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HIGH SCHOOL DISCIPLINE POLICIES AND THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of my brother, Robbie, whose belief in me has given me strength and undoubtedly helped me overcome all of the obstacles I've encountered along this journey. I hope I've made you proud, buddy.

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I would first like to acknowledge my parents, John and Patty for making this possible. Dad, thank you for the sacrifices you've made that have allowed me to pursue my doctoral degree. This is the last one-I promise. Mom, thank you for always taking the time to listen to me. Your support over the last five years has been invaluable. Mom and Dad, your confidence in me has given me the courage to follow my dreams. Thank you for never doubting me.

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HIGH SCHOOL DISCIPLINE POLICIES AND THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

SARA E. NARDONE

ABSTRACT

Relationships play a central role of human development by fostering connection and growth in individuals (Josselson, 1992). Adolescence is a stage of development in which relationships are perhaps most integral because they help youth navigate the changes that come with this developmental phase. Teacher-student relationships are one of the most influential relationships for youth because teacher-student relationships impact students' academic achievement and educational experience (Ellerbrock et al., 2015; Wilkins, 2014). There are many factors that contribute to positive teacher-student relationships. An area of research that has not gained as much attention regarding teacher-student relationships is discipline in schools. High schools are moving away from zero-tolerance discipline policies but are faced with a new set of challenges regarding the enforcement of the disciplinary protocol.

The present study sheds light on how high school discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship using a social constructionist paradigm and a basic interpretative qualitative design. Research questions were: a) How do teachers navigate any ambiguities surrounding the school discipline protocol? b) What role does inconsistency of enforcement of discipline policies play in the teacher-student relationship quality? And c) How do discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of both teachers and students? Results indicate that inconsistent enforcement of these policies is impacting the teacher-student relationship

rather than the discipline policies themselves. Implications for counseling psychology, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research will be discussed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Origins of Present Study

The motivation for the present study came about after a completion of a pilot study exploring zero-tolerance discipline policies and the teacher-student relationship (Nardone, 2017). While there is no single, universal definition of zero-tolerance policies, the American Psychological Association Zero-Tolerance Task Force (2008), defines them as "a philosophy or policy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context" (p. 2).

The pilot study (Nardone, 2017) used qualitative methods and examined what zero-tolerance policies were in place in schools and how these policies impacted the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of teachers. Participants in the study were two high school teachers, one from a private school and one from a public school. A surprising finding from the pilot study laid the groundwork for the present study. Findings from the pilot study suggested that schools started to shift away from zero-tolerance discipline policies in the traditional sense. Instead, the schools were moving towards policies that were meant to be enforced the same way that zero-tolerance policies

were designed, but there was grey area surrounding the new policies and the enforcement of them. Teachers found themselves in difficult situations in which they struggled to navigate whether to enforce or not to enforce the policies. They explained that they were often in a lose-lose situation because if they did enforce the policies, the students viewed them as too strict and if they opted not to enforce the policies, they were viewed as 'soft' by fellow teachers who did enforce them. Teachers described how they placed more value on their relationship with students than on disciplinary protocol. Thus, they often opted to not enforce the discipline policies as long as the policy violation was minor.

As a result of these findings, there remained many unanswered questions regarding current disciplinary protocol in schools. The researcher was interested in understanding what disciplinary policies are currently in place and how the grey area surrounding these policies impact the teacher-student relationship. The purpose of this study was to explore how discipline policies in general impact the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of both teachers and students. Furthermore, this study sought to understand how the ill-defined nature of school discipline protocol is navigated. In particular, how students and teachers navigate the mixed messages sent to them regarding school discipline policies and the impact it has on the teacher-student relationship (Nardone, 2017).

This chapter will provide the rationale for the present study followed by a section discussing the importance of teacher-student relationships. The next section will address the relevance of counseling psychology in schools. A brief history of zero-tolerance discipline policies will be provided, followed by a section discussing the need for new

disciplinary alternatives. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the current study's guiding paradigm and an overview of the chapter.

Rationale. The critical role of relationships, particularly relationships with teachers, in the development of high school youth has been determined in current literature (Cooper & Miness, 2014; Cornell & Huang, 2016; Gurland & Evangelista, 2015; Kiefer & Pennington, 2017; Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2010). The teacher-student relationship plays an integral part in both students' development and academic success. The present study is important because the teacher-student relationship may be impacted by the discipline protocol in high schools.

The majority of U.S. high schools are at a crossroads with their approaches to discipline. There is a large grey area in which the rigidity of school discipline policies conflicts with the discrepancies of teacher discretion when it comes to enforcing discipline. Schools are moving away from zero-tolerance but the literature on the impact of new discipline alternatives is limited (Skiba & Losen, 2016). The importance of teacher-student relationships in the educational experience and attainment of youth is known. It is also known that certain disciplinary approaches are more effective than others in fostering positive teacher-student relationships. The current study intended to provide a deeper understanding of exactly how high schools' disciplinary protocol impacts the teacher-student relationship, for better or for worse. This information is important because it provides more insight into the disciplinary protocol that is both helping and hindering teachers' relationships with students. The following section will discuss the importance of teacher-student relationships and how changing disciplinary protocol could impact the teacher-student relationship.

Aims. The present study answered the following three research questions: a) How do teachers navigate any ambiguities surrounding the school discipline protocol? b) What role does inconsistency of enforcement of discipline policies play in the teacher-student relationship quality? And c) How do discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of both teachers and students?

The Importance of Teacher-Student Relationships

Students' relationships with teachers are essential for their academic success and achievement (Ellerbrock, Abbas, Dicicco, Denmon, Sabella, & Hart, 2015; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandlios, 2011; Wilkins, 2014). Additionally, the development of positive teacher-student relationships is an essential component of effective classroom management (Emmer & Stough, 2001). Classroom management consists of many factors; however, discipline is a major aspect. There are a variety of factors that impact the teacher-student relationship in both positive and negative ways. Moreover, there are many teacher qualities that impact the ways that teachers interact and relate to students. For instance, teacher support and closeness are important factors that impact the teacher-student relationship. Additionally, conflict with teachers is another major factor that can have detrimental effects on students' academic performance, adjustment, social skills, and even self-esteem (Khullar & Tyagi, 2014). With the evolving discipline policies coupled with the developmental changes and challenges associated with adolescence, conflict is likely regularly encountered. If conflict is not handled in a productive manner, the relationship between students and teachers can suffer.

There is significant and increasing literature stressing the importance of positive teacher-student relationships for adolescents' educational attainment, school engagement,

and overall academic success (Ellerbrock, Abbas, Dicicco, Denmon, Sabella, & Hart, 2015; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandlios, 2011; Wilkins, 2014). Students' relationships with teachers have a significant impact on their overall experience in school because the teacher-student relationship affects the way they perceive their belonging and connectedness to both their teachers and their school (Cooper & Miness, 2014). Teachers who are invested in creating an environment that fosters positive relationships with students make their classrooms more conducive to the students' learning as well as making sure to meet their academic, developmental, and emotional needs (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandlios, 2011). When teachers are in the position to use their discretion regarding when and which policies to enforce, students on the receiving end may perceive their teachers in a negative light. Students' negative perception of teachers could also impact their sense of belonging as well as their perception of their school's overall climate.

The following section will include the relevance of counseling psychology in schools. Counseling psychology is not commonly thought of as having a place within the school system compared to other psychology fields such as career and vocational psychology. Given the interrelatedness of these fields, as well as other lesser known applications, counseling psychology fits well within the education system. The section to follow contains information about the importance of incorporating counseling psychology in schools.

Counseling Psychology and Schools

Counseling psychology may not initially seem to be a field of psychology that has much relevance in the education system, but there are many reasons why counseling

psychology research can enhance schools as well as students' academic experiences. Romano and Kachgal (2004) state that counseling psychology and school counseling could have stronger positive influences on both society and the education system if the two specialties converge on their similarities. They go on to explain that school counselors and counseling psychologists are obvious collaborators because of their similar historical and educational backgrounds and professional identities (Romano & Kachgal, 2004). They argue that the field of psychology has been called upon to improve the educational experience and student development (Romano & Kachgal, 2004). However, even though counseling psychologists have been significant contributors to school reform, their work is not adequately reflected in counseling psychology journals (Walsh & Galassi, 2002).

For the last two decades, the educational reform movement has spurred an interest of psychologists in schools and the education system (Walsh, Galassi, Murphy, & Park-Taylor, 2002). The American Psychological Association made a statement at a conference on school reform calling for psychologists to rethink the relevance of education as it relates to the field and make it a priority in the psychology community (American Psychological Association, 1997; Walsh, Galassi, Murphy, & Park-Taylor, 2002). Walsh et al. (2002) argue that kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) education as a focus for counseling psychologists' research and practice is a "natural fit" because many counseling psychology programs are housed in departments of education (p. 682). Furthermore, Walsh et al. (2002) suggest that the intersection between counseling psychology and developmental psychology is a foundational component of psychologists' work within schools.

Counseling psychology holds development across an individual's lifespan at the core of much of the research and practice performed by counseling psychologists (Gelso & Fassinger, 1992; Walsh et al. 2002). Perhaps the most prominent theory of development is Erikson's (1959) theory of psychosocial development which consists of eight stages beginning from birth until death. At the center of Erikson's (1959) theory lies a series of interpersonal tasks an individual must successfully master in order to progress through the remaining stages. Erikson's (1959) theory illustrates how critical relationships are in an individual's development. While relationships play critical roles for individuals across the lifespan, relationships are particularly important for adolescents. Perhaps more than any other age group, adolescents look to others or consult when making decisions. Adolescence is stage of development that is filled with decision-making ranging from which extra-curriculars to participate in, what after school job to take, or even how to handle an unplanned pregnancy (Finken, 2009). Learning how to effectively navigate the decision-making process is central to one's development as the significance of decisions increase as one matures. One of the most common decision-making processes adolescents encounter in high school involves their plans after graduation.

Developmental theories are not only limited to an individual's development across the lifespan. A major area of counseling psychology research and practice involves career and work. Not surprisingly, there are developmental components in a significant amount of career and work-related research (Solberg, Howard, Blustein, & Close, 2002; Super, 1953; 1990; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). According to these developmental theories of career development, high school is a time when a major phase

of career development occurs (Super, 1990). The exploration phase begins during high school and is when an adolescent determines their interests and strengths through hobbies and course work. Super's (1990) theory states that individuals' self-concepts are created through a variety of learning experiences, especially learning experiences that include significant relationships. During this phase, individuals attempt to determine how well they fit within an occupation. The exploration phase is crucial to one's career development and ultimately impacts an individual in both the short-term for the school-to-work transition and long-term once they have been established in a career for years. The teacher-student relationship is arguably one of the most critical relationships for a student's development, academic attainment, and an overall positive educational experience. With counseling psychology's focus on development and the importance of relational experiences for an individual's growth, it is evident that there is a significant place for counseling psychology within schools.

The present study was developed with the aforementioned components in mind. Teacher-student relationships play an integral role in adolescents' academic and career success. Thus, the present study was interested in exploring how the teacher-student relationship can be impacted by discipline policies in high schools. The changing school discipline policies from zero tolerance policies to new alternatives is an area of research that has not been given much attention with regards to how the teacher-student relationship is impacted (Skiba & Losen, 2016). There are many complex layers to the disciplinary protocols that affect both students and teachers alike (Nardone, 2017).

The next section will provide a brief overview of the history of zero-tolerance discipline policies. Although the focus of the present study was on the discipline

protocol currently in place in schools, it is important to first understand what zero-tolerance policies are and why schools have transitioned away from them. This section is intended to provide the reader with a sense of what zero-tolerance policies are and why so many critics have argued for their ineffectiveness. It is important to understand how zero-tolerance policies developed in order to appreciate why they are structured in such a rigid manner. The rigidity of zero-tolerance policies is the primary reason critics and researchers believe they cause more harm than good.

Brief history of zero-tolerance policies. Before discussing why schools have moved away from zero tolerance discipline policies, it is important to understand the nature of zero-tolerance discipline policies and why so many argued their ineffectiveness. The American Psychological Association's Zero-Tolerance Task Force defines them as (2008) "a philosophy or policy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context (p. 852). Originally, zero-tolerance policies were developed as an approach to drug enforcement (American Psychological Association Task Force, 2008). Zero tolerance policies stemmed from the broken windows theory which states that crime is a result of chaos and is unavoidable (Lorenz, 2010). The theory goes on to explain that if someone walks by a building with a broken window, the individual will assume no one cares and that no one is in charge. The more broken windows, the more chaos spreads and results in criminal activity (Lorenz, 2010). In the mid-1990s, zero-tolerance policies were largely a response to incidents of school violence and school shootings (American Psychological Association Task Force, 2008). The motivation behind the policy was to

ideally prevent, and more realistically reduce, the occurrence of weapons being brought into the school and subsequently, school violence as a whole.

While the policy began as an attempt to prevent guns and other weapons being brought into schools, schools across the country have taken zero-tolerance policies several steps further and expanded the notion of zero-tolerance to many other things. Today, some schools have zero-tolerance policies for "anything that resembles a weapon, can be used as a weapon, profanity, drugs, bullying, and cheating" (Chittom & Walter, 2016, p. 1). The intent was to make it easier for administrators to resolve disciplinary issues. However, the one size fits all approach arguably does not fit all. Problems with zero-tolerance policies started coming to the surface as school administrators and faculty encountered instances in which students violated the rigid parameters of the zero-tolerance discipline policies without even knowing it (Chittom & Walter, 2016).

The policy was developed with good intentions aimed at protecting students and keeping them safe while in school, but the vague and ever-expanding nature of zero-tolerance policies has created substantial debate over the years leading people to question the effectiveness of the polices in general. Some critics argue that these policies cause more harm than good, especially as they relate to students' educational experience (Mental Health America, 2016). In some instances, zero-tolerance policies exacerbate the exact behavior they are aimed at preventing. For example, students eventually realize they will get suspended or expelled depending on the nature of the offense or how many offenses they have committed. For some students, they see this as an opportunity to get out of school and will violate the policy just so they will get suspended or expelled (Mental Health America, 2016; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011). If

students are not in school, they are not learning, and their educational experience is negatively impacted. Given the ironic ambiguity and rigidity of the definition, it is understandable why there are so many objections to the zero-tolerance policies in schools. Because there is not a single, universal definition of zero-tolerance, it is challenging to gauge just how prevalent these policies are (American Psychological Association Task Force, 2008). There is a consensus among both critics and advocates of zero-tolerance policies that there should be some flexibility within them. Still, there are critics who argue zero-tolerance policies should be abolished altogether (Chittom & Walter, 2016). The following section will address the criticisms of zero-tolerance policies.

Criticisms of zero-tolerance discipline policies. There are many compelling reasons for schools to discontinue the use of zero-tolerance policies in their disciplinary protocol. Because there are so many criticisms, it is difficult to say which issue is the most pressing. Perhaps the most common criticism is that zero-tolerance policies often have ambiguous definitions of offenses and the scope of what classifies as an offense is too vast and continuously expanding (American Psychological Association Task Force, 2008; Chittom & Walter, 2016). Often, schools do not have clear descriptions of what offenses fall under the zero-tolerance policy (Mental Health America, 2016). Rather, they simply have a vague outline of what their institution's zero-tolerance policy is, usually indicating that all offenses will be handled with zero-tolerance. In other words, it does not matter what the context, situation, nature, or back story is to the offense. The one size fits all approach is not effective given the unique differences in every situation.

A second criticism of zero-tolerance discipline policies is the labeling of students as ‘criminals’ or ‘delinquents’ and the long-term impact it has on youth (Mental Health America, 2016; Nolan, 2011). Possibly the best illustration of criminalizing youth can be found in an ethnographic study conducted by Nolan (2011), *Police in the Hallways*, in which she highlights the serious flaws of the zero-tolerance policy in an urban public high school. According to Nolan (2011), a typical occurrence involves the following sequence of events: a student is stopped for violating the dress code (such as the wrong color shirt) and the school police officer asks for the student’s identification card. The student questions the officer and asks what they did wrong and automatically the student is written up for being disorderly. The student then must serve a detention or suspension but either misses the detention because of work or comes to school when suspended because they have a test. These situations result in a summons for a court date. The court is about an hour bus ride away from the school and most students rely on public transportation to get to and from school. The student now has a scheduled court date during school hours that they must attend. The student misses the court date because the bus ran late and if they miss the court date, a warrant is put out for their arrest. Not only does the student miss school, but also now must bear the stigma of being labeled a ‘delinquent.’

For many students, their first and only involvement in the juvenile justice system is a result of them committing an infraction in violation of the zero-tolerance policy in their school (Curtis, 2014; Nolan, 2011). Some critics even say that zero-tolerance policies serve as a ‘pipeline’ to juvenile delinquency and involvement in the juvenile justice system (Curtis, 2014). The punishments of the policy are criminalizing youth

who are otherwise 'good students.' Furthermore, the policy does not take into account the unique situations of the youth it impacts such as relying on public transportation or not having the means to wash their clothes regularly so they need to wear a different colored shirt because it is the only clean shirt they have. Labeling a student as 'delinquent' impacts their sense of self and forces them to live with the stigma of being a youth criminal (Curtis, 2014).

Another major criticism of zero-tolerance policies is how students who frequently violate them through misbehavior often have mental health issues that have not been properly addressed or have not been addressed at all (Mental Health America, 2016). Rather than seeking to provide support and assistance for youth who may be struggling with issues deeper than simple disruptive behavior, administrators jump directly to punishments that can perpetuate the exact behavior they wish to extinguish (American Psychological Association Task Force, 2008). Students with mental illness are disproportionately punished as a result of violating a zero-tolerance policy in school (Mental Health America, 2016). These students are metaphorically trapped in revolving doors in administrators' offices because once they get in trouble the first time, they are more likely to continue getting in trouble with the punishment increasing in severity each time (American Psychological Association Task Force, 2008).

High school is a time when students experience the physical, mental, and social changes that come with adolescence. Critics argue that zero-tolerance policies do not take into consideration normal childhood and adolescent development. During adolescence, students typically push the boundaries and act in rebellious ways because it is part of this stage of development. Adolescents are not yet developed in four primary

areas which include being highly susceptible to peer influence, inability to form accurate perceptions of risk, poor future orientation, and limited impulse control (Cauffman & Steinberg, 2000; Gardner & Steinberg, 2005). Rather than policies being flexible and understanding of this stage of development, students are punished for what is often just typical adolescent behavior (Nolan, 2011).

Another issue that critics have with zero-tolerance policies is the subjective application of them by faculty and administrators and the racial implications of such subjectivity (Bell, 2015). Similar to students with mental health issues, students of color are also in trouble more often, and punished more severely compared to their white peers (Bell, 2015; Curtis, 2014). Some findings on this argument include a study on school-based arrests in which a) Black students who committed the same crime as white students were more likely to be arrested, b) Black and Latino students caught with alcohol, drugs, or tobacco were ten times more likely to be arrested than White students caught with the same substances, and c) Black students faced significantly harsher punishments than White students even though the same offenses were committed (Bell, 2015; Curtis, 2014). In essence, Black students were overrepresented in all measures of school discipline.

Finally, another problematic implication of zero-tolerance policies is a bit more complex. In some instances, zero-tolerance policies can create the exact behavior that they are aimed at preventing. For example, students eventually realize they will get suspended or expelled depending on the nature of the offense or how many offenses they have committed. For some students, they see this as an opportunity to get out of school and will intentionally commit the most severe offense or continue to purposely violate the

policy so they will get suspended or expelled (Mental Health America, 2016; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2002). They do not see the long-term repercussions of their actions and instead focus on the short-term solution of getting out of school. In other words, they view the suspensions and expulsions as some type of reward so that they do not have to attend school. This reality is extremely problematic because it not only increases offenses committed in schools, but also robs students of essential learning opportunities and the consequences can follow them throughout their schooling and beyond (Mental Health America, 2016).

There is literature suggesting that there are alternative discipline strategies that studies have found to be more effective such as restorative justice models and authoritative approaches to discipline (American Psychological Association Task Force, 2008; Cornell & Huang, 2016; Hantzopoulos, 2013; Pellerin, 2005). As the literature supporting disciplinary alternatives continues to grow, it appears the alternative discipline strategies produce more positive outcomes compared to the traditional zero-tolerance policies. The following section will discuss a few of these alternatives.

A need for new disciplinary alternatives. The American Psychological Association's Task Force (2008) looked at whether there are alternatives to zero-tolerance policies that would make schools safer without having to suspend or expel students from school. There is evidence to suggest that alternative strategies are equally or more effective as zero-tolerance policies in creating safer schools and reducing school violence (American Psychological Association Task Force, 2008; Mihalic, Irwin, Elliott, Fagan, & Hansen, 2001). The efficacious strategies are considered "model[s] of primary

prevention" (American Psychological Association Task Force, 2008, p. 856). Researchers suggest that:

> Effective school discipline and school violence programs must include the following three levels of intervention: primary prevention strategies targeted at all students, secondary prevention strategies targeted at those students who may be at risk for violence or disruption, and tertiary strategies targeted at those students who have already engaged in disruptive or violent behavior (American Psychological Association Task Force, 2008, p. 856).

Examples of these strategies include a bullying prevention program that is aimed at all students and is a primary prevention strategy; a threat assessment which targets students who may be at risk and is considered a secondary strategy; restorative justice is an example of a tertiary strategy and is geared towards students who have already committed an offense.

Zero-tolerance discipline policies are considered authoritarian approaches to discipline (Pellerin, 2005). Similar to parenting styles (Baumrind, 1968), research suggests that schools using authoritative disciplinary protocol, rather than authoritarian, produce the most positive outcomes such as better student engagement, fewer dropout rates, more positive student behavior, and higher academic achievement (Cornell & Huang, 2016; Jia, Konold, & Cornell, 2016; Johnson, 2009; Pellerin, 2005; Wentzel, 2002).

Based on the current literature, it is evident that zero-tolerance policies are often ineffective and at many times detrimental to students and schools. There are instances where these policies do the exact opposite of what they were intended to prevent by keeping students in a revolving door of disciplinary consequences which in some instances makes students violate policies because they know will get suspended from school (Nolan, 2011; Pellerin, 2005). It seems that more flexibility must be allotted in

disciplinary decisions. Safe schools are undoubtedly a necessity in the U.S., however, evidence suggests there are better ways to achieve this goal than what has previously been in place, which is likely why so many schools are moving away from zero-tolerance policies and into alternative disciplinary protocol with a new set of challenges (Nardone, 2017; Skiba & Losen, 2016).

Like many states across the nation, the state of Ohio has revisited the disciplinary protocol within the public-school system. Data from the Ohio Department of Education Report Card suggest that out-of-school suspensions and expulsions significantly increased since the implementation of "zero tolerance" policies in Ohio in 1998. Furthermore, during the 2015–16 school year, students were:

> more often suspended for typical child and adolescent behavior rather than dangerous behavior, such as bringing a weapon or drugs to school. While 61 percent of out-of-school suspensions were for disobedient or disruptive behavior, truancy, or intimidation, only 5.7 percent were for weapon or drug offenses (Roettker, 2017; p 2).

Consistent with the American Psychological Association's Task Force (2008) criticisms of zero tolerance policies, findings from Ohio data suggest that:

> In the 2015–16 school year, students with an emotional disability were 9 times more likely to be suspended than students without disabilities, an increase from 7.2 in the 2010–11 school year. Similarly, a student with an intellectual disability was 2.7 times more likely to be suspended than one without a disability. Black students were 6.4 times more likely to be suspended than White students, an increase from 5.2 in the 2010–11 school year. Economically disadvantaged students were 6 times more likely to be suspended—the highest disparity in ten years—than those in economically stable homes. Students who meet any of the following conditions are defined as economically disadvantaged by the Ohio Department of Education: Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; resident of a household in which a member is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; in receipt of public assistance, or whose guardians receive public assistance; or Title I qualification (Roettker, 2017; p 3).

While zero-tolerance policies may strive to keep students and staff safe from weapons and drugs, only about 6 percent of out-of-school suspensions in the 2015–16 school year were for these types of infractions (Roettker, 2017). Numerous Ohio school districts implemented alternative disciplinary strategies that aim to keep students in school rather than relying on suspensions and expulsions. However, the outcomes, implications, and consequences of these alternative disciplinary practices are not yet known. The new challenges of the disciplinary shift found in Nardone's (2017) pilot study can be understood using social constructionism as a framework and guiding paradigm. The following sections will discuss the relevance of social constructionism. More specifically, aspects of social constructionism that are critical to the present study including the role of relationships and the notions of discourse, discipline, and power will be discussed.

Relevance of Guiding Paradigm

Social constructionism (Burr, 2015; Gergen, 2015) was incorporated throughout and used as the guiding paradigm for the present study. Fundamental aspects of social constructionism, such as relationships, power, and control in discourse (Burr, 2015; Gergen, 2015) are particularly relevant to the present study. These aspects also emerged in Nolan's (2011) ethnographic study of zero-tolerance policies in a public urban high school. Nolan (2011) discussed how the high school had a discourse of control and penal management. Similar to Nolan's (2011) study, the present study explored the current disciplinary protocol in high schools. However, the present study went one step further and investigated how the current disciplinary protocol impacts the teacher-student relationship.

The present study is important because it explored the teacher-student relationship in a way that has not been explored to date. With the rapidly changing discipline policies in schools, it is important to understand how the policies and their evolving nature are impacting the critical teacher-student relationship. With so much emphasis on the importance of relationships in counseling psychology, it is clear that this is an area of research that needs further attention. The role of relationships and the importance of interpersonal connections can also be applied to social constructionism.

Overview

The present study originated from a pilot study that investigated how zero-tolerance discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship. Upon completion of the pilot study, it was clear that many unanswered questions remained. Of particular interest was the idea of schools moving away from zero-tolerance policies yet replacing these policies with alternatives that had problems of their own. After reviewing a brief history of zero-tolerance policies, their criticisms, and why so many critics argued for their removal from schools, it is evident why schools would want to change their disciplinary protocol. Since the present study was interested in how discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship, it was guided by the social constructionist paradigm which is discussed in more detail in the next chapter. The following section is chapter two and contains a literature review of relevant literature to the present study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of literature that is relevant to the present study. The layout of this chapter is structured like a funnel and will first broadly discuss social constructionism and its relevant principles to the present study. Next, the importance of relationships and how they are influential in adolescent development will be discussed. The chapter will then outline the importance of the teacher-student relationship. As the focus of the chapter narrows, discipline and the teacher-student relationship will be reviewed. Finally, the gaps in the current literature will be discussed, as well as a restatement of the rationale for the current study.

