, and discussing results with a colleague.

Summary

Chapter 4 included information concerning the study of parenting stress in parents of 2E children such as recruitment procedures and outcomes, data collection processes, details concerning research participants, research questions, in-depth interviews and coding, themes and subthemes, findings, and evidence of quality. Thirteen participants were interviewed and asked two questions, which were supplemented using probing questions during the interviews. The process of phenomenological reduction included Epoche, horizontalization, imaginative variation, textural and structural description, and synthesis. Reduction led to the development of eight themes: (a) child characteristics; (b) appraisal; (c) attribution and meaning-making; (d) misperceptions by others; (e) trauma; (f) coping; (g) educational concerns; and (h) relationships. These efforts led to a compilation of the lived experiences of the participants. In chapter 5 I presented an

interpretation of the findings, theoretical frameworks, implications for social change, limitations of the study, recommendations for further study, and critical reflections.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Chapter 5 will include a review of the purpose of the study, problem, central research questions, and methodology. Also included will be an interpretation of the findings, a discussion of theoretical frameworks from a postinquiry perspective, implications for social change, recommendations for further study, and critical reflections. I will open the chapter with a discussion on the method of inquiry and the nature and intent of the study.

Overview

The purpose of this research was to understand how parents of 2E children experience PS. The following central research questions guided my selection of a qualitative, phenomenological study as most appropriate for understanding the lived experiences of the participants:

1. What is the experience of PS as described by parents of children with 2E?
2. How does this population of parents cope with the demands of PS?

The role of the phenomenological researcher is to use questioning as a way to elicit information about a type of lived experience and to describe its essence, but not to try and explain it, compare it with other experiences, or quantify it (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, with so little information available on the experience of PS in parents of 2E children, I decided phenomenology was a method of inquiry that fit well with the goal of exploring and better understanding this type of lived experience.

I used purposive criterion sampling in this study with the inclusion criteria of participants between the ages of 25–64 years old, who were the biological parents of a 2E child, residing in the United States as the targeted population for recruitment. Potential participants were recruited through two partner agencies. A recruitment e-mail (see Appendix B), which included the study criteria, was sent to clients from these agencies who were eligible and willing to participate. I reviewed informed consent forms with each participant to ensure that the criteria were met and that the participants understood the voluntary nature of the study. Three participants were also recruited at a professional conference when they volunteered to participate after learning about the study. Ultimately, 13 participants were willing and able to discuss their lived experiences with me during individual 1-hour, recorded interviews.

Parenting Stress and 2E Children

The findings in this study aligned with much of the knowledge in the PS literature as well as what is known about parenting gifted children and disabled children. The models of PS were developed in order to explain the connection between parent-child interactions and the determinants of parenting behavior in relation to the child. These findings confirmed Abidin's (1992) view that PS is complex and multifaceted, and that parenting behavior is strongly influenced by parents' personalities and their experiences in the parenting role. The relationship between 2E children and their mothers, in particular, appears very powerful and seems related to the unique balance of vulnerabilities and differences found in these children. To have a child who is an extreme

outlier can engender a close, intense relationship, and for many participants in this study, there was a connection indicating a mutually empowering relationship between parent and child (see Miller & Stiver, 1997).

Interpretation of the Findings

I derived the findings in this study from interviews with parents of 2E children and described the participants' experience of PS. The results represent participant responses to interview questions, my notes, and my review of the relevant literature at the foundation of the study. Thematic development occurred over multiple iterations of data and included eight major themes. In the following subsections, I will describe each major theme identified.

Theme 1: Child Characteristics

This theme represents one of the most basic and fundamental areas of common ground for parents of all children. At the start of each interview, I invited participants to begin their story of PS by describing their children. Kane (2013) describes the journey for parents of gifted children as "a qualitatively different parenting experience than for the parents of typically developing children" and this applies also to parents of 2E children (p. 254). The participants in this study described many characteristics of their children, and three subthemes were developed: milestones and differences, OEs and intensities, and sibling differences. This theme confirmed the models of PS from Abidin (1992) and Belsky (1984) concerning the importance of child characteristics in PS, and it would appear that increased asynchrony means increased PS in parents of 2E children.

