



# Defiance, Insubordination, and Disrespect: Perceptions of Power in Middle School Discipline

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*Defiance, Insubordination, and Disrespect:  
Perceptions of Power in Middle School Discipline*

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## ABSTRACT

Defiance, insubordination, and disrespect (together, “DID”) are the most common disciplinary infractions in U.S. secondary schools (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008).

Consequences for these infractions -- challenges to the power and authority of the teacher -- are disproportionately borne by students of color, males, and students from low-income families (Jordan & Anil, 2009). Yet little is known about:

1. Whether demographic differences between teacher and student lead to more DID referrals, and
2. Whether differences in teachers’ understanding of defiance and power are related to different numbers of DID referrals.

To explore these questions, I conducted a mixed methods study at the “Gold Star” Middle School (GSMS), a large, urban middle school in the northeast U.S. I analyzed DID referral forms ( $n=922$ ) for school year 2013-14 and semi-structured interviews with teachers ( $n=51$ ).

I found that the number of annual DID referrals issued per teacher at GSMS is higher when teacher and student differ by race (49.8 times more than for same-race teacher/student dyads) and by gender (29.8 times more than same-gender dyads), but lower (0.38 times less) when these dyads have different experiences with poverty. However, these effects are not additive: when teacher and student differ by race and gender, a teacher issues fewer (0.96 times less) annual DID referrals than when teacher and student differ only by gender.

I also found significant differences between teachers with the highest and the lowest number of annual DID referrals. High-DID teachers rarely invoke their

responsibilities for student academic or behavioral outcomes, ascribe student defiance primarily to ineffective school policies, and generally view power as hierarchical in nature. Low-DID teachers, however, describe specific responsibilities to care for their students and provide them with an effective learning environment. They ascribe student defiance primarily to teacher/student relationship issues and generally view power as relational in nature.

Results from this study underscore the complex role played by demographic differences between teacher and student in the disciplinary encounter, and point to the promise of exploring differences in teachers' views of their relationships with students, defiance, and power as a means of better understanding the origins of the discipline gap.

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## I. INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

According to recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics,<sup>1</sup> 41% of public secondary school teachers reported that student misbehavior "interfered with" their teaching. For anyone who has ever set foot inside a middle school or worked or lived with students entering adolescence, this statistic is probably not surprising. Research indeed confirms that student disciplinary rates tend to rise at the middle school level (Robers, Kemp & Truman, 2013; Theriot & Dupper, 2010; Raffaella Mendez 2003). While it can be argued that this rise is, at some level, simply a normal developmental leap, student misbehavior in secondary school has far-reaching consequences and warrants our attention for several important reasons.

First, whenever any student is disciplined, every member of the classroom is affected. Classroom disruptions are correlated with lower achievement for *all* students in the classroom, not simply the student who is misbehaving (Lannie & McCurdy, 2007). Schools with overall higher rates of exclusionary discipline have lower levels of academic achievement (Davis & Jordan, 1994). As such, teachers' classroom management skills are an essential component of a high-quality learning environment.

Second, while all students are affected by classroom disciplinary issues, certain student populations are more affected than others. Since 1975, with the release of a report by the Children's Defense Fund on school suspensions, researchers have consistently documented disproportionality in school discipline (often referred to as the

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<sup>1</sup> 2011-12 data as reported in NCES' "Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2013."

<sup>2</sup> I understand that students themselves are not middle-class or low-SES but that they come from middle-class or low-SES families. I use the phrase "middle-class male" for clarity and simplicity.

<sup>3</sup> From [www.dropoutprevention.org](http://www.dropoutprevention.org) (Thorstensen, 2004): "The estimated tax revenue loss from every male between the ages of 25 and 34 years of age who did not complete high school would be approximately \$944 billion, with cost increases to public welfare and crime at \$24 billion." According to the Justice Policy Institute (December 2014), the average annual cost of incarcerating a single youth is \$148,767 – compared to the average annual cost of public

“discipline gap”) for students from low-SES families<sup>2</sup> and especially for young males of color, who are disciplined both more frequently and more harshly than their counterparts (Rabrenovic & Levin, 2003; Zhang, Katsiyannis & Herbst, 2004; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Brantlinger, 1991). For instance, black students incur disciplinary referrals up to 2.8 times as often as their peers (Rausch and Skiba, 2006); males up to 4 times as often as females (Gregory, 1996; Imich, 1994), and students from low-SES families up to 8 times as often (Jordan & Anil, 2009). Research has also found that black students and girls are punished more harshly (e.g., suspended) for minor offenses, including cell-phone use, public displays of affection, chewing gum, and not changing for gym class (Crenshaw, Ocen & Nanda, 2015; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; National Education Policy Center, 2011). These disproportionate impacts begin as early as elementary school and worsen through high school (NCES, 2013).

Ultimately, students who are disciplined frequently spend less time on classwork, and those who are punished more harshly (through exclusionary discipline such as suspension and/or expulsion) also spend less time in the classroom. As a result, these students are at higher risk of school failure and dropout (Arcia, 2006; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Raffaele Mendez, 2003), which in turn increases their risk of incarceration (Chobot & Garibaldi, 1982; Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2001). Increased school dropout and incarceration rates increase the economic burden of all taxpayers.<sup>3</sup> Even if

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<sup>3</sup> From [www.dropoutprevention.org](http://www.dropoutprevention.org) (Thorstensen, 2004): “The estimated tax revenue loss from every male between the ages of 25 and 34 years of age who did not complete high school would be approximately \$944 billion, with cost increases to public welfare and crime at \$24 billion.” According to the Justice Policy Institute (December 2014), the average annual cost of incarcerating a single youth is \$148,767 – compared to the average annual cost of public education of \$12,608 per student (NCES, 2010-11).

not incarcerated, students who are suspended are less likely to become active participants in the democratic process, whether by voting or contributing to civic life in other ways (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2013). Males of color in particular face substantially higher rates of incarceration, lower earning power, and shorter lifespans than any other demographic group.<sup>4</sup>

Much of the research on the discipline gap over the last 35 years has served to document the nature and extent of the gap itself. If we are committed to changing the current disciplinary trends in our schools, however, we also need to focus our efforts on uncovering the roots of the discipline gap. As we come to understand these roots, we can design and implement effective solutions to reduce or eliminate the discipline gap. A first step is to hone in on the teacher-student interaction that precedes the disciplinary referral itself. Teachers hold much of the power in decisions regarding who gets disciplined, and for what behavioral infraction. Teachers can also hold power over students by virtue of their role as teachers and adults, as well as the power that society ascribes to certain demographic categories (e.g., a white middle-class teacher belongs to demographic categories ascribed more power than a low-SES student of color). Do differences between teacher and student along the demographic lines of race, gender, and socio-economic status (SES) lead to differences in disciplinary referral rates? What about different conceptions of power among teachers?

If eliminating the discipline gap can indeed improve both school and student academic performance, as suggested in the research cited above, it may also encourage

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<sup>4</sup> In 2010, black men were 6 times as likely as white men to be incarcerated in federal, state and local jails (Pew Research Center, 2013); median weekly earnings for black men working full-time were \$250 less than for white men and \$82 less than white women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013); life expectancy for black men was 4.7 years less than for white males and 9.5 years less than white females (CDC/NCHS, National Vital Statistics System).

economic stability and success for all members of our society. If the discipline gap were eliminated, students would spend more time in the classrooms. Teachers and students would spend more time on task, which would increase the quality of the learning environment. Teacher-student relationships would improve, as would school climate. On a larger scale, we would have more students prepared to contribute to our society and economy. In short, eliminating or even reducing the discipline gap could have positive benefits for us all – and could even contribute to a more just and equal society.

In this mixed methods study, I examined teachers' understanding of discipline, defiance, and power at the Gold Star Middle School (GSMS),<sup>5</sup> a large, urban middle school in the northeast U.S. Through analysis of student disciplinary records and referral forms for defiance ( $n=922$ ) for the school year 2013-14, as well as semi-structured interviews with teachers ( $n=51$ ), I analyzed demographic differences in race, gender, and socio-economic experience between teacher and student to determine whether such differences were correlated with differences in disciplinary referrals for defiance. I also explored the relationship between teachers' understanding of discipline, defiance, and power and their disciplinary referral rates for defiance.

In the balance of this chapter, I describe the framework and assumptions that underpin and guide this research study, including a detailed outline of the steps involved in the disciplinary process between teacher and student. In Chapter 2, I explicate and overlay the existing research on school discipline in light of this framework – what I call the ecology of discipline – in order to illuminate the issues that keep us from fully understanding how the discipline gap manifests itself. I also describe how this study

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<sup>5</sup> Gold Star Middle School is a pseudonym used in order to ensure the confidentiality of the school and its teachers, students, and administrators.

addresses these gaps and limitations and present the research questions that form the basis of this study. In Chapter 3, I describe the research site and the methodology used to answer my research questions. In Chapter 4, I describe the findings from the quantitative analysis conducted to answer my first research question, on whether demographic differences between teacher and student translate into different levels of defiance referrals. In Chapter 5, I describe the findings from the qualitative analysis used to answer my second research question, on whether teachers with different understandings of student relationships, discipline, and power have different levels of defiance referrals. Finally, in Chapter 6, I summarize the study findings and their implications and for both future research and practice. I also address the limitations of this study and provide a roadmap for effective action that can be taken by anyone interested in ensuring that public schools are the most effective learning environments possible for all children.

### **Conceptual Framework: The Ecology of Discipline**

To properly contextualize both the existing research on school discipline and the parameters of this study, I developed a conceptual framework that depicts a typical school disciplinary encounter between teacher and student. This framework, which I call the ecology of discipline, depicts the mechanisms and influences at work in a typical disciplinary encounter between teacher and student, from initial student misbehavior to final consequence for that behavior. The ecology of discipline framework brings together two distinct models: (1) the steps in a typical disciplinary encounter between teacher and student, and (2) the spheres of influence at play in any individual's decisions and actions (e.g., the configuration of influence). The following sections describe and depict each of

these models. I then conclude this chapter with a discussion of the role of power in school discipline.