There is extensive literature on the importance of interpersonal relationships in adolescents' development. There is also a vast literature on the importance of the teacher-student relationship and what factors determine whether the teacher-student relationship quality is positive. Research on school discipline is not as current as the policies are rapidly changing. However, based on the available literature, inferences can be drawn which illustrate the importance of filling in the gaps and understanding how changing high school discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship. If the teacher-student relationship is impacted, then based on existing findings, other domains

of an individual's life, such as academic achievement and career development, will also be impacted. The sections to follow will include discussion of social constructionism's key principles, research on development and decision making, teacher-student relationships, discipline, and how these are related. More importantly, this chapter will discuss the gaps in the current literature. It is through the gaps in the current literature that the importance of the present study can best be understood.

Social Constructionism: Discourse, Discipline, and Power

Social constructionism (Burr, 2015; Gergen 1985, 2015) is strikingly relevant to the present study. Of particular relevance is social constructionism's focus on interpersonal relationships and interactions in the construction of knowledge. Social constructionism assumes knowledge is subjective and is created through social interactions and exchanges. Social constructionism views language as a "constructive force" and much social constructionist research involves some type of analysis of language (Burr, 2015, p. 28). The term "discourse" is often used in social constructionist writing and research. Discourse refers to language use such as a conversation or any interaction where there is a verbal exchange but includes written texts as well (Burr, 2015). According to Stead and Bakker (2010), discourses can be "viewed as social interaction in context…[and] are social practices in that they organize ways of behaving and provide the frameworks individuals use to make sense of the world" (p. 75). Discourse is important to the present study because it is through discourse, both spoken interactions and ways of behaving, that discipline policies and their enforcement were examined and understood.

Power is inherent in every social relationship (Dreher, 2016). Some people or groups of people hold more power than others because of their position in society. In the present study, following social constructionism, teachers are likely perceived as being inherently more powerful than students due to their social standing. However, it is important to note that teachers themselves do not hold power. Rather, it is through discourse that power is present because of their social standing. In other words, teachers are likely to be viewed as more powerful than students because students likely accept the power in discourse with teachers. The present study was interested in power conveyed through discourse, specifically, discourse related to discipline. A particularly relevant component of social constructionism is the notion of disciplinary power. Foucault's (1980) view on power holds that it is most effective when it is productive and produces knowledge. In effect, control for the sake of controlling is useless and ineffective, potentially causing more problems for students and teachers alike. Foucault (1980) believes that knowledge and power are integrated. Furthermore, "it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, [and] it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power" (Foucault, 1980, p. 52). An important piece of knowledge and power is discourse.

Discourse and disciplinary power go hand in hand for the present study. For instance, discourse can be viewed as exchanges between students and teachers in which the language of disciplinary power is present. The relationship between students and teachers was examined keeping in mind that there is power in the language and behaviors that one uses to communicate. Furthermore, there is power in the ways students are expected to behave and power in the ways teachers enforce discipline policies if they do

not. The present study focused on teachers enforcing discipline policies by using power in language or discourse or making the decision not to exert their power in language and discourse. Moreover, power is relevant in how it is experienced by students who are often on the receiving end of power-laden discourse. The notion of power is an important factor in understanding how discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship because of the overarching theme of power in any type of disciplinary protocol, especially when it occurs in a relationship with a power differential such as student and teacher.

Gergen (2015) views education as a socially constructed relational process. According to Gergen (2015), the teacher-student relationship is hierarchical in which the teacher is placed in the front of the class and controls the classroom by deciding who can speak and when, and the teacher typically does the majority of the talking. He argues that such control in the classroom can actually provoke resistance in individuals who do not want to feel like they are being controlled. For instance, Foucault (1980) stated that where there is resistance there is power and where there is no resistance there is no power, but domination.

Through discourse, power and control are transmitted. Students are expected to engage with teachers with respect, as they are authority figures with the ability to control students' fate regarding whether they will be disciplined for a policy infraction. Students are aware that teachers have this power but may not realize the extent to which their behavior is being controlled. Because of the grey area surrounding the discipline protocol, students may see teachers treating them unfairly when they compare themselves to other students. The three factors of discourse, power, and control were central to

understanding students' and teachers' perceptions of how discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship. The next section will discuss how social constructionism has been used a framework for understanding the relational process.

Social Constructionism and Relationships

The field of counseling psychology places a tremendous amount of weight on the importance of relationships for individuals and their growth and development in many life contexts and domains (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004; Purgason, Avent, Cashwell, Jordan, & Reese, 2016). Josselson (1992) argues that at the core of human growth and development is interconnection (Schultheiss, Kress, Manzi, & Glasscock, 2001). Social constructionism posits that knowledge is constructed through social relationships (Burr, 2015). Relationships are a central component to adolescent development.

Identity formation and relationships. A primary aspect of adolescent development is identity formation because adolescence is when individuals begin to think about their identities (Erikson, 1959). From a social constructionist viewpoint, one's identity is a co-construction or construction with others (McLean, 2015). Relationships play an integral role in one's construction of their identity (McLean, 2015). It is through interactions with others that an individual makes sense of who he or she is. Not only do people define themselves in relation to their interpersonal relationships, but they are also defined by others as well (Bowlby, 1982; McLean, 2015). The stories individuals tell, and the stories others tell about individuals all contribute to an individual's identity construction.

Narratives or stories are often used to construct one's identity (McLean, 2015). It is believed that narratives allow an individual to construct a story through their interactions with others that provide an integration of experiences (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McLean, 2015). Social relationships play an integral role in the construction of narratives because others can help facilitate the construction of one's personal identity. Therefore, it is how people perceive themselves in relation to others that they construct their identity. Every relationship consists of various dynamics that influence one's perception. An important factor in the relationship dynamic is power.

Power in relationships. Power exists in virtually every relationship an individual has (Dreher, 2016). The extent of power is determined by the nature of the relationship. When considering power in relationships, one may think of an employer and employee or a teacher and student. However, power is present even in the mundane relationships such as those between family members. Since adolescence is a stage of development characterized by change and frequent turmoil, researchers examined the change in power dynamics between siblings across adolescence (Lindell & Campione-Barr, 2017). In general, older adolescents were perceived as having more power in their relationships compared to younger siblings. However, younger siblings believed older siblings relinquished some of this power overtime and the relationship became more egalitarian and positive (Lindell & Campione-Barr, 2017). The results are important since adolescence is most often the last time siblings spend significant time together within the same household and as they enter adulthood, usually encounter situations in which they must cooperate, make decisions for ailing parents, and so on. Furthermore, these findings

are important because one's ability to successfully navigate relationships in adolescence generally impacts one's relationships in adulthood.

A more commonly considered power differential relationship is one involving an individual's work. From a social constructionist perspective, an individual's vocational identity is seen as being continuously reconstructed within relationships and influenced by the ways in which relationships and connections with others change (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004). These constructions of relationships are contingent upon:

> Language that draws upon the socially and culturally available discourses, such as those of age, gender, education, job status, and success. In this context, discourse refers to the meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, and statements that come together in a particular version of events or persons and provide a way of interpreting and giving meaning to the world and the people in it (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004, p. 427).

As mentioned previously, discourses largely include power and can be used as a means to maintain power of a dominant group. For instance, in the career and vocational realm, there is great regard for paid, individual work that progresses in prestige and salary overtime. On the contrary, unpaid work, or work in which there is little room for progression, has been historically frowned upon. Furthermore, the discourses of career tend to favor individuals with more prestige, privilege, and more opportunities for career success (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004; Richardson, 2000).

The previous discussion of power in relationships is important for the present study. The discussion on sibling power dynamics illustrates how power exists in even the most unsuspecting relationships and can be renegotiated overtime as both parties mature and contexts change. For example, an individual's vocational identity is continuously reconstructed based on relationships which are influenced by discourses. In the present study, students' and teachers' identities are likely reconstructed based on relationships

they encounter every day. Although the present study focused on the relationships between students and teachers, there is still discourse that impacts the relationships. Just as discourse can be used to maintain power among dominant groups in the workforce (those with high paying, prestigious jobs), discourse can also be used to maintain power and control in the classroom and school.

Adolescent Development

There is vast research on the importance of relationships in adolescent development and decision-making in the field of counseling psychology. High school is one of the most critical phases of adolescent development that is often filled with both turbulence and exciting changes for youth. A major characteristic of the adolescence stage is rebellion against authority as adolescents struggle to find greater independence (Meschke, Peter, & Bartholomae, 2012; Renk, Lilequist, Simpson, & Phares, 2005). Since adolescents spend the majority of their time in school, their relationships with teachers likely impact their development in a variety of domains. According to Erikson's (1959) theory of psychosocial development, the stage associated with adolescence is Identity versus Role Confusion. During this stage, adolescents seek to figure out who they are and who they want to become. They typically rely on their peer relationships to figure out their goals, beliefs, and other interests. A major component of adolescents' identity formation involves their career path which consists largely of decision-making. In addition to being critical in the identity formation of youth, career development is an important aspect of high school students' educational experience. Specific factors can help promote career development in youth. For instance, interactions that consist of social support can assist an individual to successfully overcome stressful circumstances,

particularly stressful situations relating to career development (Cutrona, 1996; Schultheiss, Kress, Manzi, & Glasscock, 2001). Supportive relationships play an integral role in the decision-making process and development of adolescents.

The role of relationships in adolescent decision-making. Relationships with parents are the first relationships that impact an adolescent's decision-making process. However, given the amount of time adolescents spend with teachers, teaching styles also likely influence this process. Effective decision-making skills are central to healthy adolescent development. Adolescents' ability to make positive decisions regarding their behavior and interactions with school authority figures is important for adolescents' academic experiences. If a student consistently makes poor decisions and frequently gets in trouble for infractions such as misbehavior, disrespecting others, or academic dishonesty, then the student will likely face a series of penal consequences that may result in suspensions or expulsion from school. The ability to make positive decisions allows an adolescent the ability to follow rules which impacts the likelihood of facing disciplinary consequences.

The quality and nature of relationships an adolescent has often influences his/her ability to make decisions. In a study conducted by Davids, Roman, Leach, and Sekot (2015), researchers examined whether parenting style impacted adolescents' decision-making style. The sample consisted of 457 students in 9th grade from four high schools in South Africa. Of the sample, 53.8% (n= 243) were females and 46.2% (n= 209) were males; (M= 16.31; SD= 1.45) years. Results indicate that parenting styles impact adolescents' decision-making styles. Authoritarian and permissive parenting styles resulted in adolescents who lack confidence and independence in their abilities to make

decisions compared to adolescents whose parents used authoritative parenting. Authoritative parenting was associated with higher self-esteem in adolescents as well as an increased ability to independently and confidently make decisions (Davids, Roman, Leach, & Sekot, 2015). These findings are relevant to the present study because the parenting styles are also teaching styles commonly found in classrooms.

Career decision-making is one of the most frequent decision-making processes encountered by adolescents. A qualitative study explored the extent to which others are involved in an individual's career decision-making process using data and participants from Blustein et al. (1997) study of the transition from school to work (Phillips, Christopher-Sisk, & Gravino, 2001). Participants consisted of 58 young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 (M = 22.2, SD = 2.5) who were either employed or unemployed. Participants worked in a variety of occupations ranging from manual labor to secretary. There were 45 participants who were employed and13 participants who were unemployed. The participants were 41.4% female and the racial/ethnic breakdown was as follows: 62.1% European American, 25.9% African American, 5.2% Hispanic, 1.7% Native American, 1.7% Asian American, and 1.7% other (Phillips, Christopher-Sisk, & Gravino, 2001). The interview protocol consisted of structed and open-ended questions in which participants were asked to share their stories of their transition from school to work to create a narrative of their career development (Phillips, Christopher-Sisk, & Gravino, 2001). Researchers used interview data from Blustein et al. (1997) and were interested in how career decisions are made within a relational context. Findings suggest that the actions of others, such as unconditional support and providing information helped the decision maker in the career decision making process. While parents were significant

in many of the participants' decision-making process, nonparent figures, such as teachers, were also frequently cited as playing a major role in the decision-making process (Phillips, Christopher-Sisk, & Gravino, 2001).

Teacher-Student Relationships

It is necessary to understand the importance of the teacher-student relationship, as well as what factors make the relationship positive and strong, before one can begin to recognize the barriers certain discipline policies may pose to building such teacher-student relationships. According to Gergen (2015), good teaching in the constructionist view of education involves examining how teachers relate with their students. The ways in which teachers relate with students plays a significant role on how the teacher-student relationship will be perceived by both students and teachers. Some of the many ways that teachers may relate to students include facilitator, coach, or friend, depending on a particular circumstance (Gergen, 2015). Various qualities may emerge from a teacher who is relating to students from any of the previously mentioned roles. These qualities largely impact the teacher-student relationship.

Teacher qualities. There are several important factors that impact the quality of teacher-student relationships. These factors are all interrelated and important in order for students to build strong, positive relationships with their teachers. Taken from self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2004; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013), supporting a student's autonomy plays an integral role in the teacher-student relationship (Gurland & Evangelista, 2015). A teacher who is autonomy supportive is one who:

> provides developmentally appropriate opportunities for them to make choices, demonstrates to them that their opinions and perspectives are valued, encourages them to pursue activities or solve problems in their own way, and gives them reasonable latitude to be in charge of their own

> behavior with only a minimum of imposed control (Gurland & Evangelista, 2015, p. 881).

Thus, control is the opposite of fostering autonomy. Based on previous studies which found that autonomy support is positively related to relationship satisfaction and relationship quality, researchers predicted that students who perceive teachers as being autonomy supportive would also result in better teacher-student relationship quality (Gurland & Evangelista, 2015). Gurland and Evangelista (2015) were interested in the sources of students' expectations of their teachers' autonomy support and whether their expectations are related to the quality of the teacher-student relationship over time. Participants in study 1 consisted of 81 children (54% girls) entering 4th grade (n = 20, M = 8.90 years), 5th grade (n = 40, M = 9.85 years) and 6th grade (n = 21, M = 10.90 years). The sample was reflective of the ethnic/racial demographics of the town which consisted of 98.5% White residents. Researchers investigated students' expectations of their upcoming teachers as a predictor of the quality of the teacher-student relationship as well as potential sources of students' expectancies. Findings suggest students form expectancies about their teachers based on hearing information from others and making generalizations from adults they interact with (Gurland & Evangelista, 2015). Findings also suggest that the quality of the teacher-student relationship is predicted by students' expectancies. In other words, teachers who were expected to be more autonomy supportive by students were reported as having a better relationship quality with students (Gurland & Evangelista, 2015).

Although the previous study was conducted on elementary and middle school children, the importance of autonomy supportiveness can be carried over to high school students. Adolescence is a stage of development in which youth struggle to find

autonomy and often do so in ways that may get them into trouble (Perez, Cumsille, & Martinez, 2016; Ripley, 2016). Adolescents often act rebellious and push the boundaries as they try to find their own identities and how they fit in with those around them (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005; Ripley 2016). The study by Gurland and Evangelista (2015) is relevant to the present study because it shows the role that teacher autonomy supportiveness plays in students' perceptions of the quality of the teacher-student relationship. Since control is the opposite of autonomy, and disciplinary protocol involves varying degrees of control, further exploration was needed to determine whether school discipline policies are detracting from teachers' abilities to foster autonomy in students. Autonomy is not the only factor that plays a critical role in the teacher-student relationship.

Kiefer and Pennington (2017) conducted a longitudinal study examining the influence of teacher autonomy support which included data on the motivation, engagement, achievement, and school belonging of adolescents. Participants consisted of 209 students with 61% of the sample being female. The racial/ethnic breakdown of the sample was 36% White, 39% Latino, 13% Multiracial/Other, 6% African American, and 6% Asian American. Findings suggest that participants who perceived higher levels of teacher autonomy support also reported higher levels of intrinsic value. Participants who perceived high levels of teacher expectations and relevance reported higher levels of engagement.

There are other teacher qualities that impact the teacher-student relationship. Students need to feel that the teachers know them. One factor that contributes to this is care. Care involves support and connection and is at the crux of the teacher-student

relationship (Ellebrock, et al., 2015). Cooper and Miness (2014) explored how high school students perceived teacher care and understanding. Researchers used survey questions from a larger study that used 1,420 high school students in grades 9-12 who identify as 42% White, 36% Latino, 9% Black, 10% mixed race, and 0.3% Asian. From the survey results, five classes were identified to be used as case studies. From each class case study, six to eight students were selected to participate in interviews. Findings suggest that students perceived teachers as non-caring if there was an interpersonal distance between student and teacher. Furthermore, students perceived teachers as being more caring if they believed the teachers understood them as individually and relationally. For example, a teacher who took time to get to know the student was perceived as being more understanding and thus, more caring than a teacher who did not make such an effort. Furthermore, students perceived teachers as being more understanding if the teacher was able to take the students' perspective.

Another behavior of teachers that led to increased perceptions of care was approaches to classroom discipline and classroom management that were positive (Cooper & Miness, 2014). Teacher understanding of students is an interesting component of discipline policies because some policies are designed in way that eliminates any type of understanding on the part of the teacher whatsoever. If a student violates the policy, they are penalized accordingly without there being an opportunity for either party to explore what led to the infraction in the first place. Thus, certain discipline policies interfere with teachers' abilities to be understanding of their students as well as students' abilities to provide teachers with their point of view.

Student engagement. Adolescence is a time when student engagement in school such as engagement with coursework, peers, and teachers generally declines (Archambault et al., 2009). A study conducted by Engels, Colpin, Van Leeuwen, Bijttebier, Van Den Noortgate, Claes, and Verschueren (2016) investigated the links between students' engagement and their relationships with teachers and peers. Participants consisted of 1,116 adolescents (49 % female and *M* age = 13.79, *SD* = 0.93) from 121 classes across 9 secondary schools in Belgium. At the start of the study, 36 % of the participants were in the 7th grade, 37.4 % were in the 8th grade, and 26.6 % were in the 9th grade. Results indicate that students with positive teacher-student relationships had higher levels of engagement over time while students with negative teacher-student relationships had lower levels of engagement over time.

A study conducted by Klem and Connell (2004) examined the relationship between teacher support and student engagement, and student engagement and academic achievement. Longitudinal data consisting of student records and survey data obtained from six urban elementary schools in one school district and four urban middle schools in one school district were used. Data for students records and surveys were obtained from years 1990-1995. Participants included 1,846 elementary school students and 2,430 middle school students ranging in age from 7 to 15 years. Elementary school participants were 81% African American, 9% European American, 10% Hispanic. Middle school participants were 44% African American, 39% European American, 16% Hispanic, and 1% Other. Elementary school participants were 51% male and 49% female while middle school participants were 49% male and 51% female. Eligibility for reduced school lunches consistent of 85% for elementary school participants and 58% for middle school

participants. Findings indicate students are more likely to report school engagement if they perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured environment for learning. Moreover, high levels of student engagement are associated with better attendance and test scores. These findings were true for both elementary and middle school students. Interestingly, middle school students were approximately three times more likely to report engagement if they perceived their teachers as being highly supportive. Elementary school students were 89% more likely to report engagement if they perceived teachers as being supportive compared to students perceiving teachers with typical levels of support (Klem & Connell, 2004).

A study conducted by Perry, Liu, and Pabian (2010) examined the role of school engagement in academic performance through the effects of career development (career planning, career decision making, and self-efficacy) and social support factors (teacher supports and parental supports). Participants included 285 (110 males, 175 females) public high school and private middle school students ranging in age from 11 to 19 years (M = 15.38, SD = 1.64). Participants were distributed across seventh through twelfth grades with 6.7% in the seventh grade, 15.1% in the eighth grade, 30.5% in the ninth grade, 18.9% in the tenth grade, 8.8% in the eleventh grade, and 19.3% in twelfth grade. The proportions of self-reported ethnic and racial breakdown were 53% Black/African American, 25.6% biracial/multiracial, 10.5% White, 5.6% Puerto Rican, 1.4% Middle Eastern, and 1.8% Other, and the remaining 2.2% were of Asian American, Mexican, South American, or Caribbean backgrounds. Results indicate that the relationship between teacher support and school engagement was mediated by career preparation (Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2010). Thus, students who received more support from their

teachers also had higher levels of school engagement, likely because supportive teachers fostered career preparation of the students (Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2010). Furthermore, teacher support impacted career preparation more than school engagement and teacher support had a larger direct effect on career preparation than parental support. These results suggest the importance of the teacher-student relationship and students perceiving support from their teachers.

A qualitative study conducted by McHugh, Horner, Colditz, and Wallace (2013) explored how students make meaning of their interactions with teachers. Specifically, researchers were interested in what students perceive as typical of their interactions with teachers, what students believe should and should not be typical of their interactions with teachers, and what students believe their teachers should know more about. Data was collected using focus groups (n=13) at three urban sites in Pennsylvania, Minnesota, and California. The total number of participants was 78 with an average of 6 participants per focus group. Participants ranged in age from 14 to 20 years (M = 16.92, SD = 1.30 years). Participants identified as 39.7% Black/African American, 23.1% as Asian/ Asian American, 19.2% as Hispanic, 16.7% as White/Euro-American, 3.9% as American Indian, and 5.1% as multiracial. Moreover, 34.6% self-identified as female and 65.4% as male.

Findings suggest the importance of teachers building supportive relationships with students. Participants discussed their desire to form relationships with teachers in which students felt known, cared for, and understood. Participants discussed 'effortful engagement' which simply means interpersonally engaging another individual as a critical way to foster positive relationships (McHugh et al., 2013). Essentially,

participants described instances in which teachers made an effort to connect with and understand them which made students feel cared about.

Discipline and Teacher-Student Relationships

Literature discussing factors and teacher qualities that positively impact the teacher-student relationship have been discussed. Based on the previous discussed literature, it is apparent how certain discipline policies can have a negative impact on the teacher-student relationship. Of course, the current study is not designed to suggest that all school discipline has a negative influence on the teacher-student relationship. Rather, based on the literature it can be inferred that the nature of specific types of discipline policies and protocol which require teachers to exert more control and assume a more authoritarian role can have a negative impact on the teacher-student relationship. For instance, it has been determined that teacher qualities such as teacher care and support, autonomy supportiveness, and understanding positively impact the teacher-student relationship (Cooper & Miness, 2014; Ellebrock, et al., 2015; Gurland & Evangelista, 2015; Klem & Connell, 2004). When teachers are required to enforce their schools' disciplinary protocol, these important teacher qualities may not be as evident.

Authoritative models of discipline. Authoritative models of school climate have been heavily researched. The authoritative model of school climate originated with Baumrind's (1968) research on authoritative parenting which consists of firm discipline but also consistent emotional support (Cornell & Huang, 2016). Authoritative school climate holds that two major factors of school climate consists of the structure of school discipline and student support (Cornell & Huang, 2016; Gregory & Cornell, 2009; Konold, Cornell, Huang, Meyer, Lacey, Nekvasil, Heilbrun, & Shukla, 2014). Discipline

structure and student support have been consistently identified as central components of authoritative school climate (Cornell & Huang, 2016). In a review of 25 studies, Johnson (2009) determined that authoritative discipline structure generally consists of an environment in which students have an awareness and appreciation of their schools' rules and consider the rules to be just, while student support refers to teacher-student relationships that are positive. Hence, the two key tenets of authoritative school climate models are characterized by disciplinary structure and the teacher-student relationship. Schools with authoritative school climate have been found to produce more positive outcomes with regards to student engagement, student dropout rates, student behavior, and student academic achievement (Cornell & Huang, 2016; Gurland & Evangelista, 2015; Jia, Konold, & Cornell, 2016; Johnson, 2009).

Cornell and Huang (2016) conducted a study that investigated whether an authoritative school climate consisting of student support and disciplinary structure would be linked to a decrease in risk behavior of students. The sample of schools was taken from a survey across high schools in the state of Virginia. The weighted student sample consisted of 47,888 cases, with 50.6 % female and participants in ninth (26.6 %), tenth (25.5 %), eleventh (24.1 %) and twelfth (23.8 %) grade. The racial/ethnic breakdown was 52.2 % White, 18.0 % Black, 13.1 % Hispanic, and 5.9 % Asian, with an additional 10.8 % of students identifying themselves as having two or more races (Cornell & Huang, 2016). Results indicate that an authoritative school climate with strict, yet fair discipline and teacher-student relationships that were supportive were linked to decreased illicit substance use, school violence, and suicidal ideation and behavior. (Cornell & Huang, 2016). These findings are relevant to the present study

because they demonstrate the benefits of authoritative school climate which is characterized by both fair disciplinary protocol as well as supportive teacher-student relationships. The present study was interested in how the discipline protocol currently in place in high schools impacts the teacher-student relationship.

The *ways* in which teachers discipline students certainly impacts the ways that students perceive them (Jong, Mainhard, Tartwijk, Veldman, Verloop, & Wubbels, 2014). Jong et al., (2014) aimed to identify the predictors of pre-service secondary teachers' relationships with their students. Participants included 120 pre-service teachers (40.8% female) in teacher education programs ranging in age from 22-57 years of age (M = 30.4 years, SD = 8.3). Students who experienced aggressive discipline strategies, such as being deliberately embarrassed for misbehavior, perceived their teachers as less warm which negatively impacted the teacher-student relationship. Discipline strategies based on recognition and reward produced the most favorable outcomes. These strategies include praising students for good behavior and offering rewards when students behave according to rules (Jong et al., 2014).

Relational approaches to discipline. Relational approaches to discipline have also been found effective (Gregory & Ripski, 2008). In a study conducted by Gregory and Ripski (2008), researchers examined whether a relational approach to discipline is associated with students perceiving their teachers as being trustworthy. Student participants included 32 high school students from an urban school referred to an in-school suspension program for infractions regarding defiant behavior. The sample consisted of 91% African American students (n = 29) and 9% were of other racial and ethnic backgrounds (n = 3). Gender of participants was 60% males (n = 19) while the

grade breakdown was ninth (n = 12), tenth (n = 10), eleventh (n = 6), and twelfth (n = 4). Teacher participants included 32 high school teachers who were 63% White (n = 20) and 22% African American (n = 7). Gender of participants was 59% female (n = 19). The average years of teaching experience ranged from 1 to 40 years (M = 12; SD = 11). Results indicate that teachers who used a relational approach to discipline were more likely to have students who displayed less defiant behavior compared to teachers who did not use a relational approach. Furthermore, the relationship between a relational approach to discipline and less defiant behavioral problems in students was mediated by students' trust in their teachers' use of authority. Teachers who used relational approaches to discipline were more likely to have students report having trust in their teachers' use of authority (Gregory & Ripski, 2008). These results are important to the current study because they demonstrate the need for discipline policies to be enforced in a way that does not strain the relationship between students and teachers. When teachers can enforce discipline policies using relational approaches, the outcomes for both students and teachers are positive.