The literature on gifted children (i.e., Gross, 2004; Maxwell, 1998; Neville, Piechowski, & Tolan, 2013) is abundant with examples of early developmental milestones, particularly early literacy and numeracy, and in this study, I also found many examples of precocious development. Elizabeth (P7) reported a late talking milestone in her child, Megan, who did not talk until she was 4, but more common in parents from this study was the experience of children reaching milestones early. It is worth noting that milestones are stressful from both tails of the developmental curve. Kearney (2013) described the asynchrony of giftedness as "a family affair. Discrepancies in an individual child's development affect siblings, parents, and extended family members as well as the child, and educational options have repercussions that can reverberate throughout the family system and across generations" (p. 216).

OEs and intensities were quite prevalent in this study, evident in the participants themselves as well as their offspring. In 2E individuals, these characteristics are often difficult to differentiate from symptoms considered pathological (Karpinski, Kolb, Tetreault, & Borowski, 2017; Wells, 2017). This sentiment was described eloquently by Piechowski (2014) who said, "It is a common mistake to take something exceptional as a defect. What is outside the norm is not necessarily a dysfunction" (p. 33). OEs were only mentioned briefly in Chapter 2 because I became aware of OEs as part of the definition of asynchronous development as part of the ongoing literature review, but they are a construct that is highly relevant to the population of parents who participated in this study.

One subtheme of child characteristics was sibling differences, based on descriptions by participants of how their children were different in a variety of ways. Not all of the siblings of the children identified as 2E in this study have been tested for either giftedness or a disability, but in the literature there is ample evidence that giftedness does, indeed, run in families. In a discussion of giftedness and siblings, Gross (2004) traced the idea back to Terman and Hollingworth, noting that siblings of gifted children usually test as either gifted or close to the gifted IQ range. Gross also noted that "exceptionally gifted children are likely to have highly gifted siblings" (p. 80).

None of the participants in this study described their children as difficult as might have been expected from the PS research. Even children who have been diagnosed with ADHD and described with strong psychomotor OE were not perceived as difficult in a way that indicated resentment on the part of the parents. The experience of PS in these parents of 2E children more closely resembles the experience of parents of children who have just one exceptionality, such as a chronic illness, disability, intellectual disability, or giftedness alone.

Theme 2: Appraisal

Cognitive appraisal is at the heart of PS and was easily observed in each interview. I developed the subtheme of evaluation to illustrate parents' evaluative processes concerning various aspects of their children's lives, from behavioral issues to career choices. For instance, participants sometimes expressed anger over their children's

decisions concerning school, and Weiner (2000) described anger as a cue that failure is controllable and that the other is responsible.

> P3 Tina: Own your own education…The kids started throwing that in my face, when I would micromanage and check grades, and – why is it that you got an F on that assignment? Or how did you get a C on that final? With Marie not being academically driven, I really stepped back and thought, OK, she'll probably finish with a B average. Let it go. She is gifted in so many other ways, and it's not her gig. But I had to have that conversation with me, because I liked being academically gifted.

The metacognition evident in the interviews, such as in the above example, shows not only the content of participants beliefs, but the structure of their mental processes. These participants have learned that they identify with their children and that identification helps them navigate the waters of being a parent. Appraisal and reappraisal are part of the fabric of PS as well as coping. These mental processes allow for experiencing events as stressful and difficult, or not, and are the way that a person is able to work out a way forward in resolving stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In Abidin's (1992) model of PS, cognitions and beliefs of parents are the essential components of parenting behavior because all participants indicated an appraisal process of evaluation related to stress and coping. As described in the daily hassles model of PS, parents in this study have learned to adapt and cope with the day-to-day issues of parenting a 2E child (Deater-Deckard, 2004).

Theme 3: Attribution and Meaning-Making

One of the benefits of conceptualizing giftedness as asynchronous development is that it removes achievement from necessarily being a part of a child's advanced cognitive abilities, as described by Silverman (2002), "Asynchronous development is a phenomenological, rather than a utilitarian, perspective; it focuses on the conscious experience of the gifted, rather than on their usefulness to society" (p. 32). Even parents who understand this perspective in their very core struggle with the perceived relationship between achievement and giftedness. A subtheme of parental giftedness was developed based on responses from participants concerning their own giftedness or exceptionalities as well as that of their spouses and families of origin.

As I mentioned, participants in this study did not appear resentful or hostile toward their children at all, even when describing challenging behaviors. They were able to discuss it with empathy and understanding, even when they had a difficult time identifying with their child's behaviors. This may be attributed to the way that these parents did not see their children as responsible but accepted their differences as part of the experience of being gifted and disabled. Grant and Piechowski (1999) discussed the importance of adopting a child-centered approach to educating gifted children, and this is the most sensible way to understand the phenomenon of 2E as well.