### **The Disciplinary Referral Process**

Before moving forward, it is critical to understand clearly all that is entailed in the disciplinary process, especially the nature of a single disciplinary encounter. How exactly does a student go from a behavioral violation, to a written disciplinary referral, and ultimately to a disciplinary consequence such as suspension or expulsion? In practice, a myriad of factors and decisions go into each disciplinary decision. This section provides a step-by-step description of the disciplinary referral process.

The act of issuing a disciplinary referral to a student for misbehavior is more complex than it may initially appear. Some behavior violations are relatively clear-cut and objective, both as defined and in actual practice. For example, because weapons are not allowed in school, there is little doubt that a student caught with a gun in his or her locker has committed a disciplinary infraction. But other behaviors, such as defiance and disrespect, are less easily and consistently defined across teachers and do not always look the same across students. For example, is it defiance or disrespect if a student refuses to stop talking to their classmate when asked by the teacher? What if the reason for the continued talking is that the student is helping a classmate understand the lesson at hand? In these more subjective situations, a teacher's interpretation plays a central role in the disciplinary process. In practice, then, multiple actions and decisions are embedded throughout the disciplinary process. A shared understanding of this process is required in order to understand fully the challenges inherent both in analyzing disciplinary data and in developing a clearer picture of the disciplinary landscape of a single school (let alone a

district, county, or state). In a typical disciplinary incident, then, the following steps occur:

1. Student (mis)behaves.<sup>6</sup>
2. Student behavior is noticed by the teacher (or not noticed).
3. Student behavior is (mis)interpreted by the teacher as unacceptable, or (mis)interpreted as acceptable given extenuating conditions.
4. Student behavior is addressed by the teacher in the classroom, or the student receives a disciplinary referral (written notice to an administrator of the (mis)behavior).
5. Student receives a consequence for their behavior (in extreme cases, expulsion or suspension). This consequence may be assigned by an administrator if a disciplinary referral has been submitted, or by the teacher in the classroom.

These steps are depicted in Figure 1, which focuses on the decision-making process required of the teacher in making the disciplinary referral. As seen in this figure, behaving in a certain way, and being disciplined for it, are two different things – and do not *necessarily* follow one from the other. At each step of the process, the incident can either end, or it can escalate. For example, a student may (mis)behave and have that behavior go unnoticed by the teacher (#2), at which point the incident comes to an end. Or, even if a student’s (mis)behavior is noticed by the teacher, it may be interpreted as acceptable. For example, a student may act out in class but not be disciplined if a teacher believes, say, that this is unusual or out of character for the student (#3).

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<sup>6</sup> From this point, I will use the term “(mis)behaves” in order to reflect the interpretive and ultimately subjective nature of what does and does not constitute “inappropriate” student behavior.

Once the behavior is determined to be unacceptable, the teacher either issues a disciplinary referral or addresses the behavior in the classroom, either in the moment (e.g., by verbal redirection or changing seats) or in the future (e.g., by keeping the student after class or making a phone call home after school) (#4). Finally, after the disciplinary referral is issued, the student receives a formal consequence for (mis)behavior (#5). In many cases, this consequence takes the form of detention, in-school suspension, restitution, mandated peer mediation, or a formal warning that includes a phone call and/or letter to the parent/guardian (#5a). In only the most severe cases is a student suspended or expelled (#5b).

<Insert Figure 1 here>

Several key points should be apparent after outlining the multiple steps taken throughout the disciplinary process, each of which is important to keep in mind as we move forward:

1. *There are many steps and decisions involved in the disciplinary process, which lead to a wide range of disciplinary consequences.* Related to this, quantitative data is generated only in the final steps of the process, through the initial disciplinary referrals and in the consequences meted out to students, or in some cases through individual teacher record-keeping (steps #4 and #5).

2. *Discipline happens between teacher and student;* that is, it is primarily driven by the nature of the relationship (including a lack thereof) between the teacher and the student. A student's behavior must be both witnessed and interpreted by a teacher before any discipline is meted out.

3. *In school discipline, there is an imbalance of power that generally favors the authority of the teacher.*

Given these basic premises, it becomes important to understand what influences may impact or contribute to the multiple decisions made by both student and teacher as they move through the disciplinary encounter. The following section describes the model used in this study.

### **The Configuration of Influence: Understanding Agency, Culture, and Structure**

Figure 2 depicts the “configuration of influence” model and provides a means of understanding the multiple forces that impact the decision-making and actions of any individual. This model synthesizes the triad of structure, culture, and agency with the work of Bronfenbrenner (1994). The synthesis enables a more meaningful and nuanced examination of the ways in which we make sense of our own and others’ actions, and for my purposes here, of the disciplinary encounter.

<Insert Figure 2 here>

At the heart of the configuration of influence is the triad of agency, culture, and structure (Archer, 1995; Archer, 1996; Hays, 1994; Noguera, 2006). This triad is frequently used to explain the forces – both internal and external – at play in shaping the life of an individual, with agency involving the most individual control, structure the least, and culture as a moderating force between the two. These three forces can be generalized as follows:

- *Agency*: The (individual) power of choice and free will
- *Culture*: Norms, beliefs, and habits that shape behavior

- *Structure*: Circumstances largely beyond individual control that profoundly influence individual trajectory (e.g., environmental conditions such as pollution, the political system, economic conditions, and socio-historical forces such as redlining, sexism, and concentrated poverty)

To depict the relationship among these three spheres of influence, I find Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological model particularly useful. Bronfenbrenner's essential model is comprised of a series of concentric circles, with the individual (agency) in the center circle, and each succeeding circle comprising an increasingly less direct sphere of influence on the individual.<sup>7</sup> At its most basic, then, the agency/structure/culture framework has agency at its center, surrounded by the circle of culture, surrounded in turn by the circle of structure. This framework is especially helpful in moving us away from an "either-or" discussion in terms of these different types of influence on disciplinary outcomes. Traditional questions about school discipline have focused on asking whether individual choices *or* cultural contexts most influence disciplinary outcomes, or whether structural elements constrain our choices to such an extent as to eliminate personal agency or make structural change impossible (Apple,

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<sup>7</sup> There are many parallels between the triad of agency, culture, and structure and Bronfenbrenner's spheres of influence. In Bronfenbrenner's (1994) model, most immediate in influence are the environments in which the individual spends the majority of her time, such as family, school, peers, and neighborhood (the microsystem). Elements within the microsystem both interact with each other (the mesosystem) and are influenced by the members of their own specific systems (exosystem). The next circle encompasses the cultural contexts in which the individual lives, including their socioeconomic status (SES) and ethnic background (the macrosystem). The macrosystem also includes the values and/or belief systems shared by the members of any group of which the individual is a member, such as their family, peers, school, or place of employment. Finally, the circle furthest away from the individual -- what Bronfenbrenner calls the chronosystem -- includes the structural forces over which the individual has the least control, yet which nevertheless necessarily constrain or expand the individual's choices and actions. Such forces include, for example, major life transitions and socio-historical events.

1982). Using the agency/culture/structure framework just outlined promotes a more realistic discussion about the relative influence of both individual choices *and* cultural contexts, both structural constraints *and* personal agency. In relation to school discipline, for example, it may not be a question of *which* element influences disciplinary outcomes, but rather how and to what extent each of these different elements *interacts* to influence behavior and discipline.

Figure 2 depicts this framework – what I call the “configuration of influence.” In this framework, the spheres of agency and structure are the easiest to understand. Agency is simply another way of referring to individual choice, free will, and power. Structure refers to forces that are generally considered (but not always<sup>8</sup>) beyond individual control, such as, for example, a country’s political system, economic factors such as inflation rates and gas prices, and larger socio-historical forces.

Culture is a bit more ambiguous. While culture has traditionally been thought of as a system of values and beliefs shared by any certain group of individuals, this definition does not capture the more active influence that culture has on our daily actions and activities. *Culture* is perhaps more accurately defined by Swidler (1986) as “a ‘tool kit’ of habits, skills, and lifestyles from which people construct ‘strategies of action’” (p. 273). The word *culture* is also frequently used to signify and, I argue, to obscure or conflate specific demographic categories such as race and socio-economic status. While demographic categories are sometimes specifically referenced (e.g., the “culture of poverty” refers to socio-economic status), they are more commonly obscured [e.g., we use the term *cultural* when we really mean *racial*, as in describing differences (Dalmage,

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Hays (1994)

2012)]. Further, there is a tendency to assign negative traits to specific demographic categories and deem such traits a part of that demographic category's "culture" [e.g., "the culture of poverty" from the 1965 Moynihan Report; Fordham & Ogbu's (1986) "oppositional culture" of black youth]. Finally, use of the term *culture* may serve to mute and blunt the very real differences in power that are attendant to each demographic category of race, gender, and SES (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). It is important, therefore, to decouple the term *culture* from what are more accurately *demographic differences* between individuals.

At the same time, the intersection of the demographic categories of race, gender, and socio-economic status is central to our identity and provides us with a unique perspective. Therefore, I place the demographic intersection of race, gender, and socio-economic status (SES) in the concentric circle immediately surrounding the sphere of individual agency in the framework used in this study (see Figure 2). By doing so I illustrate my contention that our perspective of the world around us is directly and most closely mediated by and through our particular demographic intersection.

Finally, I draw on Hays' (1994) classification of cultural influence into two separate elements: (1) systems of social relations, and (2) systems of meaning. As she describes:

Systems of social relations consist of patterns of roles, relationships, and forms of domination... Systems of meaning are what is often known as culture, including not only the beliefs and values of social groups, but also their language, forms of knowledge, and common sense, as well as the material products, interactional practices, rituals, and ways of life established by these. (pp. 65-66)

Systems of social relations, then, are the distinct social realms of each individual: their peer group, family, neighbors, and religious community, for example. Systems of

meaning are the beliefs, values, and habits associated with each of these social realms. Making this distinction is useful because it enables us to more meaningfully differentiate between the social realm of the individual, and the beliefs and habits attendant to those social realms. For example, the distinction between a student's peer group and the values/habits of this peer group allows for one (low-SES male of color) student – Marko - - to be a member of a peer group that values primarily academic achievement, while the peer group of another (low-SES male of color) student – Paolo -- values primarily athletic achievement. Marko and Paolo both have peer groups that consist primarily of low-SES males of color, yet the values and habits of these groups are separate and different from their demographic characteristics.