While individual teachers can use their discretion in the ways they enforce discipline policies, some schools have opted for schoolwide disciplinary protocol. Hantzopoulos (2013) conducted a 2-year ethnographic study that examined how students made meaning of their experience at an urban high school that used a restorative justice model called The Fairness Committee. Restorative justice models of discipline were shown to be an effective alternative to zero-tolerance discipline policies in the American Psychological Association's Task Force (2008) report on zero-tolerance policies. Restorative justice models involve both administrators, faculty, and students in the

disciplinary process. This type of discipline is more democratic compared to authoritarian disciplinary protocol. Students' demographic data consisted of the following: 40% identified as Latino, 38% as African American, 12% as White, 6% as Asian, and 4% as Other. Approximately 54% of students qualified for reduced lunches. Students reported the restorative justice model made them feel like teachers cared about them and brought students closer to their teachers. Moreover, students felt like they were in a safe place in which they could reflect and gain awareness into their behaviors by having conversations with teachers.

Based on the current literature that discusses factors which are crucial to the teacher-student relationship, it is evident that the enforcement of certain discipline policies can easily interfere with teachers' abilities to build positive relationships with students. Strict discipline policies make it nearly impossible for teachers to be able to show care and understanding when no matter the surrounding circumstance of a policy violation, they must discipline the student to the highest degree, no questions asked. When teachers exert their power by enforcing disciplinary policies, these instances can create conflict and ruptures in the teacher-student relationship. Teachers may find themselves in difficult situations in which they struggle to keep students engaged in learning but also need to maintain order in the classroom (Pace & Hemmings, 2006). If the conflict and/or rupture is not properly addressed and resolved, the relationship may be strained.

It is important to understand what discipline policies are currently in place and how they are being implemented within schools. This study was significant because there is virtually no literature examining how the enforcement of discipline policies

impacts the teacher-student relationship. This information is valuable because if teacher-student relationships are negatively impacted by these policies, then school officials and administrators may need to re-evaluate the current policies in place in schools. The teacher-student relationship is a core factor in students' academic success and achievement. If findings provide evidence that the teacher-student relationship is impacted negatively, then certainly changes must be made so that students can get the most out of their education.

Summary

The current literature supports the need for positive and supportive teacher-student relationships. The importance of relationships has been consistently demonstrated throughout counseling psychology literature. Literature has shown how relationships between students and teachers, whether positive or negative, impacts students in significant ways (Cooper & Miness, 2014; Cornell & Huang, 2016; Gurland & Evangelista, 2015; Kiefer & Pennington, 2017; Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2010). However, with the evolving discipline policies in high schools, the ways in which teacher-student relationships are impacted has yet to be fully understood.

There are many benefits for students who have positive relationships with their teachers both in the short term and long term. Positive teacher-student relationships have been shown to promote career development, academic engagement and achievement, self-esteem, and decrease dropout rates (Cornell & Huang, 2016; Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2010). A major factor that contributes to the teacher-student relationship is discipline. Research has shown what makes the teacher-student relationship positive, as well as what hinders the relationship from growing. Teacher qualities such as care, support,

understanding, fostering autonomy, and engaging with students using a relational approach all positively impact the teacher-student relationship (Cooper & Miness, 2014; Gurland & Evangelista, 2015; Kiefer & Pennington, 2017). Furthermore, discipline that is fair and follows an authoritative approach has been shown to promote better teacher-student relationships. When teachers run their classrooms using an authoritarian approach to discipline and fail to try and understand students' perspectives, the teacher-student relationship suffers.

Review of Gaps in the Literature

Given all the current literature demonstrates in terms of what promotes positive teacher-student relationships and what hinders them, it is evident that there are still gaps. As schools across the country move away from the once popular zero-tolerance discipline policies and into new disciplinary protocol, there remain many unanswered questions about how these policies are impacting the teacher-student relationship (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Some of these unanswered questions include a) whether there are mixed-messages being sent to students and teachers and if so, b) whether the mixed messages are impacting the teacher-student relationship, c) how teachers and students navigate the mixed messages, d) how teachers decide whether to enforce a policy and e) how students interpret teachers' decisions to enforce or not enforce a discipline policy.

Certain discipline policies may still require teachers to use authoritarian approaches to discipline, even if the school does not intend for this type of approach to be used. Many discipline policies contain a lot of grey area surrounding them and the way they are intended to be enforced (Nardone, 2017). The grey area is largely a result of schools wanting to quickly abolish zero-tolerance policies but failing to replace them

with a well-designed alternative. Because the change in disciplinary protocol is happening so rapidly, schools are implementing discipline policies that have not been fully thought out (Nardone, 2017). Consequences of these policies may not manifest until after they have been in place for a period of time. It is important to understand these consequences, particularly if they are negative. If the teacher-student relationship is negatively impacted by the disciplinary protocol, there are additional consequences for students that will impact them both now and in the future. The following section will provide a restatement of the aims of the current study.

Restatement of Aims of Present Study

The current study intended to fill in some of the gaps in the existing literature on teacher-student relationships and discipline. The purpose of this study was to explore the teacher-student relationships from the perspective of both teachers and students. More specifically, this study intended to understand how current, changing, discipline policies may impact the teacher-student relationship. Furthermore, this study aimed to understand how teachers navigate the grey area surrounding the school discipline protocol (Nardone, 2017). In particular, this research focuses on how both students and teachers navigate their relationship in terms of the messages sent to them regarding discipline policies.

The following research questions were addressed: a) How do teachers navigate any ambiguities surrounding the school discipline protocol? b) What role does inconsistency of enforcement of discipline policies play in the teacher-student relationship quality? and c) How do discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of both teachers and students?

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Qualitative Inquiry

Relationships are at the core of all qualitative research (Hays & Singh, 2012). The researcher builds relationships with participants actively through interviews or more subtly through observations. Qualitative research allows the researcher to go above and beyond what can be learned from traditional quantitative methods by going deeper into the experiences of those participating in the research. At the heart of the present study is relationships, specifically relationships between teachers and students. Qualitative methods were selected for the present study because it allowed the researcher to delve deep into the lives of the participants to understand the teacher-student relationship while leveraging the relationship built with participants. Relationships are central to qualitative research, counseling psychology, and the present study. The next section will discuss the qualitative research paradigm and how it is also relevant to the relational nature of the study.

Qualitative Research Paradigm

A research paradigm in qualitative research can be viewed as a belief system that is based on fundamental philosophies of science (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Hays & Singh,

2012; Ponterotto, 2005). A paradigm is intended to guide the research and has its own set of assumptions. These assumptions influence the qualitative study such as the research design, data collection, and analysis used (Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). There are many different research paradigms used in qualitative research. Each methodology has particular research paradigms that are best suited as a pair. Some of these paradigms are positivism, critical theory, queer theory, social constructivism, and social constructionism. Two of the most commonly used paradigms in narrative methodology are social constructivism and social constructionism (Gergen, 2015; Hays & Singh, 2012). Social constructivism and social constructionism are similar and often confused. There are some important differences between the two paradigms and a compelling reason why social constructionism was selected for the current study instead of social constructivism. First, the similarities will be discussed.

Both social constructivism and social constructionism assume a single, universal truth does not exist because of the multiple, subjective perspectives that are held by individuals. In other words, knowledge and truth are entirely subjective (Sommers-Flanagan, 2015). Both social constructivism and social constructionism posit that the individual constructs knowledge. The major difference between social constructivism and social constructionism is the way in which each paradigm views the construction of knowledge. Social constructivism upholds that knowledge is constructed within the individual, typically through one's cognition (Sommers-Flanagan, 2015). Social constructivism places more emphasis on the individual (Young & Collin, 2004). Social constructionism, on the other hand, posits that knowledge is constructed through social interactions, most often through discourse. Social constructionism places more emphasis

on social processes (Young & Collin, 2004). Young and Collin (2004) offer the distinction between social constructivism and social constructionism as:

> The former focuses on meaning making and the constructing of the social and psychological worlds through individual, cognitive processes while the latter emphasizes that the social and psychological worlds are made real (constructed) through social processes and interaction (p. 375).

Due to the emphasis on relationships in the present study, social constructionism was selected as the paradigm to guide the research.

Social constructionist paradigm. Social constructionism was selected as the paradigm for the present study. Social constructionism suggests that the ways in which individuals make sense of the world and experiences are culturally and historically specific (Burr, 2015). Social constructionism upholds the belief system that there is no single, universal truth because there are many subjective and contextual forces and perspectives that influence scientific inquiry. As a result, multiple constructions can exist for a single circumstance or event (Burr, 2015).

In social constructionism, the ways in which individuals construct knowledge is through social processes and interpersonal influences (Galbin, 2014; Gergen, 1985; 2015). Thus, knowledge constructions are largely impacted by individuals' relationships with others. In fact, the ways in which we live originate and are maintained by the relationships we have with others (Gergen, 2015). Language, power, and privilege are some of many factors used in an individual's constructions of knowledge and ways in which they make meaning (Stead, 2013). Interpersonal exchanges play a central role in social constructionism because it is through relationships with others that individuals make meaning. In social constructionism, it is suggested that social interaction is at the crux of understanding and meaning (Lock & Strong, 2010; Stead, 2013). Certainly,

social relationships in social constructionism are at the heart of the paradigm. Nevertheless, there is an additional layer to these social relationships that allow meaning and knowledge to be constructed. Perhaps the most critical component of all social interactions is discourse.

Discourse and language. Discourse is at the center of interpersonal relationships. Through discourse, "an instance of situated language use," which is usually a conversation or spoken interaction but includes written text as well, individuals construct meaning and knowledge (Burr, 2015, p. 73). Because of the subjective nature of language and the nature in which it used, there are many different possibilities for constructions of one's self as well as others in an individual's world. Since there are many versions of constructions that are available through language, there can be a plethora of differing discourses for a single event or person, each with a different perspective of that event or person (Burr, 2015). Each discourse brings a new aspect of that event or person into focus and brings with it different implications.

Furthermore, the ways in which one's experience and consciousness are structured is contingent upon the ways in which language is structured (Burr, 2015). Burr (2015) goes on to state that at the root of all thought lies language and that it offers individuals a system for breaking down experiences and giving meaning to those experiences so that individuals themselves turn into products of language. Lastly, Burr (2015) states that "language produces and constructs our experience of each other and ourselves (p. 72). This notion is particularly relevant to the current study as it relates to the ways in which discipline policies are worded and enforced or, in this instance, structured. Moreover, the ways in which teachers opt to enforce the discipline policies is

tied to the ways they interpret the policies and by the language they use when enforcing them. In other words, disciplinary language may vary across different teachers in different contexts depending on the nature of the disciplinary infraction committed by the student. Additionally, the ways in which the students construct meaning through their interactions and discourse will vary based on the language used and the ways the students experience this language. Through these experiences of language, teachers and students will construct meaning.

Because of the emphasis on interpersonal relationships and discourse, social constructionist research places tremendous weight on collaboration between the researcher and participants when constructing knowledge. Interpersonal relationships are at the core of social constructionism (Gergen, 2015). In essence, interpersonal relationships determine what individuals conceive as truth (Gergen, 2015). Individuals perceive their role in relationships in their own unique way. Consequently, the ways in which individuals explain their world are contingent upon their relationships. A major component of these relationships is language.

Language in social constructionism allows for multiple constructions of one's self, others, and events in an individual's world. In other words, the construction of an individual's experience depends on how language is structured (Burr, 2015). Language is at the heart of peoples' thoughts and it is through language that individuals give their experiences meaning. The experiences of one's self and others are produced and constructed through language (Burr, 2015). A layer of language and a critical component of the present study is discourse. Discourse refers to:

> A set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events…[since] a

> multitude of alternative versions of events are potentially available through language, this means that, surrounding any one object, event, person, etc. there may be a variety of different discourses, each with a different story to tell about the object in question, a different way of representing it to the world (Burr, 2015, p. 75).

Thus, multiple discourses can be tied to a single object or event and each discourse serves to construct that object or event in a different way. Discourse was central to the present study because it was through discourse that the nature of the teacher-student relationship was explored.

Qualitative Research Design

Basic interpretive qualitative study. The research design of the present study was a basic interpretive qualitative study (Merriam, 2002). The primary goal of a basic interpretative qualitative study is to uncover and interpret the meaning that individuals construct in order for them to make meaning of their experiences (Merriam, 2002). In basic interpretive qualitative research, the researcher is most interested in the ways in which individuals interpret their experiences, the ways in which they construct their experiences, and the meaning they give to their experiences (Merriam, 2002). Understanding how individuals make meaning out of their experiences is the primary purpose of basic interpretive research. Data for this type of design are collected through interviews, document analyses, or participant observation (Merriam, 2002). They ways in which interviews are structured and questions are asked depends on the study's theoretical framework or guiding paradigm. Data analysis involves the identification of recurrent themes and patterns that are representative of the data (Merriam, 2002). The findings of a basic interpretive qualitative study are the recurrent themes and patterns from the data. Accordingly, the final interpretation and overall findings will be the

researcher's interpretation and understanding of the participants' interpretations and understanding of how discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship (Merriam, 2002).

The present study used elements of narrative analysis as the methodology. Narrative analysis seeks to describe the meaning of experiences of individuals as they construct narratives or stories about their lives (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected (Czarniawska, 2004; Creswell, 2013). Researchers using a narrative approach collect stories from individuals about their lived and told experiences. Personal narratives have been used in social constructionism to construct individuals' worlds (Gergen, 2015). Narrative assumes that realities are constructed through narrating stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Marshal & Rossman, 2011). Narrative is a good fit with the social constructionist paradigm because like social constructionism, narrative also values the ways in which the narrator constructs meaning (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). These stories are co-constructed between the researcher and participant and as a result, there is often a strong collaborative feature of narrative research. Narrative was a good fit because this study used a social constructionist paradigm which assumes knowledge is subjective and is constructed through interpersonal interactions and exchanges. The next section contains information about the sites from which participants were sampled.

Sites

Both high schools were within the same school district and were magnet schools where students must apply in order to be accepted. Although both high schools have the

same district administration and school board as other public schools, each individual program has its own set of administration. Additionally, both high schools must adhere to state requirements.

Participants

Participants consisted of high school teachers and high school students. Teacher participants were currently teaching in the high school. Student participants were from the same high schools as teacher participants. There were 10 student participants, ranging from grades 10th through 12th. By soliciting participants from 10th, 11th, and 12th grade, a wide range of instances involving the enforcement of discipline policies was experienced. Students in 9th grade were not eligible for participation because participation criteria required students to be at their current school for a minimum of two academic quarters. Interviews were conducted during November, so 9th grade students were not eligible. All participants were given twenty-dollar gift cards for Amazon.com for their participation in the study at the conclusion of the interview. All participants attended their scheduled interviews. One teacher participant attended her interview but did not have enough time to finish so rather than begin in person and finish at a later date, she was given a phone interview several days after the initial date. Two teachers had over 10 years of teaching experience but were only teaching in the current high school for 1.5 years and 2 years. Because they had significant teaching experience outside of the current high school, they were still interviewed for the present study.

Table 1.

Participant Demographics

Participants	*Gender*	*Racial/Ethnic Identity*	*Years Teaching in Current School*
John	Male	Caucasian	4
Isaac	Male	Caucasian	4
Elastigirl	Female	Hispanic	13
JJ	Female	Caucasian	4.5
Lisa	Female	Caucasian	2
Sara	Female	Caucasian	4
Sheep	Female	Caucasian	25
Carebear	Female	Caucasian	1.5
Ira	Male	African American	13
Keith	Male	Caucasian	3

Table 2.

Participant Demographics

Participants	*Gender*	*Racial/Ethnic Identity*	*Age*	*Grade*
Faith	Female	African American	16	11th
Taylor	Male	African American	16	11th
Jerry	Male	African American	16	11th
Brian	Male	African American	16	11th
Michael	Male	Caucasian	18	12th
Jake	Male	Caucasian	16	10th
Thomas	Male	African American	18	12th
Jason	Male	Caucasian	16	10th
James	Male	Hispanic	18	12th
Jasmine	Female	Multi-racial	16	11th

Sampling. Convenience and criterion sampling were used to select high school teachers and students willing to participate in the study. Convenience sampling is a

sampling method that is used based on the researcher's ease of access to a specific population (Hays & Singh, 2012). Criterion sampling is a purposeful sampling method in which participants are selected to participate in a study because they meet a predetermined set of criteria (Hays & Singh, 2012). Therefore, participants were selected based on the participation criteria selected by the researcher to best answer the research questions.

Three years of teaching experience was required because research suggests that during the first and sometimes second year of teaching, teachers encounter numerous problems adjusting to their role (Veenman, 1984). Many teachers leave the profession in the first few years of teaching because of the obstacles they must overcome (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). Participation criteria for high school teachers in order to be included in the study was a) current employment as a public high school teacher, b) at least 3 years of teaching experience in a high school, c) teacher of an academic subject (for instance, not a physical education teacher), and d) at least five instances in which they were involved in the discipline of a student. Exclusionary criteria for teacher participation include a) less than 3 years of teaching experience, b) inability to recall instances of disciplinary enforcement, and c) being a substitute teacher or a teacher of a nonacademic subject.

One of the most commonly encountered problem beginning teachers face is classroom management. Specifically, problem behaviors and managing classroom discipline (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). The three-year minimum of teaching experience was selected to account for some of the challenges and to allow teachers enough time to settle into their role. The criterion of being a teacher of an academic

subject was selected because students have more contact with their academic teachers rather than a physical education teacher who they may only see one or two times a week. Being able to recall at least five instances of discipline was selected to help the teacher participate most effectively in the interview.

The criteria for participation for high school students was a) completed informed consent and assent forms, b) attendance in the high school for at least 2 academic quarters or one academic semester, c) be between the ages of 14 and 18 years, and d) at least one instance in which they were disciplined for a school policy violation. Exclusionary criteria for student participation included a) not being a student in the high school for a minimum of 2 academic quarters and b) not being able to recall an instance of being disciplined for a violation of the policies in the school's handbook (for instance, being scolded for talking in class when that is not in the handbook).

Being a student for at least 2 academic quarters or one academic semester was based on the same rationale for teachers. This amount of time allows students time to settle into their roles in the school if they are from another school. Additionally, it is reasonable to believe that one academic semester provides ample time for the student to become familiar with their school's discipline protocol. The age criterion was selected because the 14-18-year age range is the age range for most high school students. Being able to recall at least one instance of being disciplined for a policy violation was selected so that the student could participate adequately in the interview.

Measures

Demographic form. Participants completed a demographic survey in which they were asked to identify the gender with which they identify, their racial/ethnic identities,

and their age. Students were additionally asked their current grade level and how long they have attended the school. Teachers were asked which courses they teach, the length of time teaching at the current school, and how many subjects they teach. See Appendix A for teachers' and students' demographic forms.

Interview protocol. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to assist participants in constructing their narratives (Galletta, 2013). The development of the interview protocol was based on the findings of Nardone's (2017) pilot study which laid the groundwork for the present study. Teachers and students had different but similar series of questions. The difference in the interview questions for students and teachers was to address their different roles as students and teachers. However, both interview protocols were designed to elicit and explore the same information. The protocol used a semi-structured format to allow the researcher and participants to co-construct the stories as needed. Additionally, a semi-structured format allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions that arose unexpectedly, as participants shared their narratives. In other words, a specific set of questions was asked of all participants. Depending on the nature of various participants' responses, different follow-up questions were asked to elicit additional information.

The development of the questions was based on both the findings from Nardone's (2017) pilot study and current literature on the teacher-student relationship. Question 1 was designed to understand the school's disciplinary protocol, how it is structured, and what language is used to identify and describe the policies. Question 2 was designed to understand how participants construct the nature of their relationships with students and teachers. Question 2 elicited information about teacher qualities, both positive and

negative (Cooper & Miness, 2014; Gurland & Evangelista, 2015; Kiefer & Pennington, 2017). Question 3 was designed to understand how the discipline policies are enforced in the schools. Question 3 elicited information about the types of discipline (authoritarian vs. authoritative) and notions of power and control (Burr, 2015; Foucault, 1980). Question 4 was designed to allow participants to tell a story of an incident involving a disciplinary violation, discipline enforcement, and the interpretation of the incident. Question 5 was designed to understand how participants interpreted the teacher-student relationship as being impacted by the incident (Copper & Miness, 2015). Question 5 was critical to the study and may be the question that required the most follow-up questions for the researcher to best capture the participants' interpretations. Questions 6 and 7 were designed to elicit information regarding the ways in which participants construct meaning based on their roles as either teacher or student (Gergen, 2015). Questions 6 and 7 were not fully understood by most of the student participants using the original phrasing of the questions. Most students needed the questions to be reworded. For some students, after the questions were reworded, they still needed additional clarification on what the questions were intended to capture. This clarification was provided. Question 8 was designed to allow participants to share any information they had not discussed that they felt would be helpful and important to the present study and their stories. Although follow-up interviews were listed as a possibility, no follow-up interviews were necessary. For the purposes of the present study, discipline policies were defined as any policy in the student handbook that is designed to maintain order, respect, and/or safety within the school and classroom. The policy must also include the consequences if a violation occurs. See Appendix A for teachers' and students' interview protocols.

Procedures for Data Collection

Gaining access to high schools. The researcher first contacted the school district and completed necessary paperwork requirements to apply for approval to conduct a study within the school district. Once approval from the district was granted, the researcher was provided with a letter of approval from the school district, permitting access to the schools. Both high schools were then contacted and asked to provide letters of approval to the researcher to conduct research within the individual schools. Both schools provided the approval letters. Once permission was granted from the school district and both high schools, participant recruitment began.

Recruitment of participants. Participants were selected from two urban public high schools in Northeastern Ohio. Two high schools were selected instead of one to increase the likelihood of finding participants who met participation criteria for the study. Additionally, two high schools allowed greater transferability of findings compared to one high school. The teachers were selected through word of mouth from the researcher's dissertation methodologist's network. School administrators were contacted via phone and email by the methodologist and her personal network to provide information regarding the purpose of the study and determine whether the principals would allow their high schools to participate. Once principals agreed to allow the researcher access to teachers and students, principals were provided with recruitment fliers to administer. Recruitment fliers briefly outlined the study's purpose and criteria for participation. Fliers were both posted around the school and handed out to teachers and students. Both principals appointed a teacher to assist with participant recruitment. The appointed teachers from both schools were in constant contact with the researcher to

ensure participants met participation criteria. Once participants were identified from school A, the participants contacted the researcher via email or phone to schedule an interview. The appointed teacher from school B coordinated all teacher and student participants to be interviewed in a single school day.

Interviews. Participants were informed prior to their interview to consider instances in which they were involved in either disciplining a student or being disciplined by a teacher. The appointed teachers provided copies of the informed consent or assent to interested students and teachers ahead of time. Participants under 18 years of age were given informed consents for their parent or guardian to complete. Participants under 18 years of age were required to have parental or guardian informed consents completed at the time of the interview. All interviews were conducted within the high schools. One high school allowed a private conference room in the administration office to be used for the interviews. The other high school provided a private office inside of a classroom to be used for interviews. All interviews were conducted in a single day for both schools. In other words, two school days were devoted to conducting interviews. One teacher participant could not stay for the duration of her scheduled interview, so she selected to have a phone interview the following week.

At the time of the interview and before any recording took place, each participant selected a pseudonym. Participants' pseudonyms were used to identify and keep track of their interviews confidentially. Participants were also given a code to determine whether they were a student or teacher to assist in organizing the interviews and transcriptions in NVivo. The interviews ranged in length between 30 minutes to 1 hour. All interviews

were recorded using the researcher's personal an audio recorder. The researcher did not take notes during the interviews. No follow-up interviews were needed.

Transcription. A professional transcriptionist from Cleveland, Ohio was employed to transcribe the interviews. The transcriptionist had over 20 years of experience transcribing classified data and signed a confidentiality agreement. Once the recorded interviewers were uploaded to a private shared DropBox between the researcher and transcriptionist, they were deleted from the audio recorder. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, including all audible utterances and pauses. All of participants' identifying and personal information were deleted from the transcripts. The transcribed interviews were saved on a confidential platform, the researcher's OneDrive account.

Procedures for Data Analysis

After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher organized the data. Notecards were used as a visual representation of the data before coding in NVivo began. The researcher immersed herself in the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) which consisted of the researcher reading and rereading the transcripts, notecards, and literature review. By immersing herself in the data, the researcher began to identify themes and categories. Pertinent themes from the literature and interviews were written down on the notecards as the interviewer read through the transcripts. Once themes and categories had been identified, the researcher began coding using NVivo computer software.

Constant comparative analysis. Constant comparative analysis (CCA) (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) was used throughout the data analysis process. Constant comparative analysis (CCA) has most commonly been associated with grounded theory but has been used in studies outside of grounded theory as well (Fram, 2013). This form

of analysis involves the researcher to continuously challenge or compare the interpretations of the data she generates (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The themes, categories, and codes were constantly being compared against the previously generated round as the study progressed. In addition to comparing the data against the data, it was also compared and checked against the literature review. Thus, codes and themes were generated from both the transcripts and the literature review throughout the coding process. The CCA assisted the researcher in determining when saturation was reached.

Saturation. Because not all qualitative research designs are the same, there is great debate about the method require to reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). While there are general guidelines researchers should follow, there is not a single, universal approach to reaching data saturation. Data saturation is the point in the analysis in which the researcher no longer identifies any new themes or emerging categories (Hays & Singh, 2012). In other words, saturation means that nothing new or significant is being found that would impact the study's findings.

Data saturation is not reached using the same methods for every qualitative study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). According to Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), as few as six participants could allow for data saturation depending on the nature of the interviews and study's design. However, others argue that sample size is not as important as the richness and thickness of the data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The richness of data refers to the quality of the data and the thickness of data refers to the quantity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Therefore, data saturation is not necessarily contingent upon the number of participants but rather the level of detail or depth of the data (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012). Data collection stopped once the researcher noticed the same themes repeating.

Data saturation was reached when the researcher did not uncover any new themes or information that was not already mentioned. The teachers' interviews contained similar content and most of the teachers' interviews echoed one another. Students' interviews also contained much of the same content. Data saturation was reached with the number of interviews completed from the first round of data collection at both sites and therefore, it was not necessary for the researcher to return to the district to request additional participants. Data saturation was determined when even newly generated codes could be categorized under current themes. Part of the analysis process involved breaking down the data into small codes and categories, then reorganizing it into larger themes. All the previously generated codes and categories were able to be situated within a larger theme. Furthermore, the themes and their subthemes provided information needed to adequately answer the research questions. Thus, it was evident that additional interviews were not needed because they would likely not provide new information.