Weiner (2000) described the difference between parents and teachers perceiving a child as not achieving due to a lack of effort compared to not achieving due to disability or lack of aptitude, and that issue is often a complication in identification for 2E children.

It is easy to misunderstand a child who is struggling because of a disability because even when the disability is known, acknowledged, and treated, there is not always a full understanding of its impact. This is the nature of 2E, and the parents in this study were accepting of their children's differences, even when they were unable to identify based on their own experiences. It is notable that more than one parent discussed the way that the construct of asynchronous development helps make sense of their children's exceptionalities and intensities (see Neville et al., 2013).

Theme 4: Misperceptions by Others

This theme is particularly insidious and difficult for parents of 2E children because the perceptions of other people can cause significant distress. Participants expressed their experiences of being misunderstood by other people in a number of different ways. Some participants struggled because they have felt misunderstood by a spouse or a family member, and others found that teachers misinterpreted their intentions, or other parents have sometimes misperceived the intentions or words of participants as bragging about their children. Each of these reports validates existing literature on the experience of parenting gifted children (e.g., Silverman & Kearney, 1989; Silverman & Miller, 2009). There is also the matter of being a parent and witnessing their child being misunderstood by other people, which is part of the fabric of PS for many of the participants. Belsky's (1984) model of PS included social support and provision of social expectations, and misperceptions by others in parents' lives can cause problems when it comes to developing adequate social support. Provision of social expectations is

complicated by asynchronous development because parents will struggle more than usual when a child is very divergent from the norm (Silverman, 1997).

Theme 5: Trauma

Although trauma was not discussed in the initial review of the literature as relevant to PS, it was described by eight participants in this study. The types of traumatic experiences were very different, but each had a strong impact and required adaptation and adjustment on the part of those affected. There is a body of work that discusses the effects of trauma on parenting (e.g., Appleyard & Osofsky, 2003) as well as literature on how people are able to grow from traumatic experiences (e.g., Banyard, Williams, & Siegel, 2003; Yehunda, Halligan, & Grossman, 2001). Sheeran et al. (2001) discussed the trauma of receiving a diagnosis for one's child, and coming to terms with the realization that one's child will be very different from the norm. Silverman and Kearney (1989) discussed the issue of parents' reactions to learning their child is exceptionally gifted, but there are few available reports concerning what it is like for parents of 2E children to grapple with the multiple identifications involved.

Theme 6: Coping

An array of coping strategies were described by participants in this study, both strategies for individual coping as well as ways in which to help their children cope with their own stressors. Each person responds to PS differently, based on their style of appraisal and their environmental conditions, and therefore, participants' discussion of coping reflected their perceptions and beliefs about the situations they described during

the interviews (Power & Hill, 2010). Coping can be viewed through a lens of meaning-making and divided into global meaning and situational meaning, with global meaning representing an individual's broad goals, beliefs, and sense of purpose (Park, 2011). Participants in this study discussed their experiences of coping from both a broader, global perspective and from a situational perspective. The meaning-making found in the attribution and meaning-making theme are very much related to the implicit and explicit descriptions of coping by parents. The transactional views of parenting stress described in Chapter 2 are compatible with a model of coping that views stress as the results of a discrepancy between global meaning and situational meaning (Abidin, 1992; Park, 2011).

Theme 7: Educational Concerns

Among participants in this study, only Elizabeth (P6), whose child has long been out of secondary school, did not raise the problem of educational concerns. This theme was divided into the subthemes of academic performance and goodness of fit. The struggle to find a school that fits a gifted student has been discussed in the literature (e.g., Gross, 2004) and the participants in this study described their difficulties in finding educational solutions for their children. For many parents, homeschooling becomes the only viable option, and while it alleviates problems experienced at school, it has its own concerns (Merrill, 2012; Trépanier, 2015). Mary (P12) described her concern about her son's ability to get into college as a homeschooled student, and Camille (P2) discussed her son's transition to college this year after several years of homeschooling.