To summarize, Figure 2 illustrates the interplay among individual agency, culture, and structure and serves as the cornerstone of the assumptions used in this research study. In thinking more specifically about school discipline, and using the configuration of influence framework, we see that any attempt to explain or understand the discipline gap must acknowledge each element of agency, culture, and structure. It is overly simplistic, then, to ascribe complete responsibility for poor behavioral choices simply to student agency, without recognizing the structural and cultural influences at play in the student's life, or without acknowledging the role of the teacher's agency and interpretation as influenced by her realms of culture and structure.

### **The Ecology of Discipline**

Having clarified both the configuration and types of structural and cultural influences that impact individual agency, and the multiple steps that make up a typical disciplinary encounter between teacher and student, I now present the complete

framework for this study, which I call the ecology of discipline. Figure 3 depicts this model.

<Insert Figure 3 here>

As seen in Figure 3, the disciplinary encounter is far more complex than many realize. It is certainly not as simple as a student breaking a school rule and the teacher punishing this violation; instead, it involves multiple shared and personal influences at work in a multi-step process. We also see that the teacher and student may share (certain) structural influences while they simultaneously inhabit (quite different) personal cultural and demographic spheres. Student and teacher share not only the larger structure that includes the American economy, political system, and long-term structural racism, sexism, and classism, but the larger structural (and generally unconscious) understanding of the purpose of schooling (including socialization, the “hidden curriculum,” and the purpose of discipline).

Student and teacher also share the structural elements of the school system itself – notably the school district and its attendant policies, and the school administrative policies and practices. To the extent that school discipline principles and overall purpose are openly expressed and discussed, as they tend to be with such disciplinary systems as PBIS and peer mediation, these too are shared by student and teacher. Nevertheless, despite these many shared elements of school structure and culture, the effects of both these realms of influence on student and teacher vary according to their (1) specific demographic intersection, and (2) family, peer, religion and neighborhood configuration and demographics.

In addition to Figure 3's depiction of both the influences and steps involved in the disciplinary encounter between teacher and student, there is one critical element that is not yet represented: power. The following section introduces the element of power and its role in the disciplinary encounter.

### **The Role of Power**

The element of power has been a recurring yet invisible thread woven in the discussion thus far. Power runs throughout the disciplinary encounter between teacher and student and operates through the constraints and enablers imposed by an individual's particular demographic intersection, the culture and structure of the school, and the culture and structure of our society itself. Three elements of power are particularly salient in school discipline and should be taken into consideration in any research analysis of the discipline gap: (1) the power of the teacher to interpret the behavior of the student as unacceptable; (2) the legitimate need of both teacher and student to have – and even wield -- some power in their own lives; and (3) the unequal power accorded to specific demographic characteristics.

First, the power of the teacher to acknowledge and interpret the behavior of the student in their classroom is what ultimately drives whether or not a disciplinary referral is made. While not denying that students sometimes do behave inappropriately, the fact remains that students do not have the power to prevent a disciplinary referral from being made, even if their behavior has been misinterpreted, inadvertent, or misunderstood. Second, discipline in general – and defiance and insubordination in particular – is rooted in the display of power, both on the side of the teacher and of the student. Each player has different stakes in the disciplinary dance, but each stake is power-based. Teachers

seek to establish and maintain their authority in the classroom, to teach and to manage the learning environment. Students seek to establish to themselves, their peers, and to teachers and other authority figures that they also have some agency and power in their own lives. Both teacher and student desire to be heard and acknowledged, and the need for such power is certainly understandable and legitimate.

Added to these two key points is the differential and ultimately unequal power accorded to specific demographic characteristics. In this country, few would disagree that the racial category with the most power in most domains is “white,” the gender category with the most power in the most domains is “male,” and the SES category with the most power is middle- to –upper class. This power, however, is largely invisible to those who have it, who tend to view existing social arrangements simply as “normal” and “natural” (Brayboy, 2005; Lewis, 2004; Bergerson, 2003). Further (and as discussed earlier), we tend to subsume our demographic differences under the broader term “culture.” Vaught and Castagno (2008) argue that, in so doing, we also strip these demographic differences of their actual power. As they explain, the idea of a

‘deeply different’ culture... was often used in place of explicit reference to race. This substitution of culture was significant, as participants did not conceive of cultures as differentially powered or in power relationships with one another. Cultural misunderstandings, rather than racism, occurred between individual teachers and groups of students, were devoid of power, and could be remedied through individual teacher understanding... Focusing on culture provides a way to deflect power. (pp. 103-104)

How does the unequal power accorded to different demographics manifest itself in the disciplinary process? In fact, the very nature of a teacher's authority is approached differently depending on one's gender, race or SES. For example, boys struggle with acceding to feminine authority, especially in front of their male peers (Valian, 1999). Moreover, as Delpit (1995) has noted, "[m]any people of color expect authority to be earned by personal efforts and exhibited by personal characteristics. In other words, 'the authoritative person gets to be a teacher because she is authoritative.' Some members of middle-class cultures, by contrast, expect one to achieve authority by the acquisition of an authority role. That is, 'the teacher is the authority because she is the teacher'" (p. 35).

Such demographic differences in the perception and legitimacy of authority give rise to many questions concerning the disciplinary process. Does the white middle-class teacher who expects respect from her students simply due to the fact that she is their teacher approach discipline differently – or write more defiance referrals -- than the white middle-class teacher who focuses more attention on developing respectful relationships with each of her students? What about a teacher who has very clear and strong behavioral and academic expectations and firmly communicates these expectations to her students? Does it make a difference whether such a teacher is a white female who has experienced poverty or a black middle-class male? Unfortunately, power in the classroom and the authority of the teacher are topics that rarely, if ever, get broached in research on school discipline, despite their obvious salience in the disciplinary landscape and their potential for better understanding disciplinary encounters between teacher and student.

Beyond even the notion of respect between teacher and student, what about teachers who acknowledge the power differentials inherent not just in the lived experience of our demographic categories but in our society itself? Do such acknowledgments of differential power in the classroom translate to different disciplinary referral rates? Does a teacher's understanding of power – and her ability to share power with her students, or accede power when appropriate – have an impact on disciplinary outcomes in the classroom? These questions seem not only reasonable but important, especially since students who view the school/teacher's power and authority as illegitimate exhibit more noncompliant behavior (Deutsch & Jones, 2008; Way, 2011). Yet to date, no research studies have examined whether teachers who acknowledge and/or make explicit the “culture of power” to their students, or who acknowledge their own power and authority as adults and teachers (Delpit, 1995), have fewer power struggles with their students and thus, perhaps, fewer disciplinary referrals.

And beyond even simply acknowledging power differentials, what of teachers whose specific aim is to empower their students? Brown and Rodriguez (2009) tell the story of a student who was disciplined for “defiance” after correcting a teacher in class and was ultimately suspended for the offense (p. 31). Does a teacher who cannot accept not being seen as the “expert” have different disciplinary outcomes than a teacher who allows the knowledge and experience of their students to have equitable, if not equal, weight in classroom discussions? As Brown and Rodriguez (2009) have found in their work, “sharing power... is particularly vital in working with youth who are subordinated in multiple realms of their lives...” (p. 28). They differentiate between “power purely for the sake of domination” and “relational understandings of power” and talk of “power

with rather than over youth” (p. 28). These differences in basic understanding of power are significant, and yet the differences in teacher and student understandings of and relationships to power in the classroom have never been studied in connection to the disciplinary process.

To summarize, two points are particularly important to keep in mind as I next examine the research literature and establish the basis for this study:

1. School discipline disproportionately affects those students whose demographic characteristics are most different from the teachers with the power to decide who does -- and who does not -- get disciplined; and
2. Very little is known about teachers’ understanding of power relative to their relationships with students and the disciplinary process, especially how this understanding is related to the number of disciplinary referrals issued by teachers.

As Delpit (1995) reminds us, “to act as if power does not exist is to ensure that the power status quo remains the same” (p. 39). If we do not acknowledge the power dynamics at play in our schools and in our society – that some are fundamentally more powerful than others -- then change of the kind we seek will not be possible.

## II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Having established and described the ecology of discipline framework, I now turn to the landscape of existing research on the school discipline gap. This chapter focuses on contextualizing the research on school discipline in such a way as to (1) uncover the most useful findings and (2) illuminate gaps in the research literature that, if addressed, can help us design research studies that better support teachers and school-based practitioners in working towards equity in school discipline for all students.<sup>9</sup> In general, the research studies that focus on the school discipline gap serve either to (a) document the nature and existence of the gap empirically, primarily through the use of quantitative data, or (b) posit a theory for the gap's origins and maintenance.

### **The Nature of the School Discipline Gap**

As described briefly in Chapter I, much of the research on school discipline documents that certain student populations are disciplined both more frequently and more harshly than their counterparts. Towards this end, data from such studies is analyzed from *disciplinary referrals* (e.g., all student disciplinary offenses, documenting frequency of (mis)behavior) and student *suspensions/expulsions* (e.g., the harshest consequence for (mis)behavior). As discussed in more detail later in this section, the existing research in this area (1) is limited to quantitative data from only the final steps of the disciplinary process; (2) ignores the teacher's role in the disciplinary relationship by using only student data; and (3) uses analysis based on demographic dichotomies rather than demographic intersections.

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<sup>9</sup> I do not ignore the fact that some students do not behave appropriately in the classroom, but seek to ensure that consistently unequal and disproportionate outcomes are addressed and interrupted.

## **Disciplinary Referrals**

The majority of the research studies that have focused on overall disciplinary referrals identify the most frequent types of disciplinary infractions (e.g., Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). These studies help us understand that problems with authority -- such as disrespect, disobedience, and insubordination -- are by far the most frequent and common disciplinary infractions in middle school (Raffaelle Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997).