Coding. The transcribed interviews were analyzed and coded using NVivo computer software on the researcher's personal computer. The researcher used Saldana's (2013) *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* to analyze and code the data. The researcher made note of key concepts that related to the research questions and literature. Preliminary codes were generated from listening to the interviews, reviewing the literature, and reading the transcripts using the study's guiding paradigm as a framework.

The first cycle of coding used structural coding which "applies a content-based or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data that relates to a specific research question used to frame the interview" (Saldana, 2013, p. 84). Next, segments that are coded similarly are combined for a more refined analysis. Structural

coding is appropriate for most qualitative studies, especially studies using semi-structured interviews and multiple participants to explore and understand major themes and categories (Saldana, 2013).

In NVivo software, codes are listed as "nodes" which are the overarching themes or codes that can be subcoded into additional codes or smaller nodes as necessary. For instance, examples of initial codes or nodes included: 'teacher qualities,' 'relationship,' 'discourse,' 'power,' 'policy violation,' and 'policy enforcement.' All the nodes are consistent with the social constructionist paradigm and findings from Nardone's (2017) pilot study. These codes were selected for the first cycle of coding and were continuously evaluated, added to, and modified throughout the analysis process.

Constant comparative analysis is a dynamic process so first, second, and third cycles are not clearly defined or separated. Rather, the process blends overtime as new themes are found and more specific codes are created to best represent themes and patterns. As analysis progressed, the original codes were subcoded to give voice to teachers' perspectives and students' perspectives which is consistent with social constructionism. Teachers and students did not always share the same perspectives, so it was important to allow both perspectives to be heard. Versus coding was used throughout the analysis process for most of the codes (Saldana, 2013). For example, 'teacher qualities' was a code that was divided to account for teachers' perspective of 'teacher qualities' and students' perspectives of 'teacher qualities.' Thus, 'teacher qualities' was subcoded into 'teacher qualities students' perspective' and 'teacher qualities teachers' perspective.'

The next cycle of coding further separated the initial codes and broke them down into more specific codes. Codes such as 'mixed messages,' 'teacher qualities,' 'fairness,' 'types of students,' and 'inconsistency' emerged from analysis of transcripts and continuous review of the initial codes. These codes were continuously modified as newer themes emerged. The codes 'discourse' and 'power' were placed under 'policy enforcement.' As the second cycle coding process continued, additional codes such as 'lack of support from administration' and 'choosing the battles' became clear patterns across most interviews with teachers. At this point in the data analysis, codes were separated into three categories which represented the three research questions. The purpose of this separation was to organize the data to determine what themes were best suited to address each of the three research questions. For instance, 'mixed messages,' 'lack of support from administration,' 'choosing the battles,' and 'inconsistency' were determined to best address the first research question: *How do teachers navigate any ambiguities surrounding the school discipline protocol?* The codes 'fairness' and 'types of students' aligned best with the second research question: *What role does inconsistency of enforcement of discipline policies play in the teacher-student relationship quality?* Finally, 'teacher qualities' was determined to address the third research question: *How do discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of both teachers and students?* The code 'teacher qualities' was originally subcoded into 'student perspectives' and 'teacher perspectives.' The original code, 'relationship' was broken down and recoded into 'teacher qualities.' At this point in data analysis, the researcher looked for themes in both subcodes and began creating a new list that did not separate teachers' and students' perspectives. This code was broken down and

essentially rebuilt combining students' and teachers' perspectives of teacher qualities that impact the teacher-student relationship. Codes that emerged from this process included: 'caring,' 'trusting,' 'understanding,' 'investing in students,' 'getting it,' 'keeping it real,' 'keeping their word,' and 'respecting.'

The third cycle of coding began with the following overarching codes: 'teacher qualities,' 'inconsistency,' 'policy enforcement,' 'fairness,' 'mixed messages,' 'types of students,' 'lack of support from administration, and 'choosing the battles.' These codes were reviewed and broken down further. The codes under 'teacher qualities' were evaluated and combined to create a smaller number of holistic codes rather than multiple, related but separated codes. For example, the codes 'respecting,' 'investing in students,' 'getting to know students,' and 'trusting' were combined into the code 'caring.' The codes, 'keeping their word,' and 'getting it' were combined into 'keeping it real.' The code 'understanding' became 'understanding students and their circumstances.' The codes 'inconsistency' and 'mixed messages' were reviewed and broken down into two new separate codes: 'not being on the same page' and 'policy ineffectiveness.' The code 'fairness' was broken down and used to create an additional code, 'favoritism.' The code 'types of students' was broken and subcoded into two new verbatim codes, 'good students' and 'bad students.' The remaining two codes, 'lack of support from administration' and 'choosing the battles' were evaluated and a new code, 'maintaining authority and respect' was created. The code 'policy enforcement' was broken down and data from this code was redistributed into other codes where the data were determined to have a better fit. Thus, 'policy enforcement' was removed as a code altogether.

The final cycle of coding began by examining all the codes that were broken down and then determining how to put them back together to under a main code or theme that best described the data contained in the codes and subcodes. For instance, the codes 'maintaining authority and respect,' 'choosing battles,' and 'lack of support from administration' were housed under the main code and theme 'When to Enforce' to represent teachers' decisions to enforce or not enforce a policy. The main code and theme 'Inconsistency' was created to house codes 'not being on the same page' and 'policy ineffectiveness.' This main code represents teachers' identification of reasons why there is so much variation and inconsistency regarding policy enforcement. The main codes 'When to Enforce' and 'Inconsistency' best address the first research question: How do teachers navigate any ambiguities surrounding the school discipline protocol?

The main code and theme, 'Punishment Depends on the Student' was developed to house code 'types of students' and subcodes 'good students' and 'bad students.' This main code represents the coded content that describes how the consequences often depend on the student who violates a policy. The main code and theme 'Perceived Inequality' was created to house 'fairness' and favoritism' and represents students' and teachers' perception of the inequality of discipline policy enforcement. The main codes 'Punishment Depends on the Student' and 'Perceived Inequality' best address the second research question: What role does inconsistency of enforcement of discipline policies play in the teacher-student relationship quality?

Lastly, 'teacher qualities' became a main code or theme and was renamed 'Relational Teacher Qualities' which housed 'caring,' 'keeping it real,' and

'understanding students and their circumstances.' This main code represents teacher qualities identified by students and teachers that positively contributed to the teacher-student relationship quality. The data under 'Relational Teacher Qualities' best addresses the third research question: How do discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of both teachers and students?

There was only one coder to analyze and code the data. The lack of a second coder is a limitation of the present study. It is possible that a second coder would generate themes and codes different from the ones generated by the primary researcher. However, it is important to note that in social constructionist qualitative research, researcher subjectivity is embraced. Researcher subjectivity will be discussed in more detail in the following section. However, in terms of the relevance to coding, the researcher coded data using the constant comparative analysis method which enabled the researchers to constantly check newly generated codes against the literature and previously generated codes. This method is designed to enhance the quality and trustworthiness of the study.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, or the "goodness" of a qualitative study, is a crucial factor in conducting any type of qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 39; Morrow, 2005). There are certain components that are relevant to achieving trustworthiness across all qualitative paradigms. Components that every paradigm should include when addressing the issue of trustworthiness are social validity, subjectivity and researcher reflexivity, and adequacy of data and interpretation. However, there are more specific aspects of trustworthiness that are relevant to the many differing paradigms.

Various paradigms suggest different ways to achieve trustworthiness. According to Morrow (2005), social constructionism has its own criteria for trustworthiness. Authenticity criteria (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), which includes fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, and catalytic authenticity, is one of the most relevant criteria for trustworthiness in social constructionist. Fairness refers to the expectation that various constructions be sought and honored. In the present study, fairness was achieved by the researcher exploring participants' multiple constructions and stories of their experiences of the teacher-student relationship. Ontological authenticity is when participants' constructions are "improved, matured, expanded, and elaborated" (Morrow, 2005, p. 252). Educative authenticity is when participants' understanding of other individual's constructions are enhanced (Morrow, 2005). The researcher achieved ontological authenticity and educative authenticity through the collaborative nature of narrative and social constructionism. The researcher engaged participants in sharing their narratives and assisted them in expanding their narratives at a greater depth. The researcher offered her own perspective as necessary and modeled appreciation for participants' perspectives. Catalytic authenticity refers to the extent to which action is promoted through the inquiry process. It was the hope of the researcher that through the interviews, participants gained a deeper understanding of their relationships with students and teachers. Through the sharing of their narratives, participants may have recognized a need for change in their own behavior, which could improve their relationships.

One of the standards of trustworthiness is the notion that subjectivity in social constructionist research should be embraced (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, researcher reflexivity is a critical component of qualitative research which allows the researcher to

recognize and appreciate how her own subjective experiences impact the research process. The researcher engaged in frequent reflection and kept routine reflexive journals to document her own subjective reactions to the research process. The journals provide a documented trail of the researcher's subjectivity and potential biases that could influence the research.

Researcher's Subjectivity

This study has significant relevance to the researcher both professionally and personally. As a former 'bad student,' the researcher's own high school experience laid the foundation for an interest in working with adolescents, particularly adolescents who were inclined to encounter discipline. The researcher was frequently 'in trouble' throughout her adolescence and wondered whether she would be able to reconstruct her future path to do something meaningful. The researcher first became involved in working with at-risk youth during high school and became passionate about this population. During her senior year of high school, the researcher decided to pursue an undergraduate degree in psychology, followed by a master's degree in counseling, with the hopes of furthering her work with the adolescent population. Once the researcher realized that a doctoral degree in counseling psychology would provide her with the tools and skills needed to make the kind of positive impact that she had been hoping to make, the researcher moved to Cleveland, OH to begin her doctoral studies.

Discipline policies have been an interest of the researcher for the past eight years. During her master's program, she worked as a therapist for a school-based partial program for adolescents who were involved with the juvenile justice system and had a mental health diagnosis. The program was located within a regular public high school

and all students who were from the partial program were housed together in a single classroom. All the students presented with severe behavioral and emotional difficulties, making it nearly impossible for them to get through a school day without getting in trouble. Despite being part of the partial program, the students were still held to the same standards as the rest of the high school. Due to the nature of their mental health difficulties, they were frequent violators of the high school's discipline policies. The experience from working in the partial program inspired the researcher to pursue research in this area.

During her doctoral studies, the researcher completed a qualitative pilot study, which is how the present study originated. Findings from the pilot study constructed the way the researcher views current disciplinary protocol. The researcher has completed numerous papers and projects examining discipline policies in high schools. Consequently, the researcher possesses background knowledge as well as subjective experiences that impact her subjectivity. Moreover, there are also personal biases about the utility of specific types of discipline policies that may have impacted the ways in which the researcher interpreted the data. The researcher's subjectivity was documented using reflexive memos throughout the analysis process to ensure an authentic and trustworthy research study.

The researcher's social location likely influenced the interpretations of the data. The researcher is a Caucasian woman from a small suburb in northeastern Pennsylvania. The researcher's background and identities influence the ways in which she experiences and perceives the world. These perceptions also likely impact the ways in which she interpreted the data. The researcher has been afforded many privileges and opportunities

because of her identities. Although the researcher was frequently 'in trouble' throughout high school, the researcher never questioned whether she was 'in trouble' because of her identities, such as race. Many of the teachers and students used the term 'favoritism' and 'fairness' when discussing the discipline policies at their schools. Most of the teachers were Caucasian, while most students were students of color. The researcher's identities most closely aligned with the teachers' identities. It is possible that the issues of favoritism in the high schools was more of a racial issue, but because of the researcher's social location, it was not interpreted through a racial lens during the analysis. Rather, the researcher interpreted the data staying with the discourse used by participants. Participants did not allude to racial disparities as contributing to the favoritism in the schools, but it is certainly possible that race was a major force. Future research could investigate this further. The results will be discussed in the next section.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The present study sought to answer three research questions: a) How do teachers navigate any ambiguities surrounding the school discipline protocol? b) What role does inconsistency of enforcement of discipline policies play in the teacher-student relationship quality? and c) How do discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of both teachers and students? Findings suggest that the answers to these three questions are interwoven in a complex way. The present study used a social constructionist paradigm as a framework. Congruent with the social constructionist philosophy that many subjective realties exist, the findings of the present study suggest that different realities exist for students and teachers. The differences and the similarities in their constructions of meaning can be seen throughout the chapter.

Information about the general themes and subthemes that were salient throughout the interviews will be presented in the chapter. Next, how the themes and subthemes were sorted to best answer the three research questions will be presented. Then, the three specific research questions will be addressed and discussed with greater explanation of the themes and subthemes.

There were five themes that arose from this study: 1) When to Enforce, 2) Inconsistency, 3) Punishment Depends on the Student, 4) Perceived Inequality, and 5) Relational Teacher Qualities. Each of these five themes were broken down into subthemes which were then sorted under one of the three research questions. The first two themes, *When to Enforce* and *Inconsistency*, dealt only with teacher participants. Only teachers were included in these two themes because these themes were generated with regards to the first research question which focused solely on teachers.

The theme, *When to Enforce* was broken down into three subthemes: 1) Choosing the Battles, 2) Lack of Support from Administration, and 3) Maintaining Authority and Respect. The second theme, *Inconsistency*, was broken down into two subthemes: 1) Not Being on the Same Page and 2) Policy Ineffectiveness. The first two themes, *When to Enforce* and *Inconsistency*, best address the first research question: *How do teachers navigate any ambiguities surrounding the school discipline protocol?*

The third theme, *Punishment Depends on the Student*, contained one subtheme: Types of Students. Types of Students was broken down into two additional subthemes: 1) 'Good Students' and 2) 'Bad Students.' *Perceived Inequality* was the fourth theme generated and was broken down into two subthemes: 1) Fairness and 2) Favoritism. The third and fourth themes, *Punishment Depends on the Student* and *Perceived Inequality* most effectively answer the second research question: *What role does inconsistency of enforcement of discipline policies play in the teacher-student relationship quality?*

The fifth theme, *Relational Teacher Qualities*, was broken down into three subthemes: 1) Keeping It Real, 2) Caring, and 3) Understanding Students and Their Circumstances. The fifth theme best addressed the third research question: *How do*

discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of both teachers and students?

Table 3.

Themes and Subthemes from Participant Interviews

	Participants	
Themes/Subthemes	Teachers *n* =10	Students *n* =10
When to Enforce		
Choosing the Battles	5	-
Lack of Support from Administration	7	-
Maintaining Authority and Respect	8	-
Inconsistency		
Not Being on the Same Page	9	-
Policy Ineffectiveness	9	-
Punishment Depends on the Student		
Types of Students	6	10
'Good Students'	4	7
'Bad Students'	5	7
Perceived Inequality		
Fairness	8	9
Favoritism	7	7
Relational Teacher Qualities		
Keeping It Real	8	-
Caring	5	4
Understanding Students and Their Circumstances	8	8

Research Question 1

The first research question the present study explored was *'how do teachers navigate any ambiguities surrounding the school discipline protocol?'* Both high schools were located within the same school district. Teachers explained that there are policies

that are intended to be followed from the school district in addition to policies that are unique to the individual school. As one teacher, Ira, said, "The things that are in the handbook come from the school district. The things that are done at this school come from the school…It isn't directly by the book." What complicates the policy protocol further is that school A interviewed for the study housed three different schools within the same building. This means that there are three different principals for each school. The different principals and administrative team for each school decide the policy for their school.

A similar layer of complexity existed for the second school, school B. School B also housed three programs within the same building but had different policies and procedures for each of the 9th through 12th grades. Like school A, school B had a team of teachers who decide which policies to enforce for their assigned grade. The problem with this team approach is that the teams for each grade do not agree about which policies should be enforced. Thus, there are different rules and expectations for different grades. This becomes especially problematic when students from different grades are in the same class. The teacher is then faced with the dilemma of enforcing a policy for one student but not another, even though they are both 'guilty' of the same thing, or not enforcing the policy at all.

The social constructionist view of power is salient in this section. Power is inherent in every social relationship (Dreher, 2016). People's positions in society determine how much power they hold. In the present study, teachers hold more power than students because of their perceived authority (Gergen, 2015). In this section, the notion of power is present when teachers use their discretion or exert their perceived

power in deciding if and how to enforce a discipline policy. Furthermore, power is discussed when teachers explain that they try and maintain their perceived power and authority by handling disciplinary issues on their own and without the help of administration. Teachers expressed concern that when they enforce policies by sending students to administrators, it conveys the message to students that teachers lack power and authority. Themes and subthemes connected to the first research question are described below.

When to enforce. Although both high schools had various policies that were expected to be enforced, enforcement rarely occurred. Teachers discussed the decision about when to enforce a policy and what factors impacted their decision-making process. The first theme, *When to Enforce*, arose in most of the interviews with teachers. Teachers discussed being confronted with the dilemma of whether to enforce a policy when they witnessed a student or students violating a policy. Teachers gave a variety of reasons that it was not an easy, automatic decision to enforce a policy the way the policies were intended to be implemented. Nevertheless, there were three reasons that were discussed by teachers most frequently. These three reasons often intertwined and influenced each other, namely whether enforcing a policy was a battle worth fighting, the perceived lack of support from administration, and teachers' desire to maintain authority and respect within their classrooms.

Teachers discussed that there were so many policy violations daily, that they used their discretion regarding whether it was even worth the energy to enforce a policy at all. Teachers commonly used the phrase 'picking or choosing battles' to describe one factor that contributes to their decision about whether to enforce a policy. For many teachers,

the policy violation or offense would result in more problems for the teachers. Teachers expressed exhaustion in dealing with policy violations, and frequently indicated that they did not feel it was worth the trouble of enforcing a policy. These experiences commonly discussed led to the theme, *Choosing the Battles*, which will be discussed shortly.

Another contributing factor that was commonly discussed by teachers was whether anything would be done if they were to enforce the policies. Teachers shared instances when they enforced a policy, but the student did not face any consequences. Students would get sent to the administration's office and immediately be sent back to class with nothing but a slap on the wrist. Teachers explained that they felt like it was a waste of their time and sent the message that the students' behavior was acceptable. It was difficult for teachers to find the motivation to enforce policies when they felt that they were not supported by the administration. The theme, *Lack of Support from Administration*, was created to capture this contributing factor.

The third factor that was cited among many teachers was their desire to show students that they are in control of their classrooms. Furthermore, teachers said that they wanted students to respect them and their role as a teacher. Because of this, teachers preferred to handle disciplinary issues by themselves and within their classrooms. Many policy violations required teachers to send students to the administration's office. However, teachers felt like their administration would not back them up if they enforced a policy because the administration often sent students back to class without implementing any consequences. By sending students to the administration's office, teachers felt that they were also sending the message that teachers lacked the power and authority to maintain order in their classrooms. The desire for teachers to exert their

authority and garner respect from students emerged as the theme, *Maintaining Authority and Respect.*

Choosing the battles. A common theme and statement made the teacher participants was 'choosing battles.' Teachers consistently discussed being faced with the decision to enforce or not to enforce a policy. One contributing factor to their dilemma was the decision about whether it would be a battle worth fighting. John, a teacher, felt that many teachers do not see the value in some of the policies. He explained that choosing to avoid enforcement can promote problem behaviors:

> Like I think sometimes, people just don't feel as strongly about something as other people because they feel like they're picking their battles, but sometimes when you choose not to pick a battle over something, you're actually encouraging something else… So one of the quotes that I live by is "You encourage what you allow," and/or "What you permit is what you promote," and so I think that if you allow certain things like that to happen, you're actually encouraging it and you're encouraging more than just that…So you're encouraging bad habits, which are influencing your other habits.
>
> (John, Teacher)

A seasoned teacher, Sheep, explained that she has learned with experience which battles are worth fighting:

> I mean I'm coming from 25 years' experience, so I know what battles that I'm going to pick and what battles I'm just going to let go because it's not worth the fight, and you're going to antagonize and create more of an issue with certain things, so I pick my fights.
>
> (Sheep, Teacher)

The idea that more of a problem would be the ultimate result of enforcing a policy was a common concern among teachers. Teachers knew that they were expected to enforce these policies, yet they felt that enforcing them would lead to greater conflict. Another

teacher, Keith, discussed how it is often easier to look away or walk by because more chaos will result by enforcing a policy:

> If they're a repeat offender, I will [enforce], like most teachers, if they're sitting on the benches and being quiet, looking at their phone, I walk by because it's not worth the fight because sometimes security will come down.
>
> (Keith, Teacher)

A large part of the reason that teachers reported that they choose their battles is because they feel enforcing a policy leads to greater problems since the problem behavior or violation that they are trying to correct never actually gets addressed. Elastigirl, a teacher who was noticeably frustrated and worn out expressed:

> For the most part, it's kind of like you've got to pick your battles. If I am going to enforce no jeans for the kids, or leggings, and I send them to the office and they get sent right back, nothing happened…There are supposed to be clothes that we have for them so they can change into some type of dress code, and those things don't happen. It's like even the color of their shirt. They're supposed to be forest green, and kids come in with these bright greens, you know, and it's like we're not supposed to let them wear those, but it's like the time that it takes for this kid to leave my class to go find a shirt, he's missed whatever it is that we're doing in class, and so there's a situation.
>
> (Elastigirl, Teacher)

Teachers discussed the need to choose their battles because the cost of enforcing policies frequently outweighed any benefits. Teachers saw little value in disciplining a student the way they were expected to because the process of enforcing the policy caused more problems for the teacher than the student. Some teachers relied on their experience to help them discern whether it was a battle worth fighting. Other teachers considered the most likely outcome of the enforcement and prioritized their energy to avoid feeling worn out. A related but independent theme is the lack of support teachers experienced from the administration in their schools.

Lack of support from administration. Another a factor that contributed to teachers' decision-making processes when deciding if they should enforce a policy was whether they would be supported in their endeavors. Closely related to teachers' tendencies to 'choose their battles,' was the reported lack of support from their administration. Teachers discussed how the administration put in place expectations of the way disciplinary protocol should be handled by the teachers. If students' behavior escalates or the student commits a more serious offense, then the student is supposed to be sent to the administration's office. Once in the administration's office, the protocol states that students will either be sent home, given a detention, or given a suspension, depending on the nature of their offense. However, many teachers discussed instances when a student committed an offense in which punitive consequences should have resulted in being sent home, given a detention, or given a suspension, and the student was simply sent back to class instead. Teachers acknowledged administration's desire to keep suspensions and expulsions down in order to keep their enrollment numbers up. If enrollment numbers drop, the schools risk losing funding. Furthermore, teachers explained that they need students to be present in the classroom for them to learn and subsequently perform well on the Ohio State Tests. The lack of support from administration was an obvious problem in both high schools. Teachers shared these instances with frustration, defeat, and exhaustion in their voices. Elastigirl said:

> So we get frustrated…So they're [policies] not enforced a lot of times because we're just exhausted. We're exhausted that it's so all over the place, and we're exhausted that when we do send them to the office, nothing happens, and they get sent right back.
>
> (Elastigirl, Teacher)

Ira said that he believes the problem is that there are too many administrators with their own opinions and expectations about what policies should be enforced. Since his high school houses three individual schools within it, there are separate administrators for each individual school. Ira feels that one of the biggest issues is that the administrators are not on the same page with each other which leads to conflicting beliefs about what policies should be enforced and how they should be enforced. Ira feels that having multiple administrators complicates the disciplinary protocol:

> We have too many administrators. They don't agree. They agreed before school started, and all of a sudden, I got a phone call from the assistant principal on the third floor saying, 'We will enforce dress code.' My [child] is a student here. [Child] does not wear dress code. Never. Never. And [child] never gets in trouble.
>
> (Ira, Teacher)

Keith shared a similar perspective as Ira and noted that some teachers even walk by fights in the hallways due to the perceived lack of support from administration:

> Well obviously the principals are the final arbitrator, but the Assistant Principals are the ones that mostly dispense the policies here, and they all have different personalities as to how they're going to do it. So as far as that, it's not uniform throughout the building…But as far as I mean fights, I don't walk by a fight or an argument. Some Teachers do, because, again, they either get hurt, or there's liability, or they don't feel like the administration (and I don't think they mean so much the building, but downtown) won't back them up, if something happens.
>
> (Keith, Teacher)

Carebear argued that if administration sets expectations of teachers to follow through on policy enforcement then the administration must also follow through:

> Because that's what our administrator wants us to do. So if I send a student to the office, they're going to ask, 'Did you do A, B, C? Did you warn the student? Everybody has to be on the same page, and administration has to, if it comes to that level, then they have to follow through as well.
>
> (Carebear, Teacher)

Another teacher discussed what she has witnessed in terms of the lack of administration support for the various schools within her high school:

> I have been in other buildings where there is no administration support, and that really tears apart the staff, and that's not a good feeling to be in, knowing that if you have some kind of discipline problem, you know there's nothing going be done about it, and that's very discouraging because then you're like 'Well why even bother? Because nothing's going to get done.
>
> (Lisa, Teacher)

Other teachers turned their frustrations into sarcasm, like Sara who summed up her perspective on the issue:

> I would say referrals and what we would consider more harsher offenses are not dealt with the to the teachers' satisfaction. We kind of joke that like if you refer a kid who cusses you out, they come back with a teddy bear and a lollipop in their mouth, for example. They encourage apology letters or apology notes, when kids aren't truly sorry for their actions. So they just basically force them to do a sorry note to you, so it's really not genuine or true, in order to avoid the suspensions or harsher punishments. I think that the teachers have a perception of the way things should be, and the teachers have an expectation of the way things should be, and the policies should be followed because the teachers are following their policies in their classrooms. However, administration seems to have their own set of policies on where and how things should be followed. So I think there's a disconnect between the two, between the teachers and administrators, because teachers may follow through, but administrators may not.
>
> (Sara, Teacher)

Multiple teachers discussed instances when they enforced a policy and followed the protocol step by step with the final step consisting of sending students to the administration office. Each teacher shared their frustrations over the student being sent back to class, without receiving any consequences for their behavior. The message sent to teachers in these instances was that 'nothing would be done' by them enforcing the policy. Teachers emphasized that they 'want to feel like something will be done' if they send a student to the office. They want to feel like it will be worth their efforts, like how

teachers 'choose their battles.' Most of the time, the administration does not pursue further disciplinary action with the students except in extreme circumstances such as fighting or drug use. Because teachers know that their efforts to enforce the policies are often in vain, they opt to avoid enforcing a policy altogether. The lack of administration support bleeds into the third theme that emerged under *When to Enforce*. Isaac's perspective provides an introduction on how teachers need to maintain their authority within their classrooms:

> What I think, one of the worst things that I've seen, though, is where the student is sent to the office. They walked the student back in without us having a conversation, and just basically say 'This kid's good to go,' in some way or another, like 'We've had a talk.' When that happens, it takes away a lot for me, in terms of my ability to enforce policies, because then it's like ''I'm saying you need to leave my room,' but you're walking a kid right back into my room because you don't want them sitting in the office. If that's the case, we need somewhere for them to be.
>
> (Isaac, Teacher)

Maintaining authority and respect. The third theme that emerged from the data was teachers' desire to maintain authority and respect in their classrooms. This desire is closely related to teachers' perceived lack of support from the administration. Beyond the mounting frustration and lack of support felt by teachers from administration is the deeper message that teachers believe is being conveyed to students when they are sent back to class without consequences: teachers lack power and authority. Teachers discussed the perceived lack of power that is being conveyed when teachers enforce a policy, but their endeavors are not supported by administration. A common theme from teachers from both high schools was that teachers often felt it was best to handle policy violations within the classroom, if at all, because it allows them to keep their authority. As one teacher, John, explained in detail:

> So the way that I go about it is I believe I can handle almost everything in my classroom. I don't think the office should handle more than an occasional problem here and there, and so I try to handle most things in my classroom. So over the years, I've learned that there's a perceived power…structure, and so if you handle things in your classroom, students perceive you as being the person who is in control of the room, but if you send them down to the office, they're going to start to see the office as being in more control of your classroom.
>
> (John, Teacher)

Lisa explained that she feels too many behavioral referrals being written reflects poorly on her classroom management skills. She discussed the importance of handling disciplinary issues to avoid sending the message that she lacks control over her classroom:

> I also take it personally when, if there's a lot of detentions being written, or if there's a lot of behavioral referrals being written, I feel that's a reflection on me that I'm not controlling my class, and in my opinion, in the classroom, it has to start with the teacher first.
>
> (Lisa, Teacher)

Other teachers discussed the importance of maintaining respect by showing students they have boundaries. Isaac explained his approach of discipline in the classroom:

> I try to handle the situation in a respectful manner, rather than going and passing the buck to somebody else to deal with the discipline. I know there are teachers that the kids do not respect, and I think part of that is because the teachers who refuse to discipline. They don't. Everyone's favorite teacher is generally not the one that is loosey-goosey, let's everything fly.
>
> (Isaac, Teacher)

Another teacher, Sheep, discussed the importance of respect in her classroom:

> Oh, it's my way or the highway, I mean, for the most part. You know we take ownership in the classroom, but they [students] need to understand that 'This is my classroom, and this is the way it's going to go.' You know there comes a time, you set down the gauntlet, and then as the year goes, you figure out where you can back off and where you can't. Some classes, I'll never let the gauntlet come down, and in some classes, I can let it go. But no, they need to understand, because there is, in my opinion, the level of respect within our society is not there.