Theme 8: Relationships

All of the participants in this study described critical relationships in their lives, from children, to spouses, to extended family and friends. Also included in the relationships theme were descriptions of social problems observed in participants' children and, in some cases, in the social lives of participants. This theme included both strong, positive connection in relationships, as well as feelings of isolation and disconnection (Miller & Stiver, 1997). The subtheme of marital issues is one in which stress is especially evident. Randall and Bodenmenn (2009) described the critical role of stress on close relationships, particularly as a threat to marital longevity. A subtheme was also developed from participants' descriptions of relationships with extended family members. Based on a rare, longitudinal study of exceptionally gifted children, Gross (2004) described the importance of the family:

> The family and its role in moulding the gifted child's attitudes, values and aspirations may well be the most significant factor in talent development. If the family does not value, encourage and facilitate the growth of the young child's gifts, they will not develop, in later life, as talents. (p. 76)

It is no simple task to raise a 2E child around people who are unaware of the characteristics of giftedness and disability and the intersection of these traits. Belsky's (1984) model of determinants of PS included emotional support, or feelings of acceptance of love, as protective against PS, and when these aspects are missing from a relationship, it can lead to disconnection.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study was guided by three theoretical lenses: stress appraisal theory, coping, and attribution theory. There is significant overlap between the concepts from these theoretical perspectives.

Stress Appraisal Theory

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) elucidated a transactional stress and coping model positing the view that stress results from people's cognitive appraisals of an event and the subsequent evaluation of their ability to cope with the event. Cognitions and beliefs are essential elements of parenting behavior and are certainly at the heart of the phenomenon of PS. This theory provides a way of understanding the problem of asynchronous development as a component of PS in parents of 2E children because of the divergence from the norm in this population as described by Silverman (1997). Parents look to books, websites, friends and family in order to assess their children's development, but in parents of children who are atypical, this is a constant source of stress.

Coping

Coping is a process comprised of cognitive appraisals, and is described by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as the constantly changing efforts to manage cognitive and behavioral efforts to deal with specific internal or external demands. Participants in this study all described their coping efforts for dealing with the ongoing need for evaluation and re-evaluation of stressful parenting situations. Some of the specific coping behaviors

and strategies mentioned in Chapter 2 were described by parents, and in this example from Kristen (P9), for instance, one can see positive reframing (McCleary, 2002) at work:

> We don't have any family here, so we are pretty much solo. Date night doesn't happen...So what it means – I'm going to flip it – what it means is we have a very close family. We enjoy spending time with everybody.

Not all reported coping behaviors discussed by participants would be considered healthy, or effective. The introduction of dysfunction into a family system makes it more difficult to cope (Belsky, 1984), and this was especially evident in the marital issues theme.

There was much to celebrate in the participants who did describe positive coping behaviors. As described by Belsky (1984), some parents are highly responsive with their children, and are able to help them grow by providing an environment in which they are able to thrive. Multiple participants described the way that they coached their children and taught them to function competently in the world, to be resourceful, and to follow their inner drives for mastery.

Attribution Theory

Weiner (1986, 2000) describes attribution theory as an intrapersonal and interpersonal theory of motivation and emotion based on causal ascriptions. Perceived causality relates to PS because as discussed by participants in this study, parents of 2E children feel the need to assess the reasons for their children's atypical behaviors, performance, or other responses. As anticipated, parents' beliefs about gifted and public perceptions of giftedness were discussed during interviews, with parents often struggling

to acknowledge their own giftedness. Parents who grew up identified as gifted and high achieving seem more likely to see giftedness as a family issue, and perhaps identify more easily with their children's giftedness.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to parents willing to discuss their experiences of PS, which may have unintentionally omitted parents who are reluctant to discuss their stories with a researcher. Many parents of 2E children are not aware of their children's status as both gifted and disabled, and it is acknowledged that the experience likely is different for parents who have yet to learn that there is, indeed, a name for their children's exceptionalities. Other limitations of this study included a small sample size, and a sample that was recruited from two agencies which provide assessment and counseling services to gifted individuals. The self-reporting nature of interviews introduces potential limitations as well, as people may not disclose openly and honestly about their experiences. I took measures to ensure that the risk of researcher bias was minimized through bracketing procedures such as reflective journaling. Another limitation of this study is that the vast majority of participants were mothers, with only one father participating. There was also a narrow range of socioeconomic status and ethnic diversity, with upper-middle class, white participants bring overrepresented.