Other disciplinary referral studies focus on differences by the value of a single demographic variable, such as socio-economic status (SES). For instance, Brantlinger (1991) conducted a qualitative study using interviews of adolescents from low-SES and high-SES families. Students from low-SES families reported disciplinary referrals most often for fighting and “sassing” in response to perceived injustice or unfair treatment. Students from high-SES families, on the other hand, reported disciplinary referrals most often for schoolwork-related issues (e.g., not working up to their ability), chatting, and “goofing off.” While these findings are interesting, they leave unanswered the question of whether they hold true across gender and across race. Research also shows that black girls are most likely to receive disciplinary referrals for defiance and fighting (Blake, Butler, Lewis & Darensbourg, 2011), inappropriate dress and manners (Morris, 2005), and loudness and aggression (Morris, 2007). Again, the question arises: do these findings hold true across SES? And if these findings are true for high-SES black girls, then how can we reconcile these results with the Brantlinger (1991) findings of high-SES students being disciplined for not meeting the high expectations held of them, or the relatively petty offenses of “chatting” and “goofing off”?

The most comprehensive study to date of school disciplinary referrals by race, gender, and SES was conducted by Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson (2002). In this study of thousands of students in an urban school district, disciplinary referrals were analyzed for all black and white students, and for males and females. Skiba *et al.* (2002) found that white students were punished for relatively more objective offenses that, taken together, could be considered “rule-breaking” in nature, such as smoking, vandalism, leaving without permission, and using obscene language. African-American and Latino students, on the other hand, were punished primarily for offenses that Skiba *et al.* (2002) considered to be subjective and that constituted a “challenge to authority or established procedures,” such as loitering, disrespect, excessive noise, and threat. More recent studies have found that black students more likely than white students to receive disciplinary referrals for *defiance* (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008) and for *noncompliance* (Skiba & Sprague, 2008).

### **Suspension/Expulsion**

Much of the research documenting the nature of the discipline gap focuses on the relatively small subset of students who are suspended or expelled.<sup>10</sup> Yet as seen previously in Figure 2, most students experience disciplinary consequences other than suspension and expulsion, and are thus excluded from the analysis. However, these suspension/expulsion studies have yielded some interesting results. For example, they demonstrate that white students actually have higher percentages of suspension than black and Latino students for the most serious disciplinary offenses (e.g., possession of

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<sup>10</sup> The attention focused on suspension and/or expulsion data is understandable since, as discussed previously, these specific disciplinary consequences disrupt students’ educational experiences and often predict other negative consequences such as school dropout and encounters with the legal and penal systems.

tobacco, alcohol, narcotics, and weapons) (Raffaella Mendez & Knoff, 2003).<sup>11</sup> They also demonstrate that certain student populations appear to be suspended more often than their peers for minor infractions. For example, a 2011 study by the National Education Policy Center found that black students were more likely than white students to be suspended for infractions such as cell-phone use and public displays of affection, while another study based on student self-reports found that girls reported that they were suspended for infractions such as chewing gum or not changing for gym class (Costenbader & Markson, 1998).

### **Gaps and Limitations**

If we use the ecology of discipline as depicted in Figure 3 to consider the nature of discipline in schools, it is apparent that there are several critical limitations to existing research that documents the nature and extent of the school discipline gap. While research consistently demonstrates that such a gap is both chronic and consistent across populations, it fails to support efforts to account for the complex and lived reality that influences the disciplinary encounter for both teachers and students. Specifically, existing research (1) focuses too narrowly on certain specific end results of disciplinary action; (2) focuses too simply on demographic dichotomies; and (3) focuses only on student data. Each of these limitations is addressed in more detail below.

**Narrow focus on certain specific end results of disciplinary action.** Research that documents the school discipline gap focuses almost entirely on the most extreme consequences of suspension and expulsion, rather than consequences more broadly, or referrals (offenses) even more broadly (Steps 4 and 5 in Figure 2, previous). As a result,

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<sup>11</sup> Note that these results parallel Skiba, et al.'s (2002) study detailed previously.

we learn nothing about how teachers make sense of the disciplinary encounter itself, prior to the referral, and our understanding of the full disciplinary landscape of a school or district remains limited.

**Simple focus on demographic dichotomies.** Most studies of disciplinary infractions focus on demographic dichotomies, whether male/female, black/white, or low-SES/middle-class. Yet there is evidence that both race *and* gender are significant predictors of disciplinary referrals, with black males being referred most frequently, followed by white males, black females, and finally white females (Skiba *et al.*, 2002; Taylor & Foster, 1986). In light of this, more recent studies have focused on two demographic characteristics, such as black males (Monroe, 2005) or black females (Blake *et al.*, 2011; Morris, 2007). Still, socio-economic status (SES) is also important to take into consideration, especially since it also appears to contribute to the discipline gap (Brantlinger, 1991).

Using the full demographic intersections of race, gender, and SES to examine disciplinary disparities can provide a more nuanced and accurate picture of disciplinary outcomes. Yet demographic intersections have not been fully deployed in educational research, let alone the study of disproportionate discipline. Research shows that quantitative analysis that utilizes demographic intersections provides a far richer and more complete picture of the disciplinary landscape than research using simple demographic dichotomies (Tosolt, 2010; Liiv, 2013).

**Focus only on student data.** Data documenting the nature and extent of the discipline gap tends to ignore the role of the teacher in the disciplinary process. While all of the studies cited previously help us start to make sense of the impacts of

disproportionate discipline, they focus only on the student side of the disciplinary relationship. By so doing, they (perhaps inadvertently) convey the idea that behavior is not only entirely in the hands and discretion of the student, and that even such ill-defined offenses as “defiance” and “disrespect” manifest in similar ways across all students. Focusing narrowly on student data thus serves to obscure the subjective nature of discipline, as evidenced by the first three steps of the disciplinary process (see Figure 2, previous), all of which require interpretive decisions by the teacher.

Despite focusing on these limitations on the research documenting the discipline gap, I do not mean to imply that there is no utility in analyzing student data on the end result of disciplinary encounters. Rather, we should remain aware of the limitations of this data in helping us to understand the full disciplinary landscape of a school and its district, and certainly with regards to the nature of the student population most impacted by these disciplinary outcomes.

### **Origins of the Discipline Gap**

While the facts of school disciplinary disproportion have been well documented, the origins of such disproportion remain a source of speculation. Some researchers, however, have proposed theories for the discipline gap’s origins and maintenance. These theories focus on the influences that shape disproportionate disciplinary outcomes, and thus, not surprisingly, align with the agency/culture/structure spheres of influence reflected in my ecology of discipline framework. To summarize:

1. **AGENCY:** The discipline gap originates with students: some students simply behave “worse” than others (Kinsler, 2011).

2. **CULTURE:** The discipline gap stems from teacher/administrator bias toward/against, and/or their “cultural mismatches” or demographic differences with, certain student populations (Monroe, 2005; Murphy, 2011; Townsend, 2000; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004).
3. **STRUCTURE:** The discipline gap is based on school-wide (perhaps unconscious) adherence to a school’s hidden curriculum, which reflects the values of the white middle-class (Jay, 2003; Raby, 2005; Vavrus & Cole, 2002; Wren, 1999). Further, the discipline gap serves the ultimate goal of schooling, which is social reproduction (students are sorted by socio-economic status and provided with different skill sets according to their level of power in society) (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1982; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 1980; Hannay, 1985; Tyson, 2003).

While each of these elements is important to consider, I argue that addressing them in isolation from each other is insufficient to fully explain the origins of the discipline gap. Student agency arguments ignore cultural and structural influences at play in school disciplinary processes. “Cultural mismatch” research conflates and subsumes simple demographic differences into values attributions to single-variable demographic constituencies. Structural influences such as social reproduction theory and the hidden curriculum ignore student and teacher agency (Apple, 1982) and are not grounded in available quantitative data from actual school disciplinary encounters.

The following sections address the key findings and limitations of the existing research related to each of the spheres of agency, culture, and structure.

### **Origins of the Discipline Gap: Individual Agency**

The most basic explanation given for the existence of disproportionality in school discipline is that it originates with students; that is, students that are disciplined more frequently are those that actually (mis)behave more than others. Specifically, males of color have higher rates of disciplinary referrals and expulsions/suspensions because they have more serious and more frequent breaches of behavioral standards (Kinsler, 2011; Ferguson, 2006). This explanation assigns primacy to the individual agency of the student and as such ignores the influences and constraints -- on both student and teacher -- not only of their particular race/gender/SES demographic intersection, but their specific cultural and structural realities (see Figure 3, previous). No individual operates free of these influences, and these influences do not provide equal opportunity and/or constraint for all. To imply otherwise seems naïve at best and disingenuous at worst. Further, we have seen that discipline is an inherently relational dance between teacher and student; not only that, but it is a dance in which students have far less power/agency than teachers. Therefore, to assign all agency in disciplinary matters to the student and to ignore the role of the teacher over-simplifies the issue and obscures the very nature of the disciplinary encounter. This is not to say that students have no culpability in their own discipline-worthy behavior, just that to reduce the origins of disciplinary disproportionality to the student alone is incomplete.

The idea of individual agency is particularly salient for middle school students. At this age, some assertion of individuality and independence is not only healthy but developmentally appropriate. As adolescents enter middle school, they enter into a new developmental phase, one in which they seek both (1) increased power and decision-making opportunities, and (2) supportive, trusting, and respectful relationships with

adults (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan, & MacIver, 1993; Eccles, 2004; Phinney, Kim-Jo, Osorio & Vilhjaldsdottir, 2005).

Unfortunately, many middle schools require strict compliance with adult rules and are larger and more impersonal than elementary schools (Shiner & Caspi, 2003; Utley, Kozleski, Smith & Draper, 2002), leading to what Eccles *et al.* (1993) term a “stage-environment” mismatch.<sup>12</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that disciplinary referral rates tend to rise in middle school (Robers, Kemp & Truman, 2013; Theriot & Dupper, 2010), when students become less likely to comply automatically with adult demands (Dunbar & Taylor, 1982). In fact, defiance (“the refusal to obey”), insubordination (“refusal to obey authority”) and disrespect (“showing a lack of respect“),<sup>13</sup> are the most frequent and common disciplinary infractions in secondary school (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba, Peterson & Williams, 1997). Such behavioral infractions can be said to arise from an essential power struggle between the student and teacher (or other authority figure). Yet I would argue that “defiance” can also be seen as a normal, developmentally appropriate milestone of adolescence; resisting the power of the teacher may simply be an inevitable consequence of seeking increased personal agency, power, and decision-making opportunities.