(Sheep, Teacher)

Teachers indicated that they prefer to handle policy violations and disciplinary issues within their classroom. This type of enforcement, however, leads to further complicating problems. Perhaps the most common theme throughout every interview was 'inconsistency.' Teachers explained that the problem with teachers trying to handle policy violations within their classroom is the inconsistency among teachers. *Inconsistency* became the second major theme.

Inconsistency. *Inconsistency* was a major theme discussed throughout the interviews for both teachers and students. Students' perceptions of inconsistency will be discussed later in the chapter since this section solely focuses on teachers' experiences. Teachers expressed well-meaning intentions of choosing how and when to enforce policies. They also acknowledged that this approach had its own set of problems. Each teacher interviewed reported that inconsistency in policy enforcement and agreement about what should be enforced was a significant problem and flaw in the disciplinary protocol. As Ira explained, "you can't navigate through a rule book if everyone is not following the rules." Teachers expressed that they liked having the autonomy to use their discretion regarding the enforcement of policies. They also expressed frustration about the only consistency being that of inconsistency.

Teachers reported valuing their ability to use their discretion. However, this freedom came with a cost. They discussed how individual teachers within their schools had their own opinions about what is important and what is worth addressing versus ignoring. Teachers reported little agreement, even among grade levels or teachers within the same schools, about what should be enforced. A common problem that emerged as a

theme throughout the interviews was that teachers were not on the same page with each other. This theme emerged as *Not Being on the Same Page.*

A troubling consequence of inconsistent policy enforcement that was commonly mentioned by teachers was the overall ineffectiveness of the policies in general. Teachers rarely felt that the policies within their schools effectively managed the behavior they were designed to manage. Policies were not effective because they were not enforced. If policies were enforced, they were rarely enforced the way they were supposed to be enforced. Teachers did not see the point of enforcing the policies and students saw little value in obeying rules when they feel like they can get away with policy violations. This emergent theme became *Policy Ineffectiveness.*

Not being on the same page. Inconsistency in enforcement among teachers was cited as creating the most problems with the discipline protocol. Teachers expressed a variety of issues that inconsistency of enforcement created. A frequently cited problem was the tension the inconsistency caused among teachers because teachers were not on the same page. Most of the teachers and students interviewed discussed one classroom enforcing a policy while the classroom next door does not.

JJ talked about teachers' feeling angry over the lack of uniformity in enforcement and attributed the variance to different personality types:

> For discipline, we do verbal warnings, but it varies among each teacher. It's up to each teacher's personality…Some people are really short-tempered. I've only been doing it for four and a half years, so I'm pretty easygoing, but somebody who's been doing it for 20 years, they're tired. They've pushed and pushed and depending how tired they are is how their attitude is. But we do get mad as Teachers as a whole. Our biggest complaint is our discipline is not uniform across the board, and we're not suspending the people and we're not expelling the students.
>
> (JJ, Teacher)

John gave an example of a student with whom he was having behavioral problems and shared the different reactions from fellow teachers and administration:

> So anyway, now there were different opinions on how to handle that student. I had people, both educators and office, saying 'We would never allow that. That's ridiculous,' and then I also had people in both camps also tell me that they would never address that because they thought that that was kind of silly and the student was just trying to get attention and that if you just ignored him, it would stop.
>
> (John, Teacher)

Teachers discussed that the grade levels' differing policies were intended to be stricter with freshman and sophomore students and gradually be less restrictive with juniors and seniors. The rationale behind this approach was that students 'will learn what is expected of them as they progress through high school.' However, this approach has not produced the desired results. Instead, students are confused and frustrated by, for example 'having to take off their hoodie' while sitting next to another student who is not instructed to do the same. Elastigirl explained how not being on the same page is problematic when there are students from different grades in the same class:

> Teachers get frustrated because we really don't know [what's expected]. We're looking for leadership on that. We try to come together as a team (Grade Level Teams) and try to be consistent across that spectrum you know between all the classes, but that only works for 9th grade, maybe 10th grade, and then they start mixing [in classes]. So then you'll have different grades in one class, and they have different teachers, and maybe the 10th grade team enforces dress code, but the 11th grade team doesn't really enforce dress code, and so then you've got a mixture of kids, the 11th graders going into like a 10th grade class where most of them are, you know. It's just not clear to all of us, and some of us will say 'Well that's not that big of a deal to me,' and so we're not all on the same page. Basically, everybody's doing what they think should be done in class, instead of being consistent. And we'll say, 'We're going to be consistent' all the time, and it just doesn't happen.
>
> (Elastigirl, Teacher)

Teachers explained how students use this inconsistency to their advantage to try and get out of trouble by making them feel like the 'bad guy' for enforcing the policy while other teachers do not. Teachers felt like students "play them against each other" to avoid getting in trouble. Elastigirl described common exchanges between teachers and students:

> It's kind of like playing Mom and Dad, you know 'I said you can't do that,' and so what they'll do is, they'll play us against each other: 'Well so and so said that I could,' or you know 'Hey. You're out of dress code.' 'Well you know so and so saw me and they didn't say anything, and they said it was okay.'
>
> (Elastigirl, Teacher)

Keith shared a similar perspective:

> We don't even have the same dress code floor-to-floor. So [one] floor tries to enforce the District dress code: slacks, collared Polo shirt, no ripped jeans, whereas students on the third floor, they wear ripped jeans. I have kids sitting in my same class, some will say 'Well why do I have to dress like this and this student on the third floor doesn't have to?'
>
> (Keith, Teacher)

John elaborated further:

> I mean people are busy, and sometimes they don't see the value in it, and but as I spoke with other teachers, there's a lot of value in consistency. I think it's one of the key aspects, like the top two or three aspects of a quality school, and the more consistency you can have, I think it makes your school better, stronger, because it is confusing to students, I think, if they're going into one room and seeing one set of expectations, then going to another room and they've got another set of expectations. So and we even see that. So sometimes a student will not be quite in dress code, and then they'll try to say 'Well it was okay in this classroom. Why isn't it okay with you?' and so that's a problem, and there might be things that seem like varied boundaries.
>
> (John, Teacher)

JJ discussed common questions she gets asked by students regarding the differing expectations and varying policy enforcement:

> Well why did he get suspended for three days, and I only got one day? Why am I getting in trouble for a dress code violation, but I can go in the lunchroom and see 100 people that aren't. Why are they picking on me?' It's confusing for the students. It's the code. If you follow that Progressive Discipline sheet and follow the code, we wouldn't have none, but…That doesn't happen.
>
> (JJ, Teacher)

Isaac discussed the practical implications of the policies that are often considered and used the cold building as an example:

> It's freezing. So if a kid comes in with a jacket, all I ask for is to see their collar. Like I need to see their green-collared shirt but there's other teachers that won't let kids into the room.
>
> (Isaac, Teacher)

Ira cited the problem with policies interfering with students learning:

> [Teacher] doesn't care what a kid has on. That's one of the issues. There are teachers who, if you come in their classroom out of dress code, you have to leave. You're supposed to be here to learn…As far as wearing strict dress code, I would prefer it, if we're going to have dress code, then we should have a uniform dress code policy where everyone has to wear the same thing. We have too many variations, and that's how you get so many kids wearing the wrong thing or getting in trouble.
>
> (Ira, Teacher)

Teachers are made to feel like they are being too strict since other teachers in the building do not enforce the same policy. Teachers expressed frustration over the inconsistency because they recognized that the inconsistency perpetuates policy violations that could be reduced if consistency played a larger role in the enforcement. Most teachers agreed that this is largely a result of either different schools having different expectations or different grade levels having different expectations. Because different schools with different policies exist within the same building and different grade levels have different policies, there is virtually no way to completely get rid of the

inconsistencies without each school and each grade agreeing upon what policies to enforce. Inconsistency of policy enforcement creates countless problems within the high schools and ultimately leads to ineffective policies.

Policy ineffectiveness. Most of the teachers discussed the policies being ineffective because they were either not enforced how they were intended to be enforced or not enforced at all. Teachers explained that there are expectations of how school policies are supposed to be enforced but what happens is much different. Teachers recalled how there are supposed to be policies for tardiness, dress code, cell phones, loitering in the hall, and so on, but these policies simply do not get enforced. Because teachers are not on the same page with each other, many teachers do not take these policies seriously which causes students not to take the policies seriously. This results in their ineffectiveness. Ira explained:

> The kids don't want to participate in a system when they see their peers wearing what they want to wear, and they're like 'Oh I just got detention for what she has on,' or 'I was suspended last week because I had on see-through leggings.'
>
> (Ira, Teacher)

Policies are defined in the student handbook, along with the disciplinary action that is expected to be taken if a violation occurs. Yet, teachers described countless instances when the violation was not handled the way it was supposed to be handled. Elastigirl, a teacher, said: "In the handbook, it says that we are allowed to confiscate the phone and keep it for like 30 days, but that never happens." Another teacher, John, gave an example of handling tardiness: "For our grade, every three tardies, we give a detention. That's what's stated. It doesn't always happen."

In addition to there often being no consequences for policy violations, there are also problems with the implementation of consequences in the rare occasions that the policies are enforced. Teachers, like Lisa, also discussed the problems with students serving detentions: "I think the biggest obstacle is just getting kids to serve the detention. There's usually a group of kids that won't serve the detentions." Elastigirl shared the problems with the detention policy at her school:

> I know we used to have schoolwide detentions that were run by one teacher once or twice a week, and if we gave detentions to the kids in the classrooms, they'd have to go serve it with that particular teacher. I don't believe it was a paid position, and so the Teacher kind of got tired of doing that. It wasn't often enough that they were having detentions. You see what I'm saying? Like if you did something on Tuesday or Wednesday, and you had to wait until the following Tuesday to serve your detention, it wasn't an immediate enough consequence. So they stopped doing that.
>
> (Elastigirl, Teacher)

JJ discussed the ineffective policies resulting in the students not being held accountable for their actions:

> We need more people to figure out what to do with all these students. We have too many students creating chaos. And we're not holding people accountable. We're not holding the students accountable.
>
> (JJ, Teacher)

Sara talked about the long-term consequences of the ineffectiveness of the policies:

> My opinion is that rules are there for a reason and they need to follow them. So we're trying to create humans who can function in society. If they can't function in society, I don't feel like we've done our job, and society is not going to give them 15 chances. We're in an urban district. Society is not going to give most of these kids probation instead of a jail sentence, for who our demographic is, and so we aren't teaching them life skills, particularly not teaching the reality of society, because society is not going to continuously give them chances to fix their mistakes. They have to know what's right and wrong and make their decisions between right and wrong and follow through on consequences.
>
> (Sara, Teacher)

Carebear made an interesting point which created the segue to the next section and second research question:

> There's supposed to be one [dress code], but nobody follows it. If you came here, you would assume there is no dress code. Sometimes I think kids get away with more than they should. Like a repeat offender maybe, don't need to keep giving them chances.
>
> (Carebear, Teacher)

Carebear mentioned repeat offenders and students getting away with more than they should. This was a common sentiment discussed by teachers when they were asked about their relationships and interactions with students.

Summary of Results for Research Question 1

The first research question was *'How do teachers navigate any ambiguities surrounding the school discipline protocol?'* Findings suggest that there two major factors that capture the answer to this research question. The first is the overarching theme, *When to Enforce,* which was coded into three subthemes: *Choosing the Battles, Lack of Support from Administration,* and *Maintaining Authority and Respect*. Each of these subthemes impact each other and depict teachers' decision-making processes about whether to enforce a policy. The second overarching theme, *Inconsistency,* was coded into two subthemes: *Not Being on the Same Page* and *Policy Ineffectiveness*. These subthemes represent the issues that form as a result of the inconsistency in policy enforcement within the high schools.

The first subtheme, *Choosing the Battles*, represents teachers' reports about how enforcing a policy often led to more problems for the teachers. Because of this, teachers discussed the need to 'choose their battles' and determine whether the benefits of enforcing a policy would outweigh the costs. Part of the reason teachers felt they needed

to choose their battles was due to their perceived lack of support from the administration, which was the second subtheme, *Lack of Support from Administration*. Teachers frequently discussed not being backed up by the administration when they enforced a policy the way a policy was intended to be enforced. The lack of support from administration caused teachers to feel frustrated and concerned that students were sent the message the teachers lacked power and authority over the classrooms. This led to the third subtheme, *Maintaining Authority and Respect* which captures teachers' desire to handle disciplinary issues within their classrooms to demonstrate to students that they have authority and control over their classrooms.

Teachers reported having the preference to handle policy violations within their classrooms. Because teachers use their discretion when deciding whether to enforce a policy and how they enforce a policy, inconsistency among teachers was a common problem mentioned in most interviews. The second overarching theme, *Inconsistency*, was created to represent this issue. The first subtheme under *Inconsistency* was *Not Being on the Same Page* and depicts the problems teachers encountered when certain behaviors are tolerated by some teachers while others do not tolerate the same behavior. Furthermore, the ways in which policies are enforced by teachers differs among teachers which creates confusion for students and teachers alike. The lack of uniformity across teachers led to the second subtheme, *Policy Ineffectiveness*. Teachers frequently reported their perception of the ineffectiveness of the policies because they were not consistently enforced. Teachers discussed that neither students nor teachers appeared to take the policies seriously because enforcement rarely occurred the way it was supposed to occur.

The next section addresses the second research question: *What role does inconsistency of enforcement of discipline policies play in the teacher-student relationship quality?* First, overarching themes and their subthemes will be discussed. Then, a more detailed description of the findings will be presented.

Research Question 2

The second research question the present study explored was: *What role does inconsistency of enforcement of discipline policies play in the teacher-student relationship quality?* Inconsistency was a common theme that ran through each interview. Participants all discussed the problems with inconsistent enforcement of discipline policies. The most detrimental problem is the ways in which inconsistency impacts the teacher-student relationship. Inconsistency of policy enforcement plays a significant role in the teacher-student relationship. The social constructionist lens is particularly salient in this section of the chapter. In this section, perceptions of the teacher-student relationship begin to subtly emerge. Consistent with social constructionism, students make sense of their identity as 'student' in terms of their interactions with teachers. For this study, these interactions are often disciplinary interactions (Burr, 2015).

There were two major themes, along with their subthemes, that emerged to best answer the second research question. The first theme was described by teachers and students: the idea that the *Punishment Depends on the Student*. This theme was subcoded into a subtheme: *Type of Students*, which was further separated into *'Good Students'* and *'Bad Students*.' These themes are closely connected to the second theme, *Perceived Inequality*. Teachers and students discussed their perceptions of fairness regarding the

ways in which policies are enforced. *Perceived Inequality* was broken down into *Fairness* and *Favoritism*. Teachers reported good intentions by using their discretion and considering the individual student's circumstances when deciding whether to enforce and how to enforce. On the contrary, students discussed lack of fairness and favoritism as being their major contentions with the inconsistent enforcement of policies. Teachers and students agreed that part of what contributes to the inconsistency of policy enforcement is the 'type of student' involved in the policy violation.

Punishment depends on the student. One of the major themes that emerged from the data was the idea that the punishment depends on the student involved in the policy violation. Students and teachers agreed that the student involved in the policy violation had a significant impact on if and how the policy would be enforced. The inconsistent policy enforcement was often a result of teacher's using their discretion when deciding whether to enforce a violated policy. A theme that emerged from this was the perception among teachers and students that there are *types of students*. Depending on the type of student, the policy may or may not be enforced.

Teachers discussed that the ways in which they handle a disciplinary issue is influenced by the *type of student* who committed the infraction. The social constructionist concept of discourse and language is relevant in this section. Discourses can be "viewed as social interaction in context…[and] are social practices in that they organize ways of behaving and provide the frameworks individuals use to make sense of the world" (Stead and Bakker, 2010; p. 75). The ways in which teachers opt to enforce policies depends on how they interpret the policies and by the language they use when enforcing them. Thus, disciplinary language may vary across different teachers in

different contexts depending on the nature of the disciplinary infraction committed by the student and depending on the student who committed the infraction. The discourse and language that teachers choose to use during these interactions is also impacted by the *type of student*. According to Burr (2015), "language produces and constructs our experience of each other and ourselves" (p. 72). For students on the receiving end of this discourse, whether it is power-laden or lenient, they construct meaning about who they are as students in relation to their teachers and other peers. This in turn may impact how they see themselves in comparison to other students and may impact how they make sense of their relationship with teachers.

Types of students. Expectations of students and teachers become easily blurred when not all students are disciplined equally for the same violations. Both students and teachers reported receiving mixed messages about what is expected of them as a result of inconsistency in policy enforcement. The mixed messages lead to various interpretations by students and teachers. According to both teachers and students, the *type* of student involved in the violation of a policy determines how that violation is addressed. The type of student generally had to do with the students' academic standing, behavior, involvement in clubs and extracurriculars, their level of respect towards authority figures in the school, and whether the student had been in trouble previously. Teachers acknowledged that they considered their personal history with the student when deciding how to enforce a policy and to what extent they would pursue the enforcement. Teachers also acknowledged that they considered the individual circumstances or context of the violation and the background of the student involved. For instance, John stated:

> Now I will say the way that I handle it, or communicate it, might be different, depending on the student. So if it's a student that normally doesn't have a

> problem, does have a problem that day, I might be more inclined to have a conversation with them and maybe give them an additional warning.
>
> (John, Teacher)

Another teacher, Keith, similarly shared:

> And you know…it depends on the student, obviously, what they've done, what their past is, what their circumstances are. So I can tell you there's no cookie cutter discipline here. It's not 'This offense will cause this.
>
> (Keith, Teacher)

One student, Jake, discussed this trend among teachers using an example of another student who does not face the consequences that other students would face for the same policy violation:

> A lot of this stuff is hard to explain, but there's this one kid who always gets in trouble in a way, but not how they're supposed to enforce it. Every day he's doing something wrong, and the things that he does wrong every day, by this point, he should've been expelled. He should've been expelled the first week of school, but he's still here. They've just given him a period or two of In-School Suspension, and that's it.
>
> (Jake, 10th Grade Student)

Another student, Brian, shared an example where he perceived that he was on the receiving end of policy enforcement when other students who violated the same policy did not receive the same consequence:

> It depends on what you're doing, or it depends on if you're always in trouble. That was one interaction and you choose to call my mom,' and there's other troublemakers that do that constantly, but she doesn't threaten to call their mom or something.
>
> (Brian, 11th Grade Student)

Isaac explained that he will enforce a policy if the student is a 'repeat offender' but also acknowledged the circumstances of many students when he discussed that they have

other factors and stressors in their lives that may contribute to their behavior or tendency to violate certain policies, like the dress code policy:

> I do [enforce] it if it's obviously repeat offenses, or if it's egregious. If they're wearing light denim jeans that are ripped up, I'm like 'You're out of uniform,' but if they're wearing, to be honest, black jeans, I'm like… Listen, I know half of my kids here, they're going with whatever they can find in the morning, because they had something else going on. So yeah, it's based off of the kid, usually. So I mean really a lot of times it depends on the kid.
>
> (Isaac, Teacher)

Students recognized this trend as well. As Faith explained:

> Sometimes it could be a student that never gets in trouble. So you do something, they might give you a second chance, but if it's like they constantly told you 'Don't do this/that,' and you do it anyways, then it's like 'Okay, we're not playing. You're going to get suspended or expelled.'
>
> (Faith, 11th Grade Student)

Another student, Jason, agreed that certain students get away with more policy violations compared to other students, like himself:

> Because there's kids that get certain privileges, such as being allowed to walk in the halls and other stuff, such as they will be out of dress code. The principals won't say anything to them. Neither will their [teachers from their] classes. They will be ignoring their teachers and not doing any work. Their teachers won't kick them out or get them suspended or anything, and those are the main things that they do, and the principals refuse to suspend them. The most that the principals will do is give them a detention, but I could do one thing and I'll get suspended immediately for up to three days, depending on what I do.
>
> (Jason, 10th Grade Student)

The type of enforcement and discourse used varies depending on the *type of student*. Teachers generally perceived that this approach was appreciated by students. Many of the teachers explained that some students 'just have off days' but are otherwise *'good student*s.' On the other hand, teachers explained that there are students who "constantly push the boundaries" with authority figures in the schools. Even though

teachers agreed that inconsistent policy enforcement was a major problem within their schools, they provided a rationale for their case by case (or inconsistent) approach to policy enforcement. Teachers' rationale for this approach was to demonstrate impartiality rather than enforcing the policies the same way for every student, like historical zero tolerance policies. Students, on the other hand, perceived this approach differently and their perspectives will be discussed later in this section. First, the theme *Types of Students* was subcoded into two additional subthemes: *'Good Students'* and *'Bad Students.'*

'Good students.' *'Good Students'* emerged as a subtheme from *Types of Students.* 'Good students' were perceived by students as the ones who generally got away with more policy violations compared to their peers. In order to be considered a *'good student*,' the student generally needed to possess certain traits or engage in certain activities. Some of these traits and activities include students who perform well academically, participate in class and in extracurriculars, are respectful to authority figures, do not engage in fights with other students, are rarely tardy, follow the dress code, school rules, etc. Teachers also spoke of certain students being perceived as *'good students.'* From the teachers' perspective, they generally felt that they were more lenient with students who they perceived as 'good' compared to their peers.

High school junior, Jerry, described *'good students'*:

> Well some students, I'd say the good ones that know what's expected of them, I would say that they kind of comply [with] what the teacher is talking about. They also subconsciously comply with that rule. So when they see a Teacher tell a student to, for example, take off their hoodie, they see that and they say 'Okay, well that's probably part of dress code, so that's something I shouldn't do, wear a hoodie in class.'
>
> (Jerry, 11th Grade Student)

Regarding teachers giving *'good student*s' a pass, Faith explained that students who show contrition may be more likely to receive a second chance:

> Whereas if it's a student and you go in there and you're genuinely apologizing and saying you don't want to get kicked out, then they might second-guess it and give you another chance.
>
> (Faith, 11th Grade Student)

Taylor said:

> But if I'm the type of person that does all my work and then I'm just talking, you're not going to be upset with you because of that because you're done with all your work. So most likely, they're just going to give you more work to try to keep you occupied.
>
> (Taylor, 11th Grade Student)

Brian, shared his perspective:

> It depends on if you're a Straight-A student, and you get the discipline differently, and it's just how you show things, how you go by things. I'm like a Straight-A student, which I was. No. I'm an Honor Roll student. So if I was like a Straight-A student, a good kid, never got in trouble, they'll be more lenient on the punishment than a person that keeps on getting in trouble.
>
> (Brian, 11th Grade Student)

Others perceived the *'good students'* as being immune to discipline altogether. Jerry explained:

> The 'good students' who follow the rules-some kids are really good kids. So sometimes they'll just go out of dress code and they won't be talked to. They won't actually receive discipline at all.
>
> (Jerry, 11th Grade Student)

Teachers shared what student qualities made them more likely to consider a student a *'good student*.' For instance, Lisa explained:

> Maybe because they've sat down and they've let me know them, because there are kids that are in my classroom and they're quiet and I don't know that much about them, as much as I've tried. They're just willing to talk, which is fine. I

> view it as I'm not meant to connect with every single student. At this point in my life, maybe I'm not supposed to make that connection with that student.
>
> (Lisa, Teacher)

Ira discussed his willingness to help *'good students'*:

> If you are an excellent student and you never get in trouble and you come to me and you need something, I'm going to try to make sure you have it. but if you're a great student and you're in the [name of] program and you're doing everything that you're supposed to do and you have a bad day, of course I've got you because I know you're usually not like that.
>
> (Ira, Teacher)

Although students and teachers both discussed *'good students,'* the ways in which they talked about this group or type of students differed. Students were more likely than teachers to overtly state that *'good students'* got away with more policy violations. Teachers, on the other hand, discussed aspects of their relationships with *'good students'* and what they were willing to do for them compared to other students. The other students were considered *'bad students.' 'Bad students'* were perceived by students and teachers as being less likely to get away with a policy violation and more likely to be on the receiving end of a policy enforcement.