Implications for Social Change

The construct of 2E is not widely known outside of the world of gifted education, but it is discussed with increasing frequency within the literature of that field (e.g.,

Kaufman, 2018). In psychology, there is a need for increased awareness and education about this phenomenon. Parents of children who meet the criteria for 2E may never know why their child is struggling with behaviors that don't make sense, and that are outside of the norm. A potential contribution for social change from this study is simply providing insight into the existence of the problem of PS in parents of 2E children, perhaps leading to an increased awareness that asynchronous development is fertile ground for stress. Although parents of gifted children have been described in the literature, this study illustrates some differences between those experiences compared to parenting a 2E child.

Recommendations for Further Study

Much work remains on understanding PS in parents of 2E children, and I recommend that others take up the task of studying this population, particularly from quantitative and mixed-methods perspectives. For instance, the Parenting Stress Index-4 is a validated instrument which can be used to study this population of parents on a larger scale (Abidin, 2012). It would be a worthwhile venture to examine levels of PS using the Parenting Stress Index to compare PS across groups, such as with parents of 2E children as well as parents of gifted children and disabled children. Another idea worth investigating is a study to connect the ideas in Dąbrowski's theory of positive disintegration–beyond the OEs–to this population of parents. Efforts might be made to study parents of 2E children who deal with disabilities meeting the criteria for emotional disturbances, strong OEs, and issues that can be viewed through a lens that does not view the children's behaviors as pathological. It is beyond the scope of this section to discuss

Dąbrowski's concept of multilevel development, but elements of multilevel development were seen in this study, and this type of personal growth is worthy of further study from a family perspective.

Dissemination of Findings

It is likely that most parents of children with any exceptionalities would be able to relate to the participants in this study, and for this population, it is of critical importance to feel less isolated and alone. Educators and professionals who work with gifted and 2E children might also benefit from the results of this study. I expect to share the study's findings through various media such as publications such as journals and websites, as well as periodicals. Speaking engagements will be sought through organizations on multiple levels, from local to international, including academic conferences. Another outlet for dissemination could include webinars through an organization such as Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted.

Researcher's Critical Reflection

PS is a phenomenon that is experienced by all parents and yet rarely is addressed in research or practice as relevant in understanding 2E learners. One of the persistent issues in the field of gifted education is a focus on gifted children as producers, with a potential for eminence, and a lack of awareness that children are more than their apparent gifts (Grant & Piechowski, 1999). While it is important to ensure that children's educational needs are met, children who possess advanced cognitive abilities are also individuals who have needs and interests outside of the classroom. Parents of children

who are both gifted and disabled are dealing with a parenting experience that is vastly outside of the experience of most of their friends and family. The experience of parenting stress in parents of 2E children can cause parents to feel lonely, hopeless, and it can be heartbreaking, but it is also hugely rewarding. The stress for parents of 2E children comes from a variety of sources. The themes developed from the interviews reflect that there are several areas related to stress, especially relationships with spouses and family, educational concerns, and characteristics of children who display behaviors and abilities that are far from the norm.

My Experience with Conducting this Study

When I first wrote the prospectus for this study, the plan was to investigate the phenomenon of PS in fathers of children with ADHD. During the first months of reviewing the literature on PS, my son, Jack, was withdrawn from his public elementary school. We began a slow process of "de-schooling" him, and we learned that the 2E label is an appropriate framework for understanding Jack. There have been times while working on this dissertation when my personal levels of PS felt nearly overwhelming, such as in this excerpt from my reflective journal, when Jack was 7 years old and in second grade:

> Jack ran away tonight. He got into trouble at school and we took away his iPad. Then, while I was making dinner, he ran off from the backyard. We didn't think that he'd gone far, why would we think that? He's never taken off before. But time went by, and we couldn't find him. I called my mom, and she came over to

> help look for him. Jason went all over the neighborhood, searching, he even pumped up the bike tires and rode around, looking. I finally was going to call 911 and a cop car pulled up, with Jack in it. (Reflective journal, September 3, 2013)

Later that week, I described the situation in the context of my dissertation work:

> We're in dire need of more help, to help Jack manage his symptoms. This has all been a nightmare, and I'm afraid for Jack. Since I spend my days doing research about ADHD and parenting stress, I know what sort of behaviors are possible, what comorbid conditions could develop in addition to the dyslexia he's already been diagnosed with. If ADHD and dyslexia seemed like a tough combination, it's hard to imagine things getting worse, and yet they are. We'd managed to get him through 2 years at the school, where he struggled, but he wasn't displaying serious behavior problems. Now he is, and that will mean he's going to be seen as a problem student, which is exactly what I've been afraid would happen. (Reflective journal, September 9, 2013)

Jack ran away because he was suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder, from bullying, and the medication he was taking for ADHD caused increased anxiety. By the time we pulled him out of school, roughly 1 month after the above incident, he had also eloped from school, and began to talk about self-harm. We became aware that school was the major stressor, and as soon as Jack was at home, things improved dramatically.