Beyond even the simplified explanation of personal agency as the root cause of discipline disproportionality, and the developmental nature of defiance, research simply does not demonstrate that certain student populations behave “worse” than others. In

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<sup>12</sup> Another way of thinking of this is that the school structure imposes constraints on the student’s individual agency, again in line with Figure 3 previous

<sup>13</sup> As defined in the Merriam-Webster online dictionary

fact, research has found minimal racial differences in severity of behavioral offenses (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace & Bachman, 2008), even for the most serious (and objective) offenses, such as possession of alcohol, drugs, or weapons. Further, studies that include teacher data when analyzing student disciplinary referrals find that higher rates of Black referrals are classroom-based (Skiba & Williams, 2014; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). In other words, a student is often referred multiple times from one classroom and not across all his/her classes, implying a challenging relationship with a particular teacher or in a particular subject, rather than (mis)behavior across all classrooms and with all teachers, which does more to implicate the student's own behavior.

Research has also found that differences that do exist in certain populations tend to be in behavioral categories that are more subjective than objective, such as defiance (Skiba *et al.*, 2002). However, for those offenses that are more objective than others, there are no significant differences in levels of offense or punishment between black and white students. The fact that there *are* differences in the more subjective behaviors -- and not the more objective ones -- lends credence to the argument that these differences may lie not in the (student) behavior but in the (teacher) interpretation. Again, focusing on student agency and not including the teacher's role in the disciplinary process does not recognize the relational nature of discipline.

Research also affirms the theoretical construct of discipline as relational (Vavrus & Cole, 2002; Skiba & Williams, 2014). A positive teacher-student relationship is associated with positive behavioral and academic outcomes for students (Brinkworth & Gehlbach, in press). Teachers who are perceived by students as being fair and equitable,

and who have more positive relationships with their students, are more likely to engender compliance with their authority, and thus their students exhibit less defiance and uncooperative behavior (Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Dunbar & Taylor, 1982; Way, 2011; Wu, Pink, Crain & Moles, 1982). Research also shows that teachers and schools that rely on power-assertive strategies such as severe punishment, scolding, and strict and excessive rules actually have higher rates of defiance and disruption and less authority and control (Brophy, 1996; Way, 2011; Hollingsworth, Luffler & Clune, 1984; McFarland, 2001). In fact, the most effective teachers appear to be those who combine warmth and caring for their students with high behavioral and academic expectations<sup>14</sup> (Hooks & Miskovic, 2011; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Ware 2006; Antrop-Gonzalez & DeJesus, 2006; Morris & Morris, 2002; Tosolt 2010; Wentzel, 2002). A positive relationship between teacher and student has even been shown to compel students to comply with rules that they believe are unfair (Way, 2011).

To summarize: the argument that the discipline gap originates from student agency does not take into account existing research that finds disciplinary differences among student populations only for those infractions that are more subject to interpretation. The argument also does not take into account the influence of cultural and structural elements on student agency, as well as the relational aspect of discipline. Ignoring the role of the teacher is especially problematic given that research also shows that higher rates of referrals for certain students are classroom-based, rather than school-wide – implying teacher contribution. While individual agency clearly plays a role – and a fundamental one at that – in disciplinary encounters, it remains but one element in the

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<sup>14</sup> Kleinfeld (1975) first described these types of teachers as “warm demanders.”

ecology of discipline, and should not thus be invoked as the singular cause of disciplinary disproportion.

### **Origins of the Discipline Gap: “Cultural” Differences**

Another explanation for the origins of the discipline gap implicates teacher bias toward/against, and/or their “cultural mismatches” with, certain student populations. In response to Irvine’s (1990) call for “cultural synchronicity” between student and teacher, many studies examined teacher perceptions of student behavior, focusing on “cultural mismatches” or possible teacher bias (Monroe, 2005b; Murphy, 2011; Townsend, 2000; Weinstein, Curran & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). The research on “cultural mismatch” in discipline continues to grow, especially since up to 90% of the teaching force in U.S. public schools is comprised of white, middle-class females (Dilworth & Coleman, 2014; Picower, 2009) and the discipline gap disproportionately affects males of color and students from low-SES families.

There appears to be consensus that the more “diverse and representative” the teaching force, the less racial disproportionality in discipline (Skiba & Williams, 2014; Mcloughlin & Noltemayer, 2010; Rocha & Hawes, 2009). When student and teacher are of the same ethnicity, teachers rate their relationships with students more positively (Saft & Pianta, 2001) – which, as we have seen, is correlated with more positive school behavior.

Some results of research on the “cultural mismatch” between teacher and student appear contradictory. For example, gender (of both teacher and student) appears to have the most influence on teacher perception of student behavior (Taylor, Gunter & Slate, 2001), with female teachers rating behaviors as more severe than male teachers (Salvano-

Pardieu, Fontaine, Bouazzaoui & Florer, 2009). At the same time, both black and white female teachers wrote significantly more referrals for black male students than for white male students (Sturgess 2011), suggesting an additive effect between race and gender in disciplinary outcomes. Research also shows that white teachers rate black students as more disruptive (Downey & Pribash, 2004); however, in a previous study, I found that (the overwhelmingly white, middle-class female) teachers were most likely to mete out disciplinary referrals for disruption for white boys from low-SES families (Liiv, 2013).

I believe that the cultural mismatch research is conflicting and difficult to reconcile in part because of the conflation of specific demographics in the term “culture” These studies also limit their analysis to demographic dichotomies rather than the richer demographic intersections that mark our actual lived experience. Liiv (2013) investigated differences in the types of disciplinary infractions incurred by middle-school students with respect to their gender, race, and socio-economic status (SES). Demographic intersections provided a more precise understanding of disciplinary outcomes for specific student populations, as evidenced by the following examples:

- Males had odds 3.4 times the average of incurring a disciplinary referral for threatening behavior. If this male was white and middle-class, however, his odds were only 1.5 times the average, while if he was white and low-SES, his odds were 9.5 times the average.
- Low-SES males of color incurred 59 times the referrals of white middle-class females; white middle-class males 17 times the referrals.

- Low-SES white male students had fitted odds 98 times those of white middle-class females for receiving a disciplinary referral for disruption, 86 times for threatening/dangerous behavior, and 75 times for breaking the law.

As seen above, studies on teacher-student “cultural mismatch” tend to focus on only one demographic characteristic across teacher and student: generally either race or gender.<sup>15</sup> If we are to begin to understand the role played by demographic differences across teacher and student in disciplinary outcomes, we will need to include teacher demographic data and utilize demographic intersections for both students and teachers in our data analyses.

### **Origins of the Discipline Gap: Structural Explanations**

Relatively few studies have explored the role of structural or institutional issues in the perpetuation of inequities such as the discipline gap, and those that do have tended to focus more on class-based theories (Rist, 1970; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu, 1986; Anyon, 1980). Still, we can infer certain explanations for the discipline gap from existing theories about the purpose of schooling and the purpose of discipline. Two schools of thought are particularly applicable here: (1) social reproduction theory, which addresses the overall purpose of schooling, and (2) the “hidden curriculum” of schooling, which addresses the roles and behaviors that are systematically (if unconsciously) and consistently rewarded by schools. Both of these concepts address more or less unconscious forces comprising the very fabric of our public schooling model, and to the extent that these forces remain unsurfaced or unexamined, are more likely to remain in play and thus influence teacher-student interaction.

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<sup>15</sup> I know of no teacher studies on school discipline that include teacher SES.

**Social Reproduction.** Social reproduction theory posits that students are provided with different skill sets (socialized) according to their level of power in society (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1982; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 1980). Social reproduction theorists believe that public schooling as currently constituted ensures (whether consciously or unconsciously) that the power of the dominant (white middle-class male) majority is upheld, and that those traditionally with far less power (low-SES, people of color, females) are relegated to lesser positions in society. When applying this theory with respect to disciplinary disproportion, the following is noteworthy:

- Because students of color and students from low-SES families are disciplined – and suspended and/or expelled -- more frequently than other students, and for lesser offenses, they spend less time in the classroom and less time in school, thereby reducing their time for actual learning. This in turn likely reduces their chances for high school graduation and their subsequent wage-earning potential, disproportionately relegating these students of color and from low-SES families to lesser positions in society.<sup>16</sup>
- Females are much less likely than their male counterparts to be disciplined in a school setting. Because the behavioral traits valued by public schools (see also hidden curriculum, below) include passivity, following the rules, and acceptance of authority, females are rewarded for maintaining the current status quo.

In light of the idea of schools as agents of social reproduction, Liiv (2013) found that middle-school females were disciplined for not conforming to the authority of the school and of the larger society, and were thus rewarded for remaining passive and docile

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<sup>16</sup> In many ways, the “school-to-prison-pipeline” phenomenon is essentially shorthand for social reproduction theory.

to external authority. In the same study, low-SES males and males of color were far more likely to be disciplined (and thus removed from learning opportunities in the classroom) than any other student group, on average. This left white middle-class males as the only demographic intersection that was able both to (1) exhibit behaviors that were not consistently acquiescent to authority (e.g., that demonstrated personal agency, negotiation, and self-advocacy, unlike the females in the study), and (2) remain free of the disruptions to learning that disciplinary referrals and their consequences entail (unlike males of color and/or from low-SES families). Analysis using demographic intersections, then, can surface not only deeper patterns of disciplinary disproportion, but also (hidden) privileges.

**Hidden Curriculum.** Tyack (1974) defines the “hidden curriculum” as “[t]he traits of behavior and roles expected of students which are rarely written in curriculum guides or acknowledged in the manifest objectives of the school, but which are nonetheless systematically inculcated and rewarded” (p. 49). Students who adhere to these “hidden” behavioral expectations, then, are rewarded. Some scholars have suggested that the “hidden curriculum” of our public schools is reflective of the values of the white middle-class (Jay, 2003; Raby, 2005), and that it includes characteristics such as intellectual “quiescence,” conformity, respect for authority, passivity, docility, and being “one of the crowd” (Giroux, 1977; Power & Kohlberg, 1986). Students who are not familiar with white middle-class values, then, along with those who aggressively challenge authority, are more likely to be disciplined for (mis)behavior.