'Bad students.' Contrary to *'Good Students,' 'Bad Students'* are those who do not show interest in school, rarely participate in class, often skip class or are tardy, have conflicts with other peers and staff, and are disrespectful towards teachers. According to most participants, *'bad students'* have a reputation that often follows them as they progress through the grades. Students perceived *'bad students'* as being more likely to get into trouble, even if the policy violation was minor. Teachers also acknowledged that they were generally less lenient with *'bad students'* regarding the enforcement of discipline policies. Jerry, an 11th grade student explained: "You know some kids are kind

of like notorious for doing bad stuff. They'll get that academic discipline more than other kids who are just there…" Taylor, also in 11th grade, explained that students build reputations: "If you build a reputation, then that's how they going to look at you, from off your reputation." In other words, it is harder for a *'bad student'* to change their reputation, despite some teachers who said that they treat each year with all students as a 'fresh start.' Taylor continued to discuss his perception of how one of his teacher's addresses discipline with *'bad students'*:

> If you get into a trouble a lot, well most of the time if you're a 'troublemaker,' as they say, then if something happens where you do something, then you'll go down there, because really she doesn't like suspending people because she knows education is important. But like say if I'm a type of person that comes to class, talk, and don't do anything. Then you're going to get called out for that, because you're not doing anything.
>
> (Taylor, 11th Grade Student)

Thomas, a senior, shared his perspective about *'bad students'* getting treated differently:

> I think certain kids he just keeps hammering them. He doesn't give them a break because he has a problem with them, or they're interacting in a bad way, or start off a bad way. So he gives them a different look.
>
> (Thomas, 12th Grade Student)

Brian discussed an incident when he was disciplined while another student was not:

> It depends on what you're doing, or it depends on if you're always in trouble…That was one interaction and you choose to call my mom,' and there's other troublemakers that do that constantly, but she doesn't threaten to call their mom or something.
>
> (Brian, 11th Grade Student)

Ira, a teacher, explained that he is not as likely to help students with whom he has bad interactions in the past: "If you are in trouble constantly and probably you have said some unfavorable things to me in the past and you need something, I'll think twice, I

mean depending what is it." Carebear talked about a student with whom she has been having disciplinary issues. She uses this student as an example of a 'repeat offender' or a *'bad student'* and discussed the need to use a different approach for *'bad students'*:

> I mean there's like so this one kid, and every day he's up. He's walking around. (He's) not doing his work, verbally disrespectful. There's a problem there. So with those kids, too, right now we're trying to do Behavior Contracts for those repeat kids that they're doing the same behaviors and they're doing it in multiple classes, multiple times a day. So things like that…You know same thing, same thing and the behavior is not changing.
>
> (Carebear, Teacher)

When asked what her ideal discipline protocol would look like, Carebear said that she likes the one that is in place, but it needs to be enforced all the time regardless of how teachers may feel about the student. Carebear's perspective introduces the next section, which discussed the perceived inequality about the ways in which policies are enforced:

> I like the one we have, to be honest with you…and it has to be enforced. Everybody has to be on the same page, and administration has to, if it comes to that level, then they have to follow through as well. Everybody needs to follow through and follow the steps, not just because you don't like a kid, skip to detention. I mean, again, if it's severe, that's fine, but, otherwise, following the steps and being consistent with them and following through.
>
> (Carebear, Teacher)

Teachers and students agreed that there are types of students and the type of student impacts the ways in which they experience discipline policy enforcement. The differing and inconsistent policy enforcement creates a host of problems among students and teachers. Ultimately, the teacher-student relationship quality is impacted because not all students are perceived to be treated equally. This perception is especially detrimental for students. Depending on the student's background, such as prior history with policy violations, the student may be treated more or less harshly by a teacher. Students

perceive the larger issue of inconsistency in enforcement as something less benign. For students, the question of fairness and accusations of favoritism were frequently raised.

Perceived Inequality. Another theme that emerged from the data was *Perceived Inequality*. Almost all students discussed their perception of the discipline policy enforcement being unfair or unequal within their high schools. Students shared many instances involving themselves or other students who were not disciplined consistently for the same policy violation. Students discussed their experiences with a similar frustration as teachers when they discussed their perceived lack of support from the administration. Students, like teachers, conveyed their stories with a sense of hopelessness and the nuance that things would never change. *Perceived Inequality* was divided into two subthemes: *Fairness* and *Favoritism.*

The social constructionist perspective of power is salient in this section. There is power in the ways students are expected to behave and power in the ways teachers enforce discipline policies if they do not behave. There is power in language or discourse as well as the decision by teachers not to exert their power in language and discourse. This section sheds light on how power is experienced by students who are on the receiving end of power-laden discourse and students perceive fairness as a result of their interactions with teachers. Furthermore, previous research shows that an authoritative school climate produces the most optimal student outcomes in terms of behavior (Cornell & Huang, 2016; Gregory & Cornell, 2009). The two main components of an authoritative school climate are student support and disciplinary structure. Student support refers to student perceptions that their teachers and other school staff members treat them with respect and want them to be successful. Disciplinary structure refers to

the idea that school rules are perceived as strict but fairly enforced (Konold, et al., 2014). In the following section, it is apparent that students do not perceive the school policies as being fairly enforced which can create a strain in the teacher-student relationship.

Fairness. Many students talked about the policy enforcement within their high school being unfair. Students recounted countless instances when they perceived teachers treating students differently for violating the same policy. In other words, all students were not held to the same standards. Teachers did not deny students' perceptions or experiences regarding the enforcement being unfair. In fact, teachers generally acknowledged the unfairness of the policies and the ways in which the policies are enforced.

Jake, a sophomore, said*:*

> Some kids, they don't like being here because they feel (for some of the kids in our class right now) that teachers treat them differently than other people. Some teachers will let kids do whatever they feel like it, and then some kids can't do anything at all. My fifth period, I think it is, the teacher will let certain people talk, but one person will say something, then she'll let the other person, but not the people who were talking originally.
>
> (Jake, 10th Grade Student)

Brian shared his experiences getting disciplined more harshly than other students. Brian's perspective was unique because he felt that teachers were stricter with him compared to other 'troublemakers' because they had more confidence in his ability to change his behavior:

> I interpret it as being more harsh, because I think I didn't do nothing and I guess she [teacher] wants to keep it that way, and so she chooses to punish me harder than them ['troublemakers'] because that's what they're going to keep doing. Like it doesn't matter how many times that you call their mom; they're going to keep acting up and stuff.
>
> (Brian, 11th Grade Student)

JJ a teacher discussed a food fight involving 21 students but not all 21 students received the same consequence. She goes on to say even though students involved in the fight physically harmed one of the teachers, the principals asked the teacher if he would avoid pressing charges against the student:

> Out of 21 people that got in a big, huge food fight, only nine got suspended. Well how does the <Colleague> feel when that student that hit him isn't even suspended? And even the Principals will say 'Can you not press charges?'
>
> (JJ, Teacher)

Ira provided another example of two students who violated the same policy but received different consequences. Teachers have some authority about which principal to send the student to and different principals have different disciplinary preferences:

> Two kids get in trouble. One gets sent to one principal. He gets suspended three days. The other kid gets sent to a different principal. They get detention. So for one, that's very unfair to the kid that got suspended for three days for the same offense, and there is no way that some of these things these kids get suspended for, they should not be suspended.
>
> (Ira, Teacher)

Sara also discussed students' perceptions of fairness:

> Then you have the kids who are angry because they don't think it's fair, and it's not fair. That they see that their floor is under strict discipline, and then another floor is not. So they don't think it's fair that other kids they see can get away with things and they can't.
>
> (Sara, Teacher)

Keith shared his perspective on the fairness of the policies and said that when students voice their perceptions of the policies as being unfair, he tells them that 'life is not fair' but acknowledged that he generally agreed with the students in that the policies are not fair:

> [stating what he tells students] So just all things aren't equal, and that's the policy of your school, and I have to enforce the policy per each school'…I wish they [the policies] were uniform, because it isn't fair, and the students see that and they know it, but I just tell them the way it is. It's just '[program] students, know that you have to adhere to this policy,' and it's silly that they get in trouble for things as minor as wearing a hoodie, but where the other two schools don't, so I rarely send somebody to the principal's office for wearing a hoodie.
>
> (Keith, Teacher)

Favoritism. Perhaps the most damaging perception that impacts the teacher-student relationship is that some students are favored over other students. To capture this perspective is the second subtheme that emerged from the data: *Favoritism*. Students frequently spoke of teachers favoring other students while they felt that they were being treated unfairly. The perception of favoritism among students is detrimental to the teacher-student relationship quality because it implies that many students do not believe that their teachers treat them with the same respect as other students. Furthermore, many teachers openly acknowledged that favoritism exists within their school and even for them personally. However, unlike the students' perspective, teachers did not perceive their tendencies to show favoritism as having negative effects. Jerry feels that the senior students in his high school are generally favored by teachers:

> I just think it's all just kind of ridiculous. It's favoritism almost. They kind of just favor those kids who kind of act good, and they're out of dress code and they don't say anything about it, most of the time, and then the seniors, again, are an example for all those other children. So when other kids from lower grades see that the seniors are out of dress code, they're going to do the same thing, and it kind of overrules the disciplines that the teachers take to tell the students that 'You should be in dress code.'
>
> (Jerry, 11th Grade Student)

Jake shared his perspective on favoritism:

> I think it's kind of stupid that the teachers will choose favoritism, because everybody is different. You can't have just favorite people. The teachers who are

> choosing favoritism, most of the students cannot stand them. The students don't like them, and the students just disrespect them because of it. So it's like there's no point of being nice to a teacher who doesn't even like you anyways.
>
> (Jake, 10th Grade Student)

James feels that he is one of the students who is disliked by teachers because he is more vocal about his opinions:

> There's favoritism in this school, I will say. Plenty of us, our staff members have favoritism. In our English class, I'm one of the disliked students, since I am pretty open to share opinions. So I've been told many times by my staff member that he doesn't like me.
>
> (James, 12th Grade Student)

Jasmine is another student who feels that she is not one of the favored students:

> There's a lot of favoritism. Okay, so last year when I was in tenth grade, there's like this big crew that was here since ninth grade. <teacher> liked them or something, and he showed favoritism with them. He didn't get mad at them for wearing ripped jeans or nothing, but as soon as I started wearing ripped jeans or I started doing whatever, he got mad at me for it.
>
> (Jasmine, 11th Grade Student)

Taylor, an 11th grade student, feels that there is favoritism among teachers but that the teachers likely would not admit to showing favoritism or having favorite students: "And then like Teachers probably won't say it, but they have their favorites and they're going to favor their favorites." However, most teachers did admit to having favorites. In fact, many teachers openly stated that they had favorite students. Ira, a teacher, confidently stated: "Of course there's favoritism. I show favoritism." Sheep also openly shared that there is favoritism in her school. Sheep shared an example from her interactions with students:

> Oh God, yeah. It [favoritism] exists. I'll be straight up, and I tell the kids that: 'When it comes to grades, if you are three points away from the next grade and you're a student who comes in and puts 100% effort into everything, you're

> getting those points. If you're the student who's three points away and all you are is a headache, you're a constant discipline issue, you're never prepared, you're going to get stuck with them three points.' Yes, 100%.
>
> (Sheep, Teacher)

Elastigirl argued for her approach by sharing a recent exchange with a student:

> You're playing favorites now,' because I'll say 'Hey. You need to put that phone away.' 'Well what about so and so?' and I'm like 'Well guess what? So and so does have their phone out, but they actually finished their work, so I'm not really focused on them. I'm focused on you.'
>
> (Elastigirl, Teacher)

JJ acknowledged that there is favoritism among teachers as well as the principals:

> There's favoritism on the teachers, across the board for the principals. I mean you know you've got your people, you've been working with somebody. One of the students going to come talk to you. He's in ninth grade, already has a baby. So of course, the principal is going to feel bad for him and give him more leniency because if he acts out because if he acts out because he's stressed with is working. He's trying to go to school. I listen to them when they say, 'You're playing favorites.' I say, 'I'm not playing favorites.'
>
> (JJ, Teacher)

Lisa acknowledged that she has favorite students but feels that her discipline is generally consistent among all students. However, she indicated that she is more lenient with students she has gotten to know better than other students:

> I do have favorites, and when it comes to behavior, I try to be, behavior wise, firm, fair and consistent across the board. So if I have a kid that's skipping my class and one of my good kids is skipping the class, they're going to get the same treatment, the same consequences, because my kids, it's important that they see, 'Look. Even the good kids she's going to punish.' However, some of the kids that are in my class for the second time, I use them more for like Student Helpers or if they need to do something, I'll let them leave, but if it's somebody that's in my first period class, like I have a student, she doesn't do anything in my class. So I guess that way it's favoritism.
>
> (Lisa, Teacher)

Keith offered his perspective, acknowledging that many students believe that they are singled out but explained that their behaviors have caused them to receive harsher consequences:

> I know students see this [as] favoritism, and it's natural for administrators and teachers to look at what the student's dealing with, what they're struggling with. You know discipline's not all equal. One, repeat offenders are students who you just can't get through to, who the only thing that's going to wake them up is a good kick in the butt, or you know more severe consequences, and there are students here, and I have to say if they're a quiet student, if they're a 'good student', even if they're not doing the right thing, then more likely they'll look the other way, and that happens, and I do think that impacts the other students. I do think the students who get in trouble more often feel like they're being picked on, but then again, their behaviors lead to more trouble too. I mean they see it as favoritism.
>
> (Keith, Teacher)

Summary of Results for Research Question 2

The second research question was *'What role does inconsistency of enforcement of discipline policies play in the teacher-student relationship?'* Two overarching themes were identified that best address this question. The first overarching theme, *Punishment Depends on the Student,* captures the belief by teachers and students that the way a policy is enforced is dependent on the type student involved. This theme was coded into the theme, *Types of Students,* which was then subcoded into two subthemes: *'Good Students'* and *'Bad Students.'* The two subthemes, *'Good Students'* and *'Bad Students'* captures teachers' and students' descriptions of the two main types of students within the school. This perception led to the second overarching theme, *Perceived Inequality,* which was subcoded into two subthemes: *Fairness* and *Favoritism* which represent students' and teachers' perspectives that policy enforcement is not distributed equally across all students.

The first subtheme, *Types of Students* reflects students' and teachers' perceptions that there are different types of students and the type of student involved in a policy violation impacts the way that policy is enforced. This subtheme was subcoded further to illustrate the two major categories of types of students, *'Good Students'* and *'Bad Students.'* Students and teachers perceived *'good students'* as being less likely to receive a harsh consequence for a policy violation whereas *'bad students'* were more likely to receive a harsh consequence for the same violation. Whether a student is perceived as being a 'good student' or a 'bad student', determines if and how a policy will be enforced if the student is caught violating it. Consequently, not all students are perceived as being treated equally when it comes to policy enforcement which led to development of the second overarching theme: *Perceived Inequality*.

The second overarching theme, *Perceived Inequality* reflects the perception of students and teachers that students are not treated equally regarding policy enforcement. These beliefs led to the two subthemes, *Fairness* and *Favoritism*. Many students and teachers agreed that policy enforcement was not fair because certain students would violate the same policy but be disciplined much differently. This tendency led students to accuse teachers of displaying favoritism. Teachers acknowledged that favoritism exists, and many teachers reported showing favoritism themselves, which creates strain on many students' relationships with teachers. The next section addresses the third research question: *How do discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of both teachers and students?* First, overarching themes and their subthemes will be discussed. Then, a more detailed description of the findings will be presented.

Research Question 3

The third research question that the present study explored was *How do discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of both teachers and students?* Unlike the data and themes that were discussed in the previous sections, the interpretations in this section are more complex and interrelated. In other words, findings from the previous two questions were interpreted to help answer the third research question. Furthermore, the answer to this research question is multi-layered and heavily influenced by the previously discussed themes. Multiple realities and truths exist among teachers and students. However, teachers and students generally agreed that certain teacher qualities impact the teacher-student relationship. These qualities are, nevertheless, impacted by themes previously discussed. The previously discussed findings and emergent themes tie together in this section to create a holistic perspective of how discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of teachers and students.

In order to best explain how discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of teachers and students, it is first necessary to discuss teacher qualities that impact the teacher-student relationship. Findings suggest that the discipline policies themselves do not actually impact the teacher-student relationship. Rather, the enforcement of the policies is what is most impactful on the teacher-student relationship. The enforcement and inconsistency of enforcement was discussed in previous sections. There are certain teacher qualities that enhance the teacher-student relationship that are often hindered by the enforcement or inconsistent enforcement of discipline policies. This section contains one major theme: *Relational Teacher Qualities.*

Relational Teacher Qualities. Teachers and students discussed various teacher qualities that contributed to a positive teacher-student relationship. An interesting implication of these qualities is that they were generally in direct opposition to teachers' and students' frustrations over the inconsistency of policy enforcement. Moreover, these qualities can be hindered by teachers' inconsistent policy enforcement. For example, teachers shared that they are not on the same page with one another, therefore, not all students are disciplined equally. Interestingly, many teachers and students cited their preference for considering the context of the policy violation, in addition to leniency as an important quality.

Consistent with previous research examining teacher qualities that promote or contribute to a positive teacher-student relationship, findings from the present study suggest that open and honest communication with students, caring behaviors, and understanding students on an individual and personal level are preferred qualities discussed by teachers and students (Cooper and Miness, 2014; Curtis, 2014; McHugh, et al., 2013). Many teacher qualities were discussed throughout the interviews which led to the theme: *Relational Teacher Qualities.* This overarching theme was subcoded and broken down into three subthemes: a) *Keeping It Real*, b) *Caring*, and c) *Understanding Students and Their Circumstances*. Each of these three subthemes were mentioned by teachers and students as contributing to the teacher-student relationship quality.

Keeping it real. The subtheme, *Keeping It Real*, emerged solely from the teachers' interviews. While this subtheme is not as directly tied to the research questions as the others, it is still worth reporting because many teachers discussed qualities that fell under this realm. This subtheme contains qualities that teachers felt were important

contributing factors to their relationships with students. Many teachers discussed their own backgrounds, which allowed them to understand and relate to students, because they too came from similar backgrounds and shared similar experiences as their students. Half of the teachers discussed qualities involving their character and desire to help prepare students for life beyond high school. Others discussed specific qualities that they feel are important in fostering good teacher-student relationships. Teachers also discussed their beliefs about the importance of being upfront and direct with students about how their behavior in school cannot and will not be tolerated in the 'real world.' Finally, teachers discussed the importance of showing students their true selves, like John, who explained that he feels teachers have better success with students if their behavior is consistent in and out of the classroom. John believes in the importance of being himself, rather someone he is not, in the classroom. More importantly, he noted that following through on their word is important for respect:

> I think a lot of times that like you can try to be a certain person in a classroom, but ultimately you're going to end up being yourself, and that's the best person to be is yourself, and you just want to make sure that your characteristics, your core values and stuff are good core values that work in the classroom…They don't allow things to happen that they've said won't happen. So if they'd said 'This can't happen. This will be the consequence,' and they follow through with that and they're consistent with that, I think the kids respect that and I don't think they have as many problems, and I think they live by the first three weeks that you interact with the students is going to determine the next 33 weeks.
>
> (John, Teacher)

Lisa similarly shared an instance involving a student in which she kept her word. She discussed that it is important for her that students see her as being someone who will follow through on what she says she will do:

> I wrote the referral, and then the principal walked in, talked to that student that I said, 'Please don't suspend him because he did everything he was supposed to do

> to eliminate the fight,' and so he didn't suspend him and the principal said 'Look. You need to know that this teacher, she had your back. (She) went to bat for you, supported you, stood up for you, did everything that she said she was going to do,' and then the other kid who got suspended, now he did come back and he came and apologized to me, but he's not here this year. I don't know where he is. I hope that as a teacher that they see me as a role model of somebody who's I do what I say and I say what I do type thing…I keep it real.
>
> (Lisa, Teacher)

Sara talked about *keeping it real* in another sense. She acknowledged that many students have ongoing stressors outside of school. For Sara, she feels that it is important to let students know that their outside stressors cannot always be an excuse for their behavior in school, just how their stressors cannot be an excuse for a job in the working world:

> I mean they know they still have the rules, regardless of their situation at home. We may have a conversation about what's going on, but then we also may have a conversation about how what's going on at home can't always direct their life kind of thing. So things may be horrible at home, but we may have a conversation of how 'You can't let that come… bring it to school with you. You can't let it seep into your job. Your boss isn't going to necessarily understand that your mom is sick, or things are going on. So how we can cope and use coping and dealing mechanisms in life?'
>
> (Sara, Teacher)

Sheep shared a similar perspective as Sara. Sheep also discussed the importance of preparing students for life beyond high school:

> I think I have a very good relationship with the students. I live in the country. I live on a farm, so I bring a different experience to the urban setting, and many of the students are fascinated by that, and I'm very up front. I'm very abrasive. I don't play with the kids, and they know that. It's all in the delivery in how you approach the kids. Not that I'm a friend, but I have a level of respect that I establish very quickly. I'm no nonsense, and the kids know that real quickly. They know that I don't fear their language and I will come right back with their language, if I have to. That's probably fairly bad, but it's just something I've… I do have very good respect the students and my discipline is handled in the room, and I don't have… My number one discipline is use common sense.

(Sheep, Teacher)

Carebear's perspective echoed those of Sara and Sheep. Carebear shared that she keeps it real with students by explaining the hierarchy in the school and connects it to their future in the working world:

> Again, I'm not their friend, but at the same time, there's that relationship where they can share. I also try to make them understand that at school, I'm their boss and when they say 'Oh, why can't I have my hoodie on? Why can't I have my phone?' I'm like 'You understand that I have a boss, which is my principal, and when she comes in and sees you guys on your phone, guess who gets in trouble? Me, because I have rules that I have to enforce and follow, and I might not always like them, but I have to do it,' and I'll try incorporate, too, like jobs: When you go to your job, you cannot tell your boss to [explicit] off, if you're mad. I try to get those real-life situations, because they're going to have jobs.

(Carebear, Teacher)

Other teachers shared instances of simply 'getting it' or understanding students because they also were in the students' shoes at some point in their lives. As JJ explains:

> Yeah, I just get it because I was the same kid that they were. I'm just older now. So I get it. If you don't get it, especially in an urban environment, you can't teach in an urban environment. I don't know how to say it any better than that.

(JJ, Teacher)

Ira similarly shared that he discloses his own history with students. Ira discussed how his own personal background enables him to relate and connect with students on a deeper level:

> I try to tell them that I understand what they're going through, because I went to inner city public school. 'I am from the same neighborhood as your parents. I have teenagers of my own, so I know how that relationship can be strained with your parents, or with your Teachers.' So I just try to show them that at some point in my life, I was that person. No matter what the kid is going through, or no matter what happened, I have a relatable story, because more than likely, I've been through the same thing that they're going through, and if I haven't been through it, my daughter has, or my son has.

(Ira, Teacher)

Keith talked about his desire to use his own experiences to mentor students. He discussed his decision to be a role model in school by conforming to the dress code students are expected to follow:

> I wanted to see if I could use my life experience to mentor students…I don't wear anything that's not in the student dress code, because, again, I'm trying to model, but other Teachers (and I'm not judging them), they don't have dress code, so they can wear jeans and ripped jeans and hoodies, and so if I'm a 16-year-old sitting there going 'Well if a Teacher can do that, but I can't…' you know. So that's the way I look at it. Again, so as far as the influence, my program is set up for mentoring.
>
> (Keith, Teacher)

Teachers shared their perspective about being honest with students about the real world. Teachers discussed using their own histories to demonstrate their ability to relate to students because they 'get it.'