Bracketing one's experience of the phenomenon under investigation is a challenge, and I relied heavily upon reflective journals. The fact that I identify as a 2E

adult also complicated my experience in this study, as my background set me up to have a set of beliefs and expectations surrounding giftedness that proved to be an obstacle in understanding Jack's issues (Wells, 2017). Although I am glad to report that our lives improved with homeschooling, and Jack slowly recovered from early trauma, it has been a difficult journey to get to this point. We are aware that the outcome might have been very different if we lived in a place that is less amenable to homeschooling, or if I was required to work outside of our home. That we have the support of my mother in Jack's care and schooling has also been an important factor.

The interviews for this project were, at times, quite emotional. To talk with a parent about the death of their child, as was the case with Matt (P7), or the death of a spouse, such as with Elizabeth (P6), brings a dimension of intensity that provided much to ponder in my reflective writing. The participants shared both painful and joyful experiences, and their stories painted a picture of what it is like to parent children who are vastly different from the norm. As Tina stated at one point off the record, these children are, indeed, "delightful and draining."

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand how parents of 2E children experience parenting stress. Phenomenology was chosen as an appropriate method of inquiry as this approach addresses the essence of a phenomenon and facilitates the provision of a rich description. The goals of the study were accomplished through in-

depth interviews with 13 participants, an extensive literature review, and my reflective journaling.

The phenomenon of PS is real for parents of 2E children as well as for parents of children who have one exceptionality. The asynchronous development of 2E children is not well understood or recognized by educators, clinicians, or parents, and this is the source of much stress. The consequences of PS can be grave, leading to dissolved marriages, estrangement from one's children, or health problems. To help parents minimize the stressors of parenting and increase awareness of what 2E looks like across a wide range of potential exceptionalities, it is necessary to provide knowledge and understanding of what it means to be gifted. Until the myths about giftedness and disabilities have been discarded and the concept of asynchronous development has been embraced as adequately representing the experience of possessing advanced cognitive abilities, parents of 2E children will continue to face feelings of isolation and uncertainty.

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Appendix A: Screening Questions

1. Are you between ages 25–64?
2. Are you the biological parent of a child who is at least 7 years old?
3. Do one or more of the following “disabilities” apply to your child?
    - Autism/Asperger’s Syndrome
    - ADHD
    - Deaf-blindness
    - Deafness
    - Developmental delay
    - Emotional disturbance
    - Hearing impairment
    - Multiple disabilities
    - Orthopedic impairment
    - Other health impairment (e.g., ADHD)
    - Specific learning disability (e.g., dyslexia, dysgraphia)
    - Speech or language impairment
    - Traumatic brain injury
    - Visual impairment, including blindness
4. Are you interested in participating in a face-to-face interview discussing your experiences as the parent of a 2E child?

Appendix B: Recruitment E-mail

Research Participation Opportunity

Greetings.

My name is Christiane Wells and I am a doctoral student studying educational psychology at Walden University. My dissertation topic is **parenting stress**, and I am searching for biological parents of **twice-exceptional (2E)** children to participate in a one-hour interview about their lived experiences parenting children who have been identified as gifted and also have one or more of the following co-occurring conditions:

1. Autism Spectrum Disorder
2. Blindness
3. Deafness
4. Emotional Disturbance (e.g., bipolar disorder)
5. Hearing Impairment
6. Multiple Disabilities
7. Orthopedic Impairment
8. Other Health Impaired (e.g., ADHD)
9. Specific Learning Disability (e.g., dyslexia)
10. Speech or Language Impairment
11. Traumatic Brain Injury
12. Visual Impairment
13. Deaf-Blindness

(This list of eligible “disabilities” is outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) and is used in the study to help define twice-exceptionality.)

Participation is completely voluntary and all data will remain confidential.

If you are interested, please click on the link for additional information about the study and a contact form: [insert link with contact page…]

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at XXXXXXXX or XXXXXXXX.

Thank you for your time!

Christiane Wells, MSW

Doctoral Student, Psychology

Walden University