In more recent years, the behaviors constituting the “hidden curriculum” have also been explicitly endorsed and cultivated (primarily in low-SES students of color) in what

have been termed “no excuses” schools (e.g., Kipp Academies, the SEED School). In these schools, students are provided explicit behavioral instruction, from tracking the teacher with their eyes as he speaks, to walking the halls in line and in silence as they change classrooms, to greeting adults with a firm handshake. Proponents of these schools – many of which boast impressive academic gains and achievement in their students – argue that safe and orderly schools provide the most optimal environment for learning and, further, that it is only by explicitly teaching middle-class values and behaviors that we can engender such academic achievement with students of color from low-SES families (Whitman, 2009). However, as we have seen, limiting our analysis to demographic dichotomies can mask deeper underlying patterns. If in addition to thinking of the hidden curriculum as encompassing white middle-class values, we expand our thinking to include gender, we see that the behavioral characteristics that inhabit the hidden curriculum (passivity, docility, and acquiescence to authority) can also be considered to be traditionally and stereotypically feminine.

Bringing gender more sharply into focus as a key component of the hidden curriculum may enable us to more clearly understand the roots of the discipline gap. What are the implications for schools that – unconsciously or not – value and reward stereotypically feminine behaviors? Studies have shown that, even before the age of 5, boys reward “stereotypically masculine” behavior in each other and punish male peers who make “feminine choices” (Langlois & Downs, 1980, and Fagot, 1985, both in Valian, 1999). In addition, boys learn early on to place primary value on the feedback and opinion of their male peers; they find the reactions of teachers and female peers “irrelevant” (Valian, 1999, p. 53). This suggests that not only are boys less likely to

adopt a model of feminine behavior, but that they will ignore or resist efforts from their (female) teachers to correct/discipline their (more masculine) behavior. In fact, boys' more "masculine" behavior in school, which includes speaking loudly, being more physically active in the classroom, and not waiting to be called on (Valian, 1999), is in direct contrast to the "feminine" behaviors and habits that support school success (e.g., sitting still, passivity) (Lopez, 2002). What this means for many boys is that they must often choose between behaving well in school and appearing feminine, or being "manly" and getting disciplined for their behavior (Ferguson, 2000).

Surfacing and acknowledging the largely feminine aspect of schools' hidden curriculum, then, as well as understanding the critical role that male peers play in boys' behaviors in school settings, should help us to understand the bind that many boys find themselves in: do they assert their masculinity, as encouraged by their male peers, or do they compromise their academic achievement? How do these dual constraints from the realms of structure and culture serve to constrain or enable the choices made by individual boys concerning their behavior during the school day? Again, we see the importance of considering all components of the ecology of discipline framework when seeking to understand the origins of the discipline gap.

Given our ecological model of discipline, it should also be noted that this model addresses an important critique of the social reproduction/hidden curriculum structural theories. Namely, the theory that schools are simply reproducing existing (unequal) class and social structures sharply minimizes and even eliminates the role of individual agency. In such a scenario, students are merely passive receptacles calmly accepting their assignments in our economy. Apple (1982) acknowledges that reproduction and

correspondence theories do not address the notion of individual autonomy, nor do they take into account the many ways in which students resist and contradict the dominant values and curriculum that they encounter in their schooling. However, the ecology of discipline model demonstrates that we need not choose one element over another as a source of unequal or unjust societal outcomes. Rather, each element of structure, culture, and agency is important to consider when seeking to understand public schooling.

At the very least, thinking of social reproduction and the hidden curriculum as structural influences at play in the disciplinary encounters that take place in schools should beg the question: what is the purpose of discipline? As mentioned previously, I believe that schools that cannot answer this question clearly, or that have not determined this purpose together as a school community, have a higher likelihood of falling prey to the unconscious hidden curriculum described above. Whether discipline is meant to punish and therefore deter (mis)behavior, or to change and/or improve student behavior, understanding and agreement on the specific student behavior sought by the school is the basic building block of an effective disciplinary system. In any effort to reduce or eliminate the discipline gap, then, it is crucial to understand what teachers and other school administrators believe about the purpose of discipline. A school with high levels of suspensions and expulsions, that also believes that discipline should serve to change student behavior, can be shown that there is little evidence to suggest that exclusionary disciplinary practices – and even detention – contribute towards any change or improvement in student behavior (Ballantine & Hammack, 2009; Bowditch, 1993; Hirschfield, 2008; Noguera, 2008; Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Such schools can then explore disciplinary practices that have proven far more effective

in changing and improving not just student behavior but overall school climate, such as restorative justice and peer mediation practices (Latimer, Dowden & Muise, 2005; Sherman & Strang, 2007; Johnson & Johnson, 1996).

### **Summary of Key Points**

Before introducing the research questions and methodology for this study, I summarize below the key issues raised thus far around existing efforts and research aimed at reducing or eliminating the discipline gap. The following points form the basis of this study's research questions and design and methodology:

- Research efforts devoted to documenting the discipline gap use have traditionally used data that (1) is limited to quantitative data from only the final steps of the disciplinary process (e.g., primarily disciplinary referral forms and suspension/expulsion data); (2) ignores the teacher's role in the disciplinary relationship by using only student data; and (3) uses relatively simplistic analysis based on demographic dichotomies rather than demographic intersections.
- Research efforts devoted to unearthing the root causes of the discipline gap have focused on either student agency, teacher-student "cultural" mismatches, or wider structural influences that are not necessarily grounded in school-based theory or data. Student agency arguments can ignore cultural and structural influences at play in school disciplinary processes. Cultural mismatch research can conflate and subsume simple demographic differences into values attributions to single-variable demographic constituencies. Structural influences such as social reproduction theory and the hidden curriculum can ignore student and teacher agency and are not necessarily grounded in quantitative data from actual school

disciplinary encounters. Addressing these elements in isolation from each other is insufficient to fully explain the origins of the discipline gap; each must be addressed and accounted for in discipline gap research.

- The role of power is not addressed in the specific context of school discipline, whether the power differential between student and teacher, or the value accorded to different demographic categories. Ignoring this vital element enables existing and unequal power arrangements to remain unchallenged and precludes the enactment of more equitable disciplinary – and even academic – outcomes for all students.

Given these limitations, it is important that research on the discipline gap incorporates the following elements:

First, such research should shift from simply documenting the existence and nature of the discipline gap to better understanding both (1) the teacher/student disciplinary encounter itself, especially the perspective and perceptions of the teacher, and (2) the interplay among the structural, cultural and individual agency influences on the discipline gap's origins and maintenance. This shift will enable the design of effective interventions for teachers and their students.

Second, research on the discipline gap should acknowledge both the relational aspect of discipline and the role of structural, cultural, and individual influences. As such, research should include data on both student and teacher disciplinary referrals (e.g., number and type of referrals received by student and issued by teacher), student and teacher demographics, and student and teacher perspectives on cultural and structural elements related to discipline. Mixed methods studies are thus the most logical design

for research on the discipline gap, since they can connect, for example, teacher attitudes with actual disciplinary referral data.

Third, if we believe that existing power arrangements are unequal, then we must include some attention to power differentials in discipline gap research. One way to do this is to gather qualitative information from teachers on their understanding of the purpose of discipline and connect this structural element to disciplinary referral data. In addition, quantitative and qualitative data on such subjective and power-driven infractions as “defiance” and “insubordination” are especially important, since they are the most common type of infractions in secondary school and arise from a fundamental power struggle between teacher and student. In this way, any patterns or correlations between teacher beliefs/attitudes and disciplinary referral levels can be identified.

### **Introducing the Research Questions**

In this dissertation, I examine whether and how differences in (1) teacher-student demographics and (2) teachers’ understanding of cultural and structural elements in discipline correlate with actual disciplinary referrals for defiance. Specifically, I ask:

1. Do demographic differences (i.e., race, gender, and experience with poverty) between teacher and student translate to different rates of disciplinary referrals for defiance?
2. How do teachers define and understand the ideal teacher-student relationship, the purpose of discipline, the nature of student defiance, and the extent of teacher and student power? Do different understandings of these elements translate to different levels of referrals for defiance?

My second question was intended to address each specific element from the ecology of discipline framework. The *ideal teacher-student relationship* focuses on the relational element of the model. The *purpose of discipline* – along with the ideal teacher-student relationship – informs the structural notions of the purpose of schooling. The *nature of student defiance* provides insight into whether and to what element – agency, culture, or structure – teachers ascribe defiant student behavior, or rejection of their authority and power as teachers. Finally, the extent of student and teacher *power* at GSMS, both current and ideal, reveals the nature and level of each teacher's sense of personal agency. I also focused my study specifically on referrals for defiance, insubordination, and disrespect (DID) precisely because these are considered power-driven infractions, and as such may serve as a key indicator of teachers' ability to negotiate and/or manage power with their students.

### III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

I conducted my study at the Gold Star Middle School (GSMS)<sup>17</sup> using a mixed-method design. To answer my first research question, I analyzed both student and teacher demographic data in conjunction with GSMS data on their disciplinary referrals for defiance for the school year 2013-14. I gathered teacher demographic data through a brief Teacher/Administrator Demographic Survey and also used the GSMS student demographic and disciplinary databases. To answer my second question, I analyzed (1) transcripts from semi-structured interviews with 51 teachers, and (2) written descriptions of each defiance incident from the disciplinary referral forms submitted by the referring teacher. Table 1 outlines each data source used for the study, along with its corresponding data points. In this chapter, I provide detail on the design and methodology used to answer my research questions.

<Insert Table 1 here>

#### Research Site

Gold Star Middle School (GSMS) is an urban middle school (grades 6-8) serving 1,013 students and located in a major metropolitan city in the Northeast U.S. Eighty-four percent (84%) of these students are eligible for free/reduced lunch,<sup>18</sup> and 94% are students of color (66% Hispanic, 19% Black, 6% Asian, 3% Multi-Race). The students are almost equally divided by gender, with 509 females and 504 males. The GSMS

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<sup>17</sup> Gold Star Middle School is a pseudonym used in order to ensure the confidentiality of the school and its teachers, students, and administrators

<sup>18</sup> While the official free/reduced lunch eligibility statistic given for GSMS by the district is 84%, in actuality only 6 students returned documentation certifying their ability to pay full price for lunch in 2013-14. Students who did not return eligibility forms were classified as having the ability to pay, but in reality no students at GSMS actually pay for lunch.

teaching staff and administration ( $N=72$ ) is relatively diverse, comprised of 65% females and 35% males, with 20% teachers of color (14% African American and 6% Latino/a).