Caring. Another quality that was cited by students and teachers is *Caring*. Many qualities that were mentioned by participants fell under this subtheme. Teachers and students either directly stated 'caring' as an important quality that impacts the teacher-student relationship or they discussed other qualities that shared a similar meaning. For example, students explained that teachers taking the time to help them understand a problem or setting aside time to listen to students' concerns demonstrates that they care. Some of the qualities that teachers discussed that fell under this subtheme include respecting students, building trust, helping students with things they may need, and taking the time to listen to students' stories. Teachers discussed their desire to invest in students and get to know them on an individual level. Teachers shared that this approach fosters and enhances the quality of the teacher-student relationship. Ira discussed his perspective on the importance of showing students that he cares about them:

> If the kid knows you care about them, it's not going to impact the relationship negatively because they will be angry with you, even if it's like a month, but, eventually, they'll come back and they might say 'Oh man, I don't talk to you because you're a snitch,' and then I explain to them, 'You can call it snitching, because what I do here is not snitching, and if you want to call it snitching, they pay me very well to snitch on you, but all I care about is what you're going to do in the school, how are you going to get out of here…My care for the kids is genuine. So once they pick that up, it's like we have… I don't have bad relationships with many students. I do not have bad relationships because they know I care about them. They know I genuinely care about them.
>
> (Ira, Teacher)

Sara shared her perspective on her relationship with students. She feels that she has a good relationship with students because students know that they can count on her to be there for them. She explains how students generally know where she stands in terms of what she expects from them and students know that they can go to Sara for help if they need something:

> I'd say I probably have a pretty good relationship with students. I guess I end up being in the cool setting, so they know they can come and talk to me, or if they need a minute away from something, they come to us. So the kids in the whole building kind of have an idea of where we all stand in this hallway, and how we all are and that they know that they come to us, if they need to talk to us, or they need anything. (They use our) refrigerators, microwaves. I mean as a department as a whole, and me included, we're probably one of the first set of people that a lot of the kids will come to.
>
> (Sara, Teacher)

Lisa shared that she respects students and shows them that she cares. She indicated that by being patient with students, they are more willing to work with her:

> I respect the kids, show them that I care about them. The one-on-one seems to work a little bit better… I find that if kids see that I truly care and I'm not quick to explode, then it seems like they're willing to work with me a little bit better.
>
> (Lisa, Teacher)

When asked what she does to show students that she cares about them she responded that she listens to them and discussed the importance of trust in the teacher-student relationship:

> Listen, you know. I don't know. I mean some of the students that I have this year that come and talk to me are past students, and they'll tell me that they miss being in my class or something like that. Maybe it's a trust thing. I don't know. I'm hoping maybe I make them feel comfortable. I'm not sure. Myself, I know I'm not, as the kids put it, fake. That's the big thing. Some kids will just come in my room and they'll vent and I'll just let them vent, and then they feel better and then they leave. I'm like 'Okay,' but I don't say anything. So I don't know. Hopefully I make them feel comfortable to come… I think the big thing here in this building is trust. Like the students have got to have that trust. They've got to have the feeling that they can trust a teacher.
>
> (Lisa, Teacher)

Students talked about teachers demonstrating that they care by helping them, providing positive verbal feedback, taking time to talk to them, or teachers' overall attitude and vibe. Jasmine explained:

> They show me that they care, but I need to feel it from them first that they actually do care, because some of the Teachers, like (my) English (teacher) and Geometry, they actually do care about me. They really do. It's just the fact that (sometimes I) don't listen, be hardheaded. My Geometry teacher, her helper sent me home a letter to make up the stuff that I was missing…So they're helping me get my grades together. They're actually helping me get my life together, for real…They actually tell me that they like me a lot, and they tell me about my grades and how I could fix it and how I can improve on the whole grade in general.
>
> (Jasmine, 11th Grade Student)

Michael said teachers that take time to help him demonstrate that they care:

> I just think because they're helping me. I just feel that connection. You could see if somebody don't want to help you, or don't feel like it, but they just be there every time you come to them. They always make time. Even if they don't have time, they find a way to make it. It doesn't matter when, where; they always make time.
>
> (Michael, 12th Grade Student)

When Faith was asked how she knows that teachers care she said it was more about their attitudes towards students and making genuine connections with students. Faith shared that for some students, their connection with teachers may make them more likely to push themselves to do better:

> Just like their attitudes towards the students, or they show how they care for the students by making sure everybody gets it, not just continue [with the lesson] I feel like if they are that type of teacher where they just connect with students and they want to like genuinely help students, then it impacts students to where it makes that student want to really do something. Like a student that came from nowhere, or when they grew up, it was hard and they didn't really know a lot, if it's a teacher that really connects with them, then it'll probably push them to really do something and help them do better to like really feel like they have somebody in their corner.
>
> (Faith, 11th Grade Student)

Teachers and students discussed various teacher qualities and behaviors that they feel are important. All of these qualities and behaviors fell under the realm of *Caring*. Teachers discussed things that they do to demonstrate that they care for students such as helping, listening, or taking the time to get to know students. Students felt that these qualities were important too. Students discussed that they know teachers care about them when they help with school work, listen to them, and convey an interest in fostering a connection. Faith's perspective lays the groundwork for the final subtheme: *Understanding Students and Their Circumstances.*

Understanding students and their circumstances. The final subtheme, *Understanding Students and Their Circumstances*, is the subtheme that ties the previously discussed themes and subthemes together in a holistic way to best address the third and final research question. This subtheme is consistent with findings from another qualitative study that found students had a strong desire to form relationships with

teachers in which they felt known, cared for, and understood (McHugh et al., 2013). Another study by Cooper and Miness (2014) found that students perceived teachers as being more caring if they believed the teachers understood them as individuals and relationally. Most participants shared something that fell under this subtheme when discussing teacher qualities that promote a positive teacher-student relationship.

Students discussed their preferences for teachers who demonstrate that they understand them. Part of this involves teachers understanding the context of students' behaviors, including the behaviors that violate school policies. In other words, students expressed their desire for teachers to show leniency, depending on the context of the student and their behavior. Teachers discussed their tendency to get to know students on an individual level. Teachers conveyed that every student has a story and it is important to take the time to learn their stories. Taylor describes some of his teachers who are more laid back:

> I mean that teacher, they're more, I would say like laid back, but they're more respectful. Like most teachers, as long as you come in and do what you're supposed to do, [teacher] doesn't really care, and that's also Ms. <teacher>. You come in, do your artwork, she doesn't care.
>
> (Taylor, 11th Grade Student)

When asked what made these teachers different from others he said:

> I feel like they're more understandable, and relaxed…some teachers, they can understand. Like Ms. <teacher>, she knows. She'll be like 'How you doing?' and I'll tell her, 'Good,' but she'll be like 'I know everything's not good, so if you ever need to talk to me.' I mean it depends on the teacher, because some teachers don't really like to build relationships with their students, and some teachers will. You have people from four or five years ago that will come back just to see one certain teacher.
>
> (Taylor, 11th Grade Student)

Taylor discussed one of his teachers who understands him on a personal level and knows him well enough to know when he is struggling. He also mentioned being laid back and relaxed as being important qualities. Like Taylor, Jerry also said that leniency is important and explained that some teachers learn about students' unique personalities and alter their approach to students based on the students' unique needs:

> I'd say a teacher who, I wouldn't say is laid back, but I guess lenient…definitely a teacher that's lenient in terms of work. [And] they're just constantly learning about the students and different personalities, and I guess I would say that because of that particular student or that group of students, they probably approach teaching just a little differently, or they might act a certain way.
>
> (Jerry, 11th Grade Student)

Brian also mentioned his p reference for teachers' leniency and understanding the context of a situation. He gave the example of wearing hoodies in a cold classroom despite hoodies being a violation of school policy:

> I feel like <teacher's> version is better, because she's more lenient and she understands it's cold in class, and sometimes you don't want to walk around without a jacket or something…The right way would be understanding of one situation.
>
> (Brian, 11th Grade Student)

Brian goes on to discuss teachers being able to relate to students and understand where they are coming from:

> A good teacher, if they can relate to a student. If they know where a student is coming from, and they know how to deal with the student and they've got control of their classroom, that makes them a good teacher[...]They understand where the student is coming from, like why they act out. They know more. They dig deeper on a student, like in the background, and knows what's their interest, what they like, you know, and compliments them when they do something right, yeah, and appreciates it, understands where we come from. We're not perfect, but at the end of the day, we're here to learn. We're here to be the people you're trying to make us to be.
>
> (Brian, 11th Grade Student)

Similarly, Michael expressed his preference for teachers being willing to talk to him about what is going on in his life rather than just enforcing a policy when he acts out:

> They could talk to me about what's going on. I talk a lot, so I will tell them exactly what's going on and then just get back to work, but some teachers just don't really care. So I wish they would just listen, instead of just saying 'Whatever. Get out.'
>
> (Michael, 12th Grade Student)

Jake shared that teachers being able and willing to look at both sides of the story before acting on enforcing a policy is helpful:

> That they've been in my shoes before. When they were going to school, the same thing was with them, and they're understanding, and they actually take the time to look at both sides of the story.
>
> (Jake, 10th Grade Student)

Thomas discussed his connection with teachers who talk to him about his life outside of school and some of the things that cause him stress which contributes to how he behaves in school:

> Teachers help me in school, and I won't say they help me outside of school, but we talk about outside of school things, like life, what's going on in my household, or if I'm having problems, or if I need somebody to talk to, they're there…I mean you get in trouble a lot with a teacher, you're being a pain in her butt, so that's a connection y'all got because she knows how you are. In a good way, she sees you need something, they'll do for you.
>
> (Thomas, 12th Grade Student)

Teachers also discussed the importance to them of understanding students from the students' perspective and worldview. Lisa discussed her relationship with one student and how she approaches him differently after knowing his story:

> Well now that I know his background, I approach him a little bit differently, and so if I see him starting to get angry, because there are certain people that will provoke him, then I'll just tell him, 'Go get a drink of water. Take a walk. Here's the pass. Calm down,' and that seems to work. So I try to do some kind of tactic

> in the classroom, let the students know that, 'Look. I'm willing to work with you. You just (sort of have to) keep me informed or have a discussion with me so we can figure out.
>
> (Lisa, Teacher)

When told that it sounds like she gets to know students' circumstances, and the context of the behavior, Lisa responded:

> Right, as best as I can. As much as they allow me to, I guess. I guess, too, maybe it's some of the mom stuff coming out. The kids know I respect them, and then that same respect is return, because I've heard kids say 'They don't care. They're fake. They're mean.' My word, they're quick to punish, and the kids get irritated with that, and they're like 'I didn't even do anything,' or 'If I did do something, it's because of this, this and this.' It's almost like that Teacher's not taking the time to listen, and maybe that's why it's so important to me to make sure that I'm still okay, doing what I've always done. It just comes naturally, I guess. Maybe that's why I'm in teaching.
>
> (Lisa, Teacher)

Carebear similarly shared that she takes the time to get to know students as individuals and understand them on a personal level, such as learning about difficulties they might be experiencing in their lives outside of school:

> I feel like I have a really good relationship because at the beginning of the year, I try to build a rapport. I try to show that I'm interested in them as a person, not just a Teacher-student, but if they're having issues at home, or personal things, that they can feel comfortable to come talk to me. So I feel like I have good relationships here with students.
>
> (Carebear, Teacher)

Sheep echoed Carebear's perspective:

> If a kid's having a bad day and swears, they're having a bad day, you know. I think by the first or second month of school, you get to know who your students are, and once you know where those students, their dynamics, you know what you can enforce and what you can't and what needs to go farther. So it's a level of respect in the classroom.
>
> (Sheep, Teacher)

When asked if she considers the individual circumstances when a student is acting out Sheep responded:

> Um hmm. Oh yeah. Yeah. I mean you know if a student has come back and they've been absent for a couple of days and you know they're agitated, there may be something else going on. Years ago, I had a student who came to me and he was just very agitated for the last couple of days and he approached me and he apologized, and he said 'I don't have any food in the house. We have no food, and I'm hungry.' You know I go home. I have a home. I have food. Some of these kids, you got to remember what they don't have.
>
> (Sheep, Teacher)

Sara echoes what other teachers shared about getting to know and understand students on a personal level so that she can better understand why a student may act out:

> I think a lot of times, we just try to relate to them, have conversations with them, have a discussion about their lives, what's going on in their lives, who, what, where, when and why?[...] I don't think they can respect you, unless you respect them, and I think part of respecting them is getting to know them. So if I don't ever take the time to have a conversation with them about who they are as a person, then I can't understand why they may act out, or why they may not do some things the way they do, and you may have conversations and still not figure out why they act out kind of thing, but I think it's important to have semi-personal relationships with almost all the kids that you can. It works better for me and for my classes. When you get to know them, then they respect you. When they respect you, you'd have less discipline problems. So it's just, for me, a full circle.
>
> (Sara, Teacher)

Sara discussed why it is important for her to understand students as individuals because it enables to her to better understand their behavior. Like many teachers, Sara emphasized the importance of forming relationships with students. By forming relationships with students, respect is developed and maintained. Teachers shared their perceptions that if their relationships with students are rooted in respect, then there are less disciplinary issues.

Summary of Results for Research Question 3

The third research question was '*How do discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of students and teachers*?' There was one overarching theme that best addressed this question, *Relational Teacher Qualities*. This theme reflects teacher qualities that all have a relational component to them. The theme, *Relational Teacher Qualities* was coded into three subthemes: *Keeping it Real, Caring,* and *Understanding Students and Their Circumstances.* These subthemes capture teachers' and students' perceptions of teacher qualities that positively impact the teacher-student relationship.

The first subtheme, *Keeping it Real,* was cited by teachers only. Teachers discussed various qualities that fell under this subtheme such as finding similarities between their histories and students' histories to demonstrate that they can empathize with students' struggles. Other teachers discussed the importance of being honest and transparent with students to help prepare for the real world beyond high school. In a similar vein, teachers mentioned that showing students' their true selves allowed for a better teacher-student relationship to form. The second subtheme, *Caring,* reflects teachers' and students' perceptions about teacher behaviors that demonstrate they care about students. Behaviors that fell under this subtheme included: helping students understand a problem, setting aside time to listen to students' concerns, respecting students, and building trust. The third and final subtheme, *Understanding Students and Their Circumstances,* reflects students' and teachers' preferences of teachers demonstrating that they understand students and the context of their behaviors, including the behaviors that violate school policies. Teachers conveyed that every student has a

story and it is important to take the time to learn their stories. The next section will report a summary of all results.

Summary of Results

Teachers discussed various factors that impact their decision when deciding whether to enforce a policy. These factors include deciding whether enforcing a policy is a battle worth fighting, perceived lack of support from administration, and teachers' desire to maintain power and authority within their classrooms. Furthermore, teachers are not in agreement about what policies should be enforced and how they should be enforced. This inconsistency leads to policy ineffectiveness since there is so much ambiguity surrounding the policies and little follow-through with consequences. Additionally, inconsistent policy enforcement has negative implications for students.

The inconsistency of enforcement creates the perception of students and teachers that there are types of students, particularly 'good students' and 'bad students.' The type of student involved in a policy violation impacts if and how that policy is enforced. It is generally recognized and accepted that not all students are treated equally regarding policy enforcement which creates the perception of inequality. This perception is especially problematic because it raises the issues of fairness and favoritism among students and teachers.

There are certain relational teacher qualities that students and teachers listed as impacting the teacher-student relationship quality positively. Teachers discussed the importance for them to upfront and keep their word with students. Additionally, teachers shared their tendency to help prepare students for the world beyond high school. Students and teachers discussed teachers' demonstrating that they care about students by

helping them, taking time to listen, building trust, and respecting them. Lastly, students and teachers indicated that teachers taking the time to understand students and their circumstances was a major factor that contributed positively to the teacher-student relationship. This quality made students feel like they were known and enabled teachers to better understand students' behavior in the context of their unique circumstances. However, was also the quality that contributed the most to inconsistency. The inconsistency of enforcement creates the perception that some teachers prefer some students over others. For the students who are not in the preferred category or considered *'good students'*, they feel like teachers dislike them. A short example from Elastigirl summarizes the issue:

> So a perfect example, this boy, he came in First Block and I said to him, 'If you keep talking (I was very serious) over my lesson, we're going to have a little discussion. You keep talking while I'm talking, that's it for you,' and I was so serious, and he felt like 'Dang.' So a couple days later, I saw him and I was like 'Hey,' and I gave him a hug, and he's like 'I thought you hated me.' I'm like 'What? I don't hate you.' 'Well you yelled at me.' 'Yeah, and I yelled at you and it was over.' 'Really?' 'Yeah.' 'Oh. Here all these, you know a couple of days I've been thinking you can't stand my guts.' 'Just because I yelled at you?'
>
> (Elastigirl, Teacher)

In the example above, the student interpreted the teacher's enforcement of a policy as a reflection of how she felt about him as a student and person. For students who witness their peers violate policies but not experience consequences, then violate the same policies and experience consequences, they interpret that enforcement as the teacher disliking them. Because there is not consistency in policy enforcement and perhaps too much discretion involved, students who are disciplined experience more than just the punitive consequence. Students who are disciplined may begin to internalize their discipline as something deeper, such as being a 'bad student' or disliked by the teacher

who disciplined them. If a student perceives their teacher as disliking them, certainly the student's perception of their relationship with that teacher will also be affected. The next chapter contains an integration and discussion of the results.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Research Questions

The researcher intended to fill in some of the gaps in the existing literature on teacher-student relationships and discipline. Additionally, the researcher hoped to help bridge the disconnect between the fields of counseling psychology and education. The purpose of this study was to explore the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of both teachers and students. More specifically, the purpose was to understand how current, evolving discipline policies may impact the teacher-student relationship. The following three research questions were investigated: a) How do teachers navigate any ambiguities surrounding the school discipline protocol? b) What role does inconsistency of enforcement of discipline policies play in the teacher-student relationship quality? and c) How do discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of both teachers and students?

Research question 1. *How do teachers navigate any ambiguities surrounding the school discipline protocol?*

There is scant literature on the ambiguities surrounding school discipline protocol since the shift away from zero tolerance discipline policies is a relatively recent one.

Many schools are currently in the process of structuring an alternative disciplinary protocol (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Thus, previous research related to the first research question is limited. The complexity of the findings for the first research question was exacerbated by the schools' unique structure of differing policies for each grade level and individual program. What was strikingly evident was that almost all teachers spoke of the ambiguous nature of the discipline policies within their schools. The major problem with the ambiguity of the disciplinary protocol is that different rules exist for different students depending on school program or grade level. The ambiguity and lack of uniformity across programs and grade levels creates tremendous difficulty for teachers when they try and navigate the disciplinary expectations of the administration. Two major themes arose to address the first research question. The first theme involved teachers' decisions about whether to enforce a policy. The second theme involved inconsistency across schools, grade levels, and teachers.

One of the most problematic findings is that teachers are faced with the decision to enforce or not enforce a policy in the first place. This finding conflicts with the traditional zero-tolerance policies which are designed to be enforced every time a violation occurs, regardless of the extenuating circumstance (American Psychological Association Task Force, 2008). While zero tolerance policies have many criticisms, there is not a concern about consistency since the major characteristic of them is consistent enforcement. Because there is little agreement among grade levels and programs, teachers reported various decision-making processes and considered several factors when deciding whether to enforce a discipline policy. For most teachers, the first step in their decision-making process was to decide whether enforcing a policy was a battle worth

fighting. Teachers recalled a variety of factors that helped them determine whether it was in their best interest to enforce or not. This decision to enforce or not to enforce is related to the discussion of Foucault's (1980) disciplinary power reviewed in the first chapter. Power exists in the ways teachers enforce discipline policies. Furthermore, power exists in teachers' decisions not to enforce discipline policies.

The two remaining themes that impact teachers' decision to enforce a policy are closely connected. Teachers discussed that they often feel a lack of support from the administration because administration may not follow through the enforcement on their end once a student reaches the administrator's office. Teachers described numerous instances when they followed the disciplinary protocol as it was structured which would often lead to students being sent the principal's office. The problem is that the students would simply be returned to their classrooms where the policy violation took place without facing any penal consequences. Teachers expressed strong opinions about this trend which developed into the third them, maintaining authority and respect.

Because teachers feel such a lack of support from the administration, they discussed their preferences for handling disciplinary issues within their classrooms. The underlying reason for this preference is to reduce to the perception of students that the teachers lack power or control of their classrooms. Teachers' decisions to manage disciplinary issues within their classrooms is part of classroom management. While there are many components of effective classroom management, discipline is a major factor (Emmer & Stough, 2001). Teachers discussed their concerns about the implications of administrations' tendency to return students to class without consequences had on students' perceptions of teachers and their authority. When deciding whether to enforce a

policy and how to enforce a policy, teachers mentioned their desire to maintain authority and respect in the classroom.

The ways in which teachers enforce a policy and the discourse used to enforce a policy is often motivated by teachers' desire to demonstrate that they are in control of their own classroom and do not need to rely on administration for disciplinary issues. Previous research shows how discourse can be used to maintain power among dominant groups in the workforce through a social constructionist perspective (those with high paying, prestigious jobs, etc.) (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004; Richardson, 2000). Discourse can also be used to maintain power and control in the classroom and in the school. Gergen (2015) suggests that education is a socially constructed relational process. As mentioned in the first chapter, students are expected to engage with teachers with respect, as they are authority figures with the ability to control students' fate regarding whether they will be disciplined for a policy infraction. Students are aware that teachers have this power but may not realize the extent to which their behavior is being controlled. The use of teacher discretion in deciding to handle disciplinary issues within their own classroom contributes to the second overarching theme relevant to the first research question: Inconsistency.

Because teachers all have unique decision-making processes that they consider when deciding to enforce a policy, there is no surprise that inconsistency is an obvious byproduct that manifests in various ways. Teachers discussed that they enforce policies inconsistently from student to student because they do not agree with what policies should be enforced and how they should be enforced. Teachers expressed frustration that they all are not on the same page when it comes to the policy enforcement. Because

teachers are not on the same page, the policies lose their effectiveness. Teachers discussed seeing little value in enforcing the policies because of the problems it creates for teachers and because the policies are so loosely defined. Furthermore, students do not take the policies seriously because there are not consistent consequences when policies are violated. The inconsistent enforcement of discipline policies leads to greater problems for students, teachers, and the teacher-student relationship which will be discussed in the next section.

Research question 2. *What role does inconsistency of enforcement of discipline policies play in the teacher-student relationship quality?*

Teachers expressed various factors that impacted their decision when deciding whether to enforce a policy which creates inconsistent policy enforcement. The inconsistency of policy enforcement has major implications for students' perceptions of their relationship with teachers and how they see themselves as students. When teachers do not enforce policies consistently and equally across all students, students notice. Students notice that certain students are disciplined more often and more severely than other students who violated the same policy. Students notice the discourse used when they are on the receiving end of a policy enforcement may not be the same discourse used with other types of students who committed the same offense. In other words, the punishment depends on the student. In addition to some students receiving discipline while others do not, inconsistent enforcement is a futile way to reduce policy violations.

Early research taken from Skinner's (1932) operant conditioning has shown that inconsistent enforcement of punishment is ineffective and may even create resistance in students' tendencies to follow the school policies (Deur & Parke, 1970; James, 1972).

Research examining the effects of training a hitting response in school aged children using continuous and intermittent reward and punishment found that children with a history of receiving inconsistent reward and punishment for their aggressive behavior were more resistant to consistent punishment and more resistant to the extinction of the behavior (Deur & Parke, 1970). For punishment to be most effective, it must occur immediately and consistently, every time the undesired behavior occurs (James, 1972). These early findings are relevant to the present study because they show how inconsistent policy enforcement can perpetuate a cycle of continued policy violations and can exacerbate the unequal treatment of students.

Students and teachers recognize that not all students are treated equally when it comes to the enforcement of discipline policies. The major underlying issue with teachers exerting their power and discretion when deciding whether to enforce a policy is that it creates the perception of students that they are being treated unfairly and that teachers show favoritism. When a student is one of the 'bad students' and sees peers violating the same policy that they got disciplined for, that student internalizes the message that they are not one of the favorites, or worse, that they are disliked by the teacher. This is particularly relevant through a social constructionist lens. Social constructionism upholds that individuals make meanings, including meanings of who one is, through social interactions and social processes (Cunliffe, 2008). On the other hand, students who are aware that they are one of the 'good students' may use this reputation to their advantage and push boundaries, knowing that they will not likely suffer penal consequences.

The issue of favoritism has major implications from a psychological perspective that can be explained by early research investigating ingroup and outgroup favoritism (Billig & Tajfel, 1973). Researchers argue that individuals perceive the world through the lens of ingroups and outgroups and their perception determines their subsequent behavior in social interactions (Reynolds, Turner, & Haslam, 2000). Early research has found that the mere categorization of individuals into meaningless groups was enough to cause them to display discriminative behavior and show ingroup bias or favoritism towards their own group (Billig & Tajfel, 1973). More recent research has found that individuals belonging to socially advantaged groups tend to display greater implicit favoritism for their ingroup and more prejudice against outgroups compared to members of socially disadvantaged groups (Dasgupta, 2004). Furthermore, individuals belonging to socially disadvantaged groups sometimes even displayed favoritism towards the outgroup (Dasgupta, 2004). Implications of findings from the present study can be viewed through the lens of ingroup and outgroup favoritism.

Students who are considered 'good students' are part of a socially advantaged group within the high school because they are more likely to get away with policy violations compared to the 'bad students.' Students in the 'good students' ingroup may show favoritism towards one another while showing bias towards the 'bad students' outgroup. Students in the 'bad students' outgroup may be more inclined to continue violating policies in order to remain connected to other 'bad students.' Risk taking behavior is common during adolescence, especially when adolescents are accompanied by peers (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005). For youth, the initial excitement of rebelling with peers outweighs the potential consequences, largely because relationship skills are

formed during this stage of development (Mescke & Bartholomae, 2011). Even though the adolescent risks getting in trouble, they view their risky behavior as a means to relate or connect with peers. A social constructionist lens towards adolescent risk-taking behavior views risk-taking as a relational process (Gergen, Lightfoot, & Sydow, 2004). Research has found that rule breaking behaviors are viewed by adolescents as an interpersonal process (Gergen, Lightfoot, & Sydow, 2004). In the present study, 'bad students' may view themselves as part of their group and may behave in ways that maintain their standing in the group because it allows them to maintain a connection with peers, even if the peers are considered 'bad students.' This tendency could lead to disconnection between groups of students and can isolate students who are part of the 'bad students' outgroup. Isolation of the 'bad students' outgroup has major implications for the ways in which those students see themselves and their ability to form relationships with peers. The potential for isolation is relevant to counseling psychology because of the weight counseling psychologists place on relationships and connection with others (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004; Purgason, Avent, Cashwell, Jordan, & Reese, 2016).

Social connection is also tied to an individual's mental and emotional well-being. Research has shown that individuals with low social connectedness reported greater trait anxiety while those with greater social connectedness reported higher levels of social identity (Lee & Robbins, 1998). Essentially, those who were socially connected were less likely to perceive life as stressful. In addition to feeling isolated, 'bad students' may also feel unmotivated to try and excel the way they perceive the 'good students' excelling. Encouragement, which has been found to be a critical factor in motivating

clients for therapy, is relevant in the teacher-student relationship dynamic. Part of therapeutic encouragement involves conveying the belief to clients that they can succeed and reminding the individual of times when they have succeeded (Wong, 2015). Motivation is an important part for change in behavior to occur. Taken from self-determination theory, motivation is the state in which an individual lacks the intention to act (Deci & Ryan, 2004). Motivation often results from the individual finding little value in the activity or from the individual assuming that the end result would not produce the desired outcome (Deci & Ryan, 2004). Furthermore, research has found that higher levels of teacher support was associated with greater academic motivation (Kiefer & Pennington, 2017). Findings from the present study suggest that motivation and teacher support may not be felt by the 'bad students.' Students who are repeatedly disciplined and categorized by teachers, peers, and themselves as 'bad students' are likely not receiving encouragement from teachers that they can do better because their past behaviors are used to keep them in the 'bad students' group. The 'bad students' are receiving the opposite of encouragement when they are automatically disciplined due to their status in the 'bad students' group. The 'bad students' may feel unmotivated to change their behavior because they assume that doing so would be futile. Their membership of the 'bad students' group can impact their identity.

It has been argued that connection encompasses the core of human growth and development (Josselson, 1992; Schultheiss, Kress, Manzi, & Glasscock, 2001). Moreover, according social constructionism, individuals determine who they are through their relationships with others (McLean, 2015). Thus, connection plays an integral role in the ways that students perceive themselves. The ways that policies are enforced, and the

discourse used to convey the enforcement impacts how students and teachers perceive students. Students in the outgroup may be at an increased risk of developing a negative self-concept. For instance, students who witness the same students getting disciplined repeatedly begin to view those students as troublemakers or 'bad students.' This is especially problematic for adolescents' identity formation, particularly because adolescents tend to the push boundaries both in and out of school as they figure out their own identities and how they fit in with peers around them (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005; Ripley 2016). Identity formation is a critical aspect of adolescent development (Erikson, 1959). Peers play a significant role in adolescents' identity formation and self-concept (Erikson, 1968). Students who are part of the outgroup, such as 'bad students,' may struggle with low self-esteem. Previous research found that peer group membership impacts one's self-esteem (Brown & Lohr, 1987). People who were 'crowd members' show higher self-esteem compared to 'outsiders' (Brown & Lohr, 1987). Regarding the present study, students in the 'good students' ingroup are likely perceived by 'bad students' as being part of the 'in crowd' since they receive benefits and special treatment that 'bad students' do not. Consequently, 'bad students' may be at an increased risk of developing a low self-esteem and a negative self-concept or identity.

From a social constructionist perspective, one's identity is a co-construction with others where relationships play an integral role in the construction of one's identity (McLean, 2015). It is through interactions with others that an individual makes sense of who he or she is. Social constructionism views oneself as an interdependent existence with others (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). Furthermore, knowledge is formed through interpersonal experiences (Burr, 2014). Students who are repeatedly disciplined may

begin to view themselves as ‘bad students’ which could negatively impact their sense of self and self-concept since their identity is intertwined with their relational experiences with teachers. Similarly, teachers who frequently discipline the same students or witness the same students violating school policy repeatedly also view those students as ‘bad students.’ On the contrary, students who may be otherwise ‘good students’ but may just be having a bad day, may not be disciplined to the same degree as a ‘bad student.’ A negative self-concept could impact students’ overall well-being which could lead to a variety of mental health problems. Researchers argue that in addition to academic achievement, a major role that schools play in students’ lives is to provide a setting in which students can develop positive cognitive, social, and emotional skills and enhance their overall well-being (Seligman., Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009; Waters, 2011). Moreover, developing effective decision-making skills is an important part of adolescence. Research has shown that authoritative parenting, which is like teachers’ use of authoritative discipline in the classroom, was associated with higher self-esteem in adolescents and an increased ability to independently and confidently make decisions (Davids, Roman, Leach, & Sekot, 2015). The teacher-student relationship is an important contributing factor to students’ development of these skills. Findings from the present study suggest that the teacher-student relationship can be a source of negativity for some students and may detract, rather than promote, positive cognitive, social, and emotional skills. In addition to the negative implications inconsistent policy enforcement has on the individual students, inconsistent enforcement is also ineffective.

The inconsistent nature of both high schools’ discipline policies conflicts with what previous research has shown to be the most effective type of disciplinary structure.

Research has suggested using a relational approach to discipline in the classroom that involves positive reinforcement for good student behavior, getting to know students individually, and demonstrating care (Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Lewis, Newcomer, Trussell, & Richter, 2013). Teachers who used a relational discipline approach reported less problem behavior in their classrooms compared to teachers who did not employ a relational approach (Gregory & Ripski, 2008). Furthermore, teachers who used a relational discipline approach were more likely to have students who reported having trust in them (Gregory & Ripski, 2008). These findings are relevant to the present study because in order for positive reinforcement to be effective, it must be consistent (Skinner, 1932). In the present study, there is a lack of positive reinforcement and too much inconsistency in the enforcement that occurs. Additionally, the inconsistent enforcement of policies could have an impact on students' trust in teachers. Trust is a foundational component to relationships. Research has found that children develop trust through their parents' fulfilling promises repeatedly (Szczesniak, Colaco, & Rondon, 2012). Trust in others, such as teachers, is generalized once their behavior is reliable or consistent (Szczesniak, Colaco, Rondon, 2012). Inconsistent policy enforcement could negatively impact students' trust in teachers because their behavior is not reliable. This impact could be especially detrimental for students who already have trouble trusting others due to their family dynamics.

Previous research has shown that schools with authoritative school climate have been found to produce more positive outcomes with regards to student engagement, student dropout rates, student behavior, and student academic achievement (Cornell & Huang, 2016; Gurland & Evangelista, 2015; Jia, Konold, & Cornell, 2016; Johnson,

2009; Konold, et al., 2014). Authoritative school climate holds that the two major factors of school climate consist of the structure of school discipline and student support (Cornell & Huang, 2016; Gregory & Cornell, 2009). Johnson (2009) determined that authoritative discipline structure generally consists of an environment in which students have an awareness of their school's rules and consider the rules to be fair, while student support refers to teacher-student relationships that are positive. Findings from the present study suggest that students do not perceive their school's rules to be fair and instead, perceive them as being unfair. Furthermore, students also believe that teachers show favoritism towards certain students. Because students perceive the rules as being unfair and teachers' showing favoritism, the second factor of authoritative discipline structure, student support, is lacking from findings in the present study. Students who believe their teachers show favoritism and treat them unfairly compared to their peers likely do not simultaneously believe those same teachers support them. The issues with the discipline protocol in the present study has implications for how the teacher-student relationship is impacted, which will be discussed in the next section.

Research question 3. *How do discipline policies impact the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of both teachers and students?*

Findings suggest that discipline policies themselves are not impacting the teacher-student relationship. Rather, it is the inconsistent enforcement of these policies that is impacting the teacher-student relationship. Early research has shown how inconsistent enforcement can lead to resistance in students' following school policy which in turn leads to certain students being disciplined while other students are not (Deur & Parke, 1970; James, 1972). Moreover, certain teacher qualities were identified by teachers and

students that impact the quality of the teacher-student relationship. Interestingly, when teachers and students were asked about teacher qualities that they believe enhance the teacher-student relationship, the qualities they discussed conflicted with the previously mentioned frustrations about inconsistency and inequality. For example, qualities that fell under the theme *Keeping It Real* included being open, honest, and transparent with students about how their behavior in school will not always be tolerated in the real world. Furthermore, qualities such as preparing students for the real world and life beyond high school are consistent with the literature encouraging schools to aid in students' school-to-work transition (Gysbers, 1997). Part of what Gysbers (1997) suggests is assisting students in developing individual skills such as planning, managing, and evaluating their development in social, personal, and academic domains. These qualities are consistent with previous research that examined what parents believed to be the most important aspects of education for their children and found that parents wanted their children to be socially responsible and function as a productive member of society (Cohen, 2006). Other research found teachers' promotion of open and honest communication to be central in fostering a positive student-relationship (Ellerbrock, et al., 2015). Although these qualities were consistent with previous research, they conflicted with participants' frustrations about the inequality in enforcement in the present study.

Teachers spoke about the qualities they feel they possess with good intentions; Yet, many of these teachers also acknowledged that they show favoritism and that the policies within their schools are not fair. Qualities that fell under the theme, *Keeping It Real*, such as being honest and transparent with students likely conflicts with favoritism. Findings from Dasgupta (2004) suggest that the implicit attitudes and prejudices an

ingroup holds, impacts their decisions and behaviors. Since teachers admitted to giving the 'good students' ingroup certain passes, it is reasonable to believe that they more closely identify with the 'good students.' Given this tendency coupled with Dasgupta's (2004) findings, teachers who favor the 'good students' may be more likely to treat the 'bad students' harsher. Teachers may believe that they are treating students equally, however, they may not be aware of their implicit biases towards both the 'good students' and 'bad students.'

Teachers' biases and tendencies to show favoritism towards certain students while treating other students more harshly for policy violations may be related to the countertransference experienced by therapists when working with clients (Gabbard, 2001). When describing qualities under the theme, *Keeping It Real*, teachers in the present study discussed feeling like they could relate to certain students because they shared similar circumstances when they were adolescents. As a result, teachers found themselves wanting to impart wisdom to these students. Additionally, these shared experiences appeared to allow teachers to connect with certain students over others and caused teachers to show these same students leniency. In psychotherapy, countertransference refers to the therapist's internal and external reactions to a client (Gelso & Hayes, 2007). The therapist's reaction is based on his or her own experiences, values, vulnerabilities, or unresolved conflict (Gelso & Hayes, 2007; Rosenberger & Hayes, 2002). Research has shown that countertransference may impact the working alliance or therapeutic relationship (Rosenberger & Hayes, 2002). A similar effect can result in the teacher-student relationship dynamic. Students who evoke some type of internal reaction from the teacher impacts the ways that teacher behaves with the student.

The teacher's subsequent behavior can have an impact on the teacher-student relationship. While certain qualities mentioned in the present study can be viewed through a complex psychological lens, other qualities identified by participants are more straightforward.

Teachers and students cited many teacher qualities that fell under the theme, *Caring*. Qualities under this realm included taking the time to listen to students' stories, going the extra mile to help them, and getting to know students. These qualities were consistent with previous research which found care to be foundational to the teacher-student relationship and central to promoting students' academic success (Ellerbrock, et al., 2015). Researchers found that caring teachers are those who make time for everyone to get to know one another, who foster a safe learning environment, and who facilitate mutual respect, care, and responsibility between teachers and students (Ellerbrock et al., 2015). Similarly, previous research suggests that students perceived teachers as non-caring if there was an interpersonal distance between student and teacher but perceived teachers as being more caring if they believed their teachers understood them as individuals and relationally (Cooper & Miness, 2014).

In the present study, understanding students on an individual level was the quality that was cited the most by both teachers and students as being central to the teacher-student relationship quality and became the theme, *Understanding Students and Their Circumstances*. However, it is the theme that conflicts the most with teachers' and students' complaints about inconsistency and inequality. Teachers discussed that it was important for them to get to know students and understand why they behave the way that they do. Teachers shared instances of knowing the students' circumstances and the

context of their behavior that violated a policy. Some examples included having a sick parent, not having food at home, or not having the means to wash clothes regularly. If a student was angry or acting out, teachers said it was important for them to understand why that student was angry because they would then use this knowledge to inform how to approach the student differently. Students echoed teachers' statements about understanding them and their circumstances. Students expressed preferences for teachers who considered the context of their behavior, who knew them on a personal level, and showed leniency towards them because of their unique circumstances. Furthermore, students perceived teachers as being more understanding if the teacher was able to take students' perspective.

The findings from the present study suggest that teacher qualities such as open and honest communication, care, support, trust, and understanding are critical for a positive teacher-student relationship. These findings are consistent with previous research that found students preference to form relationships with teachers in which students felt known, cared for, and understood (McHugh et al., 2013). Numerous other studies have similarly found teacher care, support, and understanding to positively impact the teacher-student relationship (Cooper & Miness, 2014; Ellebrock, et al., 2015; Klem & Connell, 2004). Additionally, open and honest communication that assists in fostering students' development to best prepare them for life beyond high school is consistent with previous literature (Cohen, 2006; Gysbers, 1997). The teacher qualities discussed by teachers and students in the present study are undoubtedly critical components to the teacher-student relationship. However, the ways in which school disciplinary protocol is

enforced may interfere with these qualities having the same positive impact on the teacher-student relationship as has been found in previous research.

Summary. In summary, inconsistent policy enforcement is what impacts the teacher-student relationship, not the discipline policies themselves. Teachers discussed numerous reasons why policies are not enforced consistently, including experiencing more consequences than the students, feeling a lack of support from administration, and wanting to maintain authority within their classrooms. There is extensive research stemming from principles of operant conditioning that outline the problems with inconsistent enforcement of discipline, namely, that inconsistency can make it harder to completely stop a behavior from occurring (Deur & Parke, 1970; James, 1972; Skinner, 1932). Unfortunately, inconsistency in enforcement of discipline policies is only part of the problems with current disciplinary protocol.

Teachers and students discussed teacher qualities that they believe facilitate a positive teacher-student relationship, but it is unrealistic to assume that teachers can demonstrate these qualities with each student they interact with. Research has shown that ingroup bias causes an implicit influence on behavior (Dasgupta, 2004). Teachers who view certain students as 'good' and other students as 'bad' may not even be fully aware that these perceived categories are influencing their behavior towards them. Thus, teachers will convey these qualities to varying degrees to students. In other words, not all students will experience these qualities equally. As a result, some students may feel less connected or less known by their teachers compared to their peers. Students who are less connected may be at risk of developing problems such as depression, anxiety, or low-self-esteem. Previous research has shown that adolescents with higher social anxiety

reported poorer social connection and less friendships compared to their less anxious counterparts (La Greca & Lopez, 1998).

The lesser connected students may be more likely to be on the receiving end of a policy enforcement because teachers do not know them on a personal level. Teachers may be quicker to assume that such a student is a 'bad student' since teachers may only see their problematic behavior rather their other positive qualities. From a social constructionist perspective, the 'bad students' likely negotiate their identity or self-concept based on the ways in which teachers interact with them (McLean, 2015). If students believe they are 'bad students,' then they likely will behave congruently with that belief. In turn, this can create a cycle of inconsistent policy enforcement which further perpetuates the perception of favoritism among students. Students discussed their frustrations with certain students being favored over others and believe that policies should be enforced equally across students. However, students shared their preferences for teachers who take the time to understand students' backgrounds and show leniency when considering the context of students' behavior. Interestingly, students primarily discussed this preference in relation to their own behavior. Students expressed preferences for teachers to show *them* leniency while simultaneously expressing frustration over perceived inequality.

It appears that students want teachers to enforce policies equally for everyone except themselves. When the individual student is on the receiving end of a policy enforcement, the trend has been that the students perceives the teacher as treating them unfairly or singling them out. In other words, students want teachers to understand their unique situations, but when they see teachers doing the same for other students, students

often perceive teachers as showing favoritism. Teachers also expressed their tendency to understand students' behavior in the context of their circumstances. While their intentions may be good, doing so contributes to inconsistent enforcement since deciding if and how to enforce a policy is a completely subjective decision. Furthermore, this trend adds to students' perceptions of favoritism when teachers are only enforcing certain policies with certain students. Teachers and students cannot expect consistency and fairness if they are also expecting a case-by-case approach to discipline.

If discipline policies were enforced equally for everyone, then perhaps issues with the policies themselves could be explored. Because there are not uniform policies for all students, one should not blame the policies for contributing to the teacher-student relationship. Instead, it is the way these policies are enforced, or not enforced at all, that contribute to the teacher-student relationship. If the teacher takes the time understand the context of a student's behavior and shows leniency towards that student, the relationship between that teacher and student may be enhanced. However, for students who witness that same teacher showing leniency to that student, they may feel less connected to that teacher if they were disciplined differently for violating the same policy. The inconsistency of enforcement is what is most problematic because it creates the perception of inequality and favoritism among students. The implications for counseling psychology will be discussed in the next section.

Implications for Counseling Psychology

The relevance of the education system to counseling psychology was previously discussed in chapter one. First and foremost, many counseling psychology doctorate programs are housed within departments of education, so issues pertaining to schools,

teachers, and students are pertinent topics for the field of counseling psychology (Walsh et al., 2002). It has been argued that the field of psychology has been called upon to improve the educational experience and the development of students (Romano & Kachgal, 2004). For the field to contribute to the education system in a meaningful way, the gap between counseling psychology and the education system must be bridged. To bridge the gap, similarities between school counselors and counseling psychologists should be integrated so that both fields can work together for the common goal of enhancing the educational experience of students. Findings from the present study can help connect both counseling psychology and the education system, and school counselors and counseling psychologists.

The present study highlights important issues that administrators, educators, and counseling professionals should be aware of to best serve students and aim to provide a positive educational experience. The field of counseling psychology places tremendous weight on the importance of relationships in many facets of one's life (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004; Purgason, Avent, Cashwell, Jordan, & Reese, 2016; Schultheiss, Kress, Manzi, & Glasscock, 2001). Moreover, counseling psychology recognizes the importance of social support, career development, and career decision-making in youth (Cutrona, 1996; Schultheiss, Kress, Manzi, & Glasscock, 2001). Studies have shown the impact that relationships, especially students' relationships with teachers, have on their career development, decision-making, and academic achievement (Klem & Connell, 2004; Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2010; Phillips, Christopher-Sisk, & Gravino, 2001). Findings from the present study suggest that inconsistent enforcement of policies can have a negative impact on the teacher-student relationship, particularly for students who

are considered ‘bad students.’ As a result, these students may be less likely to obtain the same achievement and career development of their ‘good student’ counterparts. Since it has already been shown that the teacher-student relationship plays an important role in students’ career development, decision-making, and academic achievement, it is important to implement a consistent disciplinary protocol that fosters a positive teacher-student relationship so that these aspects of students’ development are not negatively impacted.

Teachers acknowledged their tendency to show favoritism with certain students. Many teachers discussed their tendency to show leniency as being connected to their ability to relate to students. Teachers discussed being in the students’ shoes and having the ability empathize because they can relate their own histories to students’ circumstances. This tendency is relevant to counseling psychology because it is like the countertransference experienced by psychologists when providing therapy. Countertransference originated from Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis and is an emotional reaction to the client that arises from the unconscious which may cause the therapist to respond in a particular way (Gabbard, 2001). It appears that teachers experience a similar emotional reaction to certain students with whom they are best able to connect. This could be explored further in future research.

Counseling psychology is concerned with the overall well-being of individuals and how to promote a positive quality of life. Researchers argue that schools are an ideal place to promote wellness initiatives because students spend large portions of their days inside the school walls (Seligman, et al., 2009). Cohen (2006) emphasized the need for teachers and mental health professionals to collaborate in order to recognize and address

mental health barriers that impact students' educational experience. Furthermore, researchers go on to point out the important role that students' experiences with peers and teachers have on their well-being which in turn, promotes better learning (Seligman, et al., 2009).

School based interventions have been developed using a positive psychology framework to enhance the overall wellness and quality of the educational experience for students (Waters, 2011). Positive psychology aims to promote human flourishing by focusing on strengths. School based positive psychology interventions emphasize students' positive behaviors and emotions by encompassing the entire school rather than just certain classrooms (Waters, 2011). It has been argued that a key component to effective school based positive psychology interventions is to have all students, faculty, staff, and administration in agreement about what is expected and how it will look in practice (Waters, 2011). Findings from the present study suggest that the inconsistent enforcement of discipline policies may have a negative impact on students' overall well-being and could interfere with their learning as a result. Students may internalize messages sent to them, both overt and covert, about the ways in which teachers and peers perceive them. For some students, being perceived as a 'troublemaker' or 'bad student' can lead to detrimental effects for their self-esteem, self-concept, and ultimately, their mental health. Adolescence is a time when one's identity is formed and is largely influenced by the ways in which an individual interacts with others (Erikson, 1959; McLean, 2015). Inconsistent policy enforcement can negatively impact students' self-esteem by causing students to view themselves undesirably compared to their peers. Students who have a low self-esteem may be more inclined to develop anxiety or

depression. Counseling psychologists working with students who present with these concerns can assess the students' school experience for a more comprehensive understanding of the students' presenting concerns. The knowledge gained from a thorough assessment of the students' experience can be used to develop and present both formal and informal trainings.

Counseling psychologists can aid in the training of teachers and school counselors by providing workshops on effective discipline strategies to promote students' overall wellness and improve the disciplinary climate of the school. As mentioned previously, psychologists argue that schools are an excellent environment to implement wellness programming because of the amount of time students spend there (Seligman, et al., 2009). Many counseling psychologists have extensive knowledge or direct experience about the implications of the teacher-student relationship quality and its role on students' academic success. Counseling psychologists are also aware of the mental health implications of inequality and inconsistent reward and punishment. The integration of what is already known about the effects of favoritism and what constitutes effective discipline can be developed into training workshops for school administration and staff. Counseling psychologists can implement these workshops to help promote a fair, consistent, and effective disciplinary protocol in the schools.

Finally, another implication of the findings deals with advocacy. When a student is frequently in trouble at school, that student is often connected with the school counselor to address the behavioral concerns. When working with students who may be disciplined for violating a school policy, it is important to understand how the students interpret the school rules. Students may not fully understand what is expected of them

because the rules are loosely defined. Furthermore, students may be more likely to be disciplined because of the ways they are viewed by teachers. In these instances, it is important for counselors working with students to be willing to advocate for them when they are treated unfairly. Students may feel disempowered and may not receive fair treatment compared to other students in the school. Counselors can use the findings of the present study to explore the context of the students' behavior and their understanding of the rules. There may be instances when a student was genuinely treated unfairly, and the counselor may be the only person who can advocate on the students' behalf. The next section will address limitations of the present study.

Limitations

There are several limitations of the present study. The first limitation involves teacher experience. Two of the teacher participants only taught in the high school for 2 years and 1.5 years, respectively. Both teachers had over 10 years of teaching experience but were only teaching in their current high school for a short amount of time. Although their interviews were similar to the rest of the teacher participants, it is possible that they would have different perspectives on the discipline protocol if they were teaching in the current school for longer and had more experience having to deal with disciplinary issues.

Another limitation is that the two schools used in the present study both were magnet schools. Magnet schools have multiple programs or schools within the same building. The individual school has its own set of administration and school policies. Additionally, one of the schools had different policies for each individual grade level. It is possible that the inconsistency found in both high schools was a result of the magnet school model. In other words, schools that have the same policies throughout the entire

school, for every student, may not have as many instances of inconsistent policy enforcement.

A third limitation of the present study is that most of the student participants were male. Only two females, one from each high school, were interviewed for the study. It is possible that male students are more likely to be disciplined compared to their female peers. Nevertheless, there were limited female students' perspectives in the present study. Future research may wish to include more female participants as they may have differing perspectives on the disciplinary protocol in their schools.

Finally, there was only one coder, the researcher, to analyze the data for the present study. The design of the present study was a basic interpretative qualitative study. Findings in of a basic interpretative qualitative study are recurrent themes and patterns from the data. Thus, the findings were the researcher's interpretation and understanding of the participants' interpretations. Having one coder in a basic interpretative study is common and congruent with the design of the study. However, the lack of a second coder raises the issue that alternative themes could be generated from the data. The next section contains recommendations for future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations for future research that evolved from the present study that pertain to the types of high schools interviewed. First, the present study interviewed participants from two urban public schools in the same city. Both schools had unique disciplinary structures for different grade levels or different school programs. Future research may investigate schools that have the same disciplinary protocol for all students throughout the school. Additionally, more than two schools

would provide greater transferability to other urban public schools. Both high schools were in an urban district and both were public schools. High schools in rural and suburban settings, along with private schools may produce alternative findings or will supplement the findings from the present study.

Only teachers and students were interviewed in the present study. Many of the teachers discussed administrations' role in the inconsistency of the disciplinary protocol. Future research could include administrators to gain an additional perspective. By eliciting participation from administrators, a more holistic picture of the discipline protocol may be provided. For example, perhaps there are certain reasons that administrators have different policies for their own programs or choose to use their own discretion when deciding how far to take the students' disciplinary consequences. Administrators may be feeling pressure from the school district or elsewhere. Thus, allowing administrators to have a voice and offer their perspectives could shed additional light on some of the issues with current school discipline policies.

The present study was developed as a result of learning about the problems with traditional zero-tolerance policies. One of most commonly cited problems with zero-tolerance policies is that these policies do not consider the unique circumstances of students who violate them and consequently impose unfair consequences upon students. Findings from the present study suggest that the current discipline protocol still imposes unfair consequences onto students. Furthermore, issues of inequality and favoritism were commonly mentioned by both students and teachers. These findings indicate that there are similar problems with the current discipline protocol that need to be better understood. To learn more about the issues with fairness, teachers who taught with

traditional zero-tolerance policies as well as the new discipline protocol could be interviewed to be understand the changes in teacher perceptions of fairness of both policies.

Findings suggest that students and teachers may perceive students as either 'good students' or 'bad students.' Students who are perceived as 'bad students' may also perceive themselves as 'bad students.' One's self concept is shaped during the critical stage of adolescent development. Future research can explore how the inconsistency, which leads to the perception of 'good students' versus 'bad students,' impacts students' self-concept and self-esteem.

Teachers discussed their tendency to show favoritism or refraining from enforcing policies with certain students. Teachers provided reasons such as being able to understand the student, having a personal history with the student, or knowing that the student is a genuinely 'good student' but is just having a bad day. This tendency is similar to countertransference in psychotherapy. Future research can further investigate teachers' reactions to certain students and why teachers feel more compelled to show leniency to some students over others. Concluding remarks will be presented in the next section.

Conclusion

This study is one of the first to explore how the current school discipline protocol impacts the teacher-student relationship. Findings suggest that teachers struggle to enforce policies the way the policies are intended to be enforced because enforcing the policies often leads to more problems for the teachers. Additionally, teachers feel that they are not supported by administration, so they opt to handle disciplinary issues within

their classrooms to maintain authority and respect from students. Teachers expressed frustration that there is so much inconsistency across teachers and recognized that the inconsistent enforcement leads to greater issues such as students accusing them of showing favoritism. Students discussed feeling that the policies were unfair and not enforced equally across students. Teachers and students shared teacher qualities that they felt positively contribute to the teacher-student relationship quality even though these qualities perpetuate the cycle of inconsistency and subsequent inequality.

In conclusion, discipline policies are not impacting the teacher-student relationship. Rather, inconsistency among teachers and administration regarding policy enforcement is impacting the teacher-student relationship. Although the one size fits all approach to discipline may not be the most effective model, consistency with any model is critical for it to be effective and productive. This new information can aid in the development of a discipline protocol that is grounded in consistency for all parties involved.

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Appendix A

Interview Instrument

Demographic Questionnaire for Students

1. What gender do you identify with?

2. What racial/ethnic identities do you identify with?

3. What is your age?

4. What is your current grade level?

5. How long have you attended your current school?

Demographic Questionnaire for Teachers

1. What gender do you identify with?

2. What racial/ethnic identities do you identify with?

3. What is your age?

4. What grade(s) do you currently teach?

5. What subjects do you currently teach?

6. How long have you taught at your current school?

Interview Protocol for Students

1. What discipline policies are currently in place in your school?
    a. How are they structured?
2. What are your relationships with your teachers like?
3. How are discipline policies enforced in your school?
    a. How do you know how to behave?
    b. Are there any mixed messages sent to students/teachers about these policies?
    c. What are they?
4. Has one of your teachers ever disciplined you for violating one of these policies?
    a. Describe the situation.
    b. What did your teacher say/do?
    c. How did you interpret this incident?
5. How was your relationship with your teacher impacted by this incident?
6. How do you perceive your role/position as student impacting your relationship with teachers?
7. How do you perceive your teachers' roles/positions as teacher impacting your relationship with teachers?
8. Is there anything else I have not asked but you feel is important to share?

Interview Protocol for Teachers

1. What discipline policies are currently in place in your school?
    a. How are they structured?
2. What are your relationships with your students like?
3. How are discipline policies enforced in your school?
    a. How do you know whether to enforce them?
    b. Are there any mixed messages sent to students/teachers about these policies?
    c. What are they?
4. Have you ever disciplined a student for violating one of these policies?
    a. Describe the situation.
    b. What did you say/do?
    c. How did you interpret this incident?
5. How was your relationship with your student impacted by this incident?
6. How do you perceive your role/position as teacher impacting your relationship with students?
7. How do you perceive your students' roles/positions as student impacting your relationship with teachers?
8. Is there anything else I have not asked but you feel is important to share?