GSMS is a Title I school ranked “Typical” for its academic performance and student achievement.<sup>19</sup> The school district in which GSMS is located assigns students to neighborhood schools, although it does allow parents to rank their choices from among these schools. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the median household income for the area in which GSMS is located is \$39,137, with 27.4% of families with children living below the poverty line. Sixty-three percent (63%) of residents are people of color and 70.7% have attained at least a high-school diploma. A local data-analytic organization, which organizes data by neighborhood rather than by Census tract, reports that in the three neighborhoods that surround GSMS, less than 44% of residents have a high school diploma, and 33% of residents live below the poverty level. In 2013, 27% of all violent crime in the city occurred in the two police districts that sandwich GSMS.

In 2012-13, GSMS had 847 suspensions, the second lowest of the six public middle schools in its district, but 6th highest in the state across 47 comparable middle schools and nearly three times the state average.<sup>20</sup> In the 2012-13 annual statewide survey, 56.8% of students surveyed<sup>21</sup> said that they agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement, “All students [at GSMS] are punished equally if they break the same rule” (across the state, 62.7% agreed). Only 59.3% (strongly) agreed that, “Discipline at [GSMS] is fair” (67.6% agreed statewide). A teacher survey conducted at GSMS in

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<sup>19</sup> The State uses a 6-tiered system of ranking its schools across measures of performance. The highest level is Commended, followed by Leading, Typical, Warning, Focus, and Priority, the lowest level.

<sup>20</sup> State Department of Education, 2011-12 data

<sup>21</sup> The 2012-13 survey had an 81.8% student participation rate.

December 2013 ( $n=41$ ) found that 68% of respondents identified “defiance” and “disrespect” as the biggest behavioral issues at the school.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

In the Fall of 2013, I met with the GSMS Principal and subsequently the School Improvement Team and received permission to conduct my study. In December 2013, I met with the entire school staff during their weekly meeting, described the proposed study, and was privy to a spirited discussion on the disciplinary climate and issues most important and relevant to the school. I remained in regular contact with the GSMS principal and the school data administrator throughout the IRB and school district study approval process.

In the Spring of 2014, I launched the study at the GSMS weekly staff meeting. Prior to this meeting, I assigned a randomized study identification number to each teacher and administrator in the school in accordance with FERPA requirements. At the meeting, I described the purpose of the study, the study procedures and methods, what their participation entailed, and how participants’ confidentiality would be maintained. I distributed a packet to each teacher that included 2 copies of the consent form (see Appendix A), and the Teacher Demographic Survey (see Appendix B). The Demographic Survey asked teachers to indicate their years of teaching experience, both at GSMS and in total, as well as their race, gender, and experience with poverty.<sup>22</sup> Those

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<sup>22</sup> Because I was interested in demographic differences between teacher and student, and because virtually all GSMS students live below the poverty line, I asked teachers whether they had ever had experience with poverty (which I defined simply as food and/or shelter insecurity) rather than their socio-economic status. All GSMS teachers’ current socio-economic status can be inferred as middle-class given that the base salary for teachers in the district is well above the poverty line. I believe that teachers’ self-reports of their past experience with poverty are sufficient to determine difference or no difference with students, since it is the teachers’ perception of this difference that ultimately influences their relationships with students who live in poverty.

choosing to participate in the study completed the Demographic Survey; those that chose not to participate in the study left all forms blank.

Of the 50 teachers and administrators that attended this initial meeting (out of 72 total), 38 signed consent forms agreeing to participate in both the survey and interview, and 12 agreed to the survey only. In the weeks following the study launch meeting, I contacted each teacher who had not attended in order to ensure that they had the opportunity to participate in the study. By the end of the school year in June, I had interviewed a total of 65 teachers and administrators (51 teachers and 14 administrators), achieving a 92% interview response rate.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, only 6 teachers did not take part in the interview portion of the study,<sup>24</sup> but three of these did complete the demographic survey.<sup>25</sup>

Immediately after collecting the surveys, I met with the school data administrator in order to remove teacher names from the surveys and replace them with their study ID number. This same procedure was followed after every day of data collection at the school (e.g., for interview notes and audio recordings). The code sheet, the consent forms, and the survey and interview data were kept in separate, secure locations throughout the life of the study.

Interviews averaged 40 minutes in length (ranging from 20 to 75 minutes) and were conducted from April through June of 2014 (see Appendix C for interview

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<sup>23</sup> 9 of the 12 teachers who initially declined to be interviewed approached me after a few weeks of my presence at the school and asked to be included in the study.

<sup>24</sup> One of these 6 teachers went on leave prior to the April CPT meeting; while I did interview her long-term substitute, I ultimately decided to delete both the teacher and the substitute from the study, since they were the only teachers who were not consistently with the same group of students throughout the 2013-14 school year.

<sup>25</sup> Demographic data on the remaining three teachers was based on the principal's description of their race and gender, and the assumption of middle-class SES based on average teacher's salary in the GSMS district.

protocol). The interviews were structured to gather data about: (1) teachers' overall relationships with students, as well as how they would describe the "ideal" teacher-student relationship; (2) their understanding of the purpose of discipline, and their experience with discipline in general and defiance specifically; and (3) how they understood the scope and limits of teacher and student power and authority both currently and in an ideal setting. Also at the end of each interview, I asked participants to fill out a power grid (see Appendix D). This power grid was broken into 4 quadrants, with teacher power on the horizontal axis, and student power on the vertical axis. On each axis, teachers identified, on a scale from 1-10, how much power they believed students or teachers currently had at GSMS, as well as how much power teachers and students should ideally have.

After each interview, I wrote a brief reflective memo that captured my observations and thoughts about the interview process and the interviewee. During my drive home after each of the 27 days I spent at the school, I recorded (and later transcribed) my overall thoughts about my experience as I conducted interviews, observed student-teacher discussions and exchanges in the classroom and the hallways, attended various school events such as band and drama performances and graduation, and spoke with teachers and administrators in the hallways, the mailroom, and the library. I also wrote periodic analytic memos across all interviews and all days to capture my preliminary interpretations of the data and/or any patterns that I saw emerging.

At the end of the school year (June 2014), I received student demographic data that included, for each student, information on their grade level, gender, race, and

academic tier<sup>26</sup> (which included special education status). I also gathered information on the grade levels and academic tiers taught by each teacher from the GSMS staff in the main office. A separate student list was provided to me in Fall 2014 indicating student free/reduced lunch status. Prior to my receipt of this data, I generated a random and unique study identification number for each student (as already done for the teachers and administrators). This unique number was substituted for each student name so that no identifiable student data was released.

Originally, I had planned to use the school's disciplinary database in order to identify, for each student, the date(s) of any defiance disciplinary incident(s) along with the name of the referring teacher. The disciplinary database used by GSMS is a web-based information system (SWIS, or School Wide Information System) that was designed to support a PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports) strategy. The disciplinary referral forms (see Appendix E) used by the school (and which are, in fact, consistent district-wide) are meant to parallel the fields of the SWIS database. The standard fields used on the form and in the database include the reason for the conduct referral (20 category options are provided), the location of the incident, the perceived motivation/trigger of the student, others involved, and any intervention prior to the referral. Once populated, the database can then be used to generate specific, pre-determined reports concerning student behavior patterns, such as the most frequent problem behaviors and when and where problem behaviors are most likely to occur. However, a number of issues that clearly compromised the integrity of the data from this

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<sup>26</sup> GSMS designates students into multiple tiers according to their academic ability: regular education, advanced academic, and special education or intervention status.

database became apparent the more I learned about not just the disciplinary process in use at GSMS, but the limitations of the database itself.

To begin with, the school relied on a single teacher – the data administrator -- to enter all of its disciplinary data. This teacher was allotted one hour per week for this task. Given that the school generated from 15-20 disciplinary referral forms per day, and that entering each form took 2-3 minutes, the teacher, understandably, was unable to keep current with disciplinary data entry. By April 2014, when I began interviewing teachers, the disciplinary referral forms were backed up to the beginning of January. By May it became clear that if I wanted access to the discipline data before the end of the school year, I would need to assist the data administrator in entering the referral forms. I received permission from the Principal to assist in the data input process. In doing so, the limitations of the database became clear.

Most challenging was the fact that the database would allow only one entry under the category “reason for referral,” while teachers frequently chose and checked off from two to six categories at a time to describe the reason for their disciplinary referral. This meant that, if more than one reason was indicated, the data administrator was responsible for choosing which reason to enter into the database. Because of this issue alone, the data was to some extent compromised, but so long as only one person entered the data, any biases were at least consistent. When I began to assist the data administrator, therefore, I attempted to “perfectly replicate” her biases.

According to the data administrator, her rationale for choosing a particular “reason for referral” when more than one was provided was based on the seriousness of the offense; that is, the most serious offense listed was the one that was entered. Before

entering any data myself, then, the data administrator and I ranked the reasons for referral in terms of their seriousness (e.g., weapon most serious, drug/alcohol offenses second, physical assault next, etc.) and entered the most serious offense in the database. This meant that while a teacher might have checked defiance as one of several reasons for the referral (and perhaps even intended it as the primary reason for the referral), if any more serious infraction was checked, “defiance” would not be entered.<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, this meant that many referral forms that *could* have been coded as defiance were not, rendering the SWIS database incomplete in accounting for all defiance referrals at the school.

Other issues that compromised the integrity of the data in the database included the following:

- Any students with special education status triggered an additional set of data entry requirements in the database, beginning with a special education code that was not provided to the data administrator. As a result, no students with special education status were entered into the SWIS database. This omission was especially problematic since research shows that special-education students tend to be over-represented in disciplinary referrals in public schools (US DOE, 2014; CSG, 2011; Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

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<sup>27</sup> Two points of clarification are needed here: First, the disciplinary referral form itself did indicate that only one reason for referral was to be chosen, but in talking with teachers it became obvious that this limitation simply was not reasonable in actual practice. Many teachers did not have the time to prioritize multiple infractions, or could not disentangle one from another, and therefore continued to check multiple reasons even while knowing they were only being asked for one. Second, ideally the data administrator and I would have asked the teachers themselves to choose one reason over all others; however, the time involved in tracking down the teachers, and asking them to remember one incident when for some of them they were handling multiple incidents per day, was beyond our capacity to do so.

- While the disciplinary referral form that GSMS used collapsed defiance, insubordination, and disrespect into one category (e.g., “defiance/insubordination/disrespect” or DID), the SWIS database used two categories (“defiance/insubordination” and “disrespect”). As a result, all incidents categorized as DID were entered into the database as “defiance/insubordination,” unless the teacher used the word “disrespect” in her description of the incident. This may have resulted in incidents that the teacher would have categorized primarily as “disrespect” being entered into the “defiance” category, and vice versa. Again, the integrity of the data was compromised by this limitation.

In lieu of using the SWIS database for data regarding DID referrals, then, I manually sorted through each of the written referral forms submitted for the school year 2013-14, pulling aside any form that had “defiance/insubordination/disrespect” checked as a reason for referral. These forms were then photocopied, and each student and teacher name was blacked out and replaced with their corresponding unique study identification numbers. It is these individual Student Conduct Referral Forms, then, rather than the SWIS database, that served as the basis for the dataset used for the quantitative portion of this study. Using the Student Conduct Referral Forms, I first identified, for each student, the total annual number of defiance referrals they received from each teacher. I then supplemented these 524 unique student-teacher pairings with the teacher demographic information from the Teacher/Administrator Demographic Survey, and the student demographic information from the GSMS student database.

### **Data Cleaning**

In developing the final dataset for use in the quantitative analysis, and that also served as the basis for determining which teachers had the highest and lowest number of defiance referrals across a number of key parameters, I made several important decisions. These decisions, which are outlined below, were made in regards to certain deletions from the dataset as well as how to handle missing data.

As just discussed, the raw dataset on DID referrals for the school year 2013-14 was compiled from the individual Student Conduct Referral sheets submitted to the data administrator. Because the ultimate aim of this study was to understand the perspective of teachers, particularly in relation to DID and discipline, I deleted from the dataset any referrals from school administrators, staff, classroom and hallway aides (whose assignments varied weekly), and substitutes. I also deleted referrals from one teacher who went on leave in the middle of the year, as well as those from her long-term substitute, since all other teachers had a full year of contact with the same students. These deleted referrals totaled 94, or approximately 9% of the total number of original DID referrals (1,016).

The dataset also required demographic information from both teachers and students. Of the original 258 students who received DID referrals over the 2013-14 school year, I was unable to locate school records for only 4 students. The five DID referrals associated with these students were therefore deleted from the database.

### **Data Analysis**

*RQ1: Do demographic differences (i.e., race, gender, and experience with poverty) between teacher and student translate to different rates of disciplinary referrals for defiance?*

## Dataset and Sample

Appendix F provides an overview and structure of the dataset used for this analysis. My sample for this portion of the study consists of all teachers who issued disciplinary referrals for Defiance/Insubordination/Disrespect (DID)<sup>28</sup> in the school year 2013-14 ( $n=50$ ). The dataset took into account all student-teacher pairs at GSMS that together generated a DID referral ( $n=524$ ). Of the students in this group ( $n=254$ ), 100% are eligible for free/reduced lunch, 94.5% are students of color, and 69.7% are male. Of the teachers in this group ( $n=50$ ), 30% have experienced poverty at some point in their lives, 14% are teachers of color, and 36% are male. In Table 2, I summarize the demographic characteristics of both the students and teachers in this sample. In Table 3, I present the frequency distribution of DID referrals received by student and issued by teacher.

<Insert Table 2 here>

<Insert Table 3 here>

## Measures

**Outcome Variable.** The outcome for this research question records the total number of DID disciplinary referrals issued by each teacher.

**Question Predictors.** My principal question predictor is demographic difference, which I represented using a vector of dummy variables to account for the effects of demographic difference between teacher and student with regards to race, gender, and experience with poverty. Each element of this vector distinguished whether the student is

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<sup>28</sup> As stated previously, GSMS uses a disciplinary referral form that is standardized for all schools across their district. On this referral form, “defiance, insubordination, and disrespect” (DID) are grouped together as one of 20 types of disciplinary infractions for which students can be referred.

demographically different from the referring teacher with respect to the particular measure (=1) or not (=0). For example, a white student who is referred by a teacher of color was coded as “1” in the dummy variable for race; a white student referred by a white teacher was coded as “0.” This vector told me whether and which demographic variable(s) difference(s), if any, accounted for higher numbers of DID referrals.

**Covariates.** I included five categorical variables in the model. The first categorical variable accounted for the effects of a student’s grade level, since prior research suggests that it may moderate the rate of disciplinary infractions (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Wu *et al.*, 1982). The second categorical variable accounted for a student’s academic tier. GSMS designates students into multiple tiers according to their academic ability: regular education, advanced academic, and special education or intervention status. Student special education status in particular is generally associated with higher rates of disciplinary infractions (US DOE, 2014; CSG, 2011; Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

The third categorical variable accounted for a teacher’s level of experience. Prior research suggests that teachers with less experience discipline students more frequently, more harshly, and for lesser offenses, and are more likely to rely on stereotypes and bias when making disciplinary decisions (Kokkinos, Panayiotou & Davazoglou, 2004; Martini-Scully, DeBray & Kehle, 2000; Noltemayer, Kunesh, Hostutler, Frato & Sarr-Kerman, 2012; Salvano-Pardieu *et al.*, 2009). The fourth categorical variable accounted for the grade level taught by each teacher. Because some teachers teach across multiple grade levels, I used a vector of dummy variables to account for these effects. Each element of this vector distinguished whether the teacher taught in a particular grade level

(=1) or not (=0). Finally, the fifth categorical variable accounted for the academic tier of students taught by a teacher.

### **Data-Analytic Procedure**

Because my outcome was a count variable that is log-normally distributed, I used the method of linear regression analysis with a log-transformed outcome to address my first research question. I fit linear regression models of the following general form:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Log}_e(\text{Total DID Referrals}) = & \\ & \alpha + \beta_1 \text{RACE DIFFERENCE} + \beta_2 \text{GENDER DIFFERENCE} \\ & + \beta_3 \text{SOCIOECONOMIC DIFFERENCE} \\ & + \beta_4 \text{STUDENT GRADE LEVEL} + \beta_5 \text{STUDENT ACADEMIC TIER} \\ & + \beta_6 \text{TEACHER EXPERIENCE} + \beta_7 \text{TEACHER GRADE TAUGHT} \\ & + \beta_8 \text{TEACHER ACADEMIC TIER} + \varepsilon \end{aligned}$$

If estimates of parameters  $\beta_1$ ,  $\beta_2$ , and  $\beta_3$  are positive and statistically significant, then I can conclude that the log count of DID disciplinary referrals is higher for students who are demographically different than their teachers with regards to race, gender, and experience with poverty, than for others. To this generic model, I added selected statistical interactions to test whether the impact of the principal question predictors were moderated by the presence of each other, and whether their joint effects differed by student grade, student special education status, and teacher experience.

*RQ2: How do teachers define and understand the ideal teacher-student relationship, the purpose of discipline, the nature of student defiance, and the extent of teacher and student power at GSMS? Do different understandings of these elements translate to different levels of referrals for defiance?*

### **Dataset and Sample**

My sample for this portion of the study consists of 51 teachers. To provide context, Table 4 provides the demographic characteristics of the GSMS staff as a whole ( $N=71$ ), composed of 57 teachers and 14 administrators and staff. Table 4 also provides demographic information specifically for the administration and staff ( $n=14$ ) (e.g., librarian, school social worker, guidance counselors, etc.), the teachers included in the DID dataset ( $n=50$ ), and the teachers who were interviewed and thus included in this sample ( $n=51$ ).

<Insert Table 4 here>

### **Data-Analytic Procedure**

To address the first part of this research question (“How do teachers define and understand the ideal teacher-student relationship, the purpose of discipline, the nature of student defiance, and the extent of teacher and student power at GSMS?”), I focused on the teacher interviews. As previously described, the interviews were structured to focus on four key questions in order to address each specific element from the ecology of discipline framework. The *ideal teacher-student relationship* focuses on the relational element of the model. Along with the *purpose of discipline*, it also informs the structural notions of the purpose of schooling. The *nature of student defiance* provides insight into which realm of influence – agency, culture, or structure – teachers ascribe defiant student behavior. Finally, the extent of student and teacher *power* at GSMS, both current and ideal, reveals the nature and level of each teacher’s sense of personal agency.

I began the analysis, then, by blind coding the individual interview transcripts using broad etic codes from the ecology of discipline framework, as follows:

- Individual Agency (Teacher, Student)
- Culture (Social Realm, Values/Beliefs)
- Structure (Societal, School/District)
- Race/Gender/Experience with Poverty
- Teacher-Student Relationship (Learning/Teaching Environment, Relational Elements, Discipline)
- Power/Authority

Next, I used a grounded theory approach within these coded sections of the interviews in order to allow more nuanced codes to emerge from the data itself (Charmaz, 2006). Appendix G provides the detailed codebook developed and used for this part of the analysis.

After coding the first 3-5 interviews/questions, I trained two colleagues in my coding schema and asked them to code several interview questions in order to develop a high measure of inter-rater reliability. Initial inter-reliability from the original broad etic codes was 70 percent; after meeting together several times to discuss and refine the codebook, final inter-rater reliability (including both etic and emic codes) stood at 85 percent. I also recoded several interviews halfway through the analytic process to assess my own intra-rater reliability and to ensure consistency and accuracy in both the coding process and the analytic results. Rather than reading through each interview in its entirety, by teacher, interviews were read and coded by each question for each group (e.g., all of the responses to the question about the purpose of discipline, or why students are defiant, etc.). In this way I was better able to note the effectiveness of my existing coding scheme and develop consistency around any further emic coding.

After the coding of all questions was completed, I organized my data within a single Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet included, for each teacher, the codes for each interview question as well as the demographic information previously noted in Table 4. The spreadsheet format allowed me to conduct cross-case analyses and identify differences and similarities across units of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It also allowed me to “hide” the demographic data on each teacher and analyze final codes blind to any identifying information about the teacher.

With the teacher interviews, I looked specifically for any patterns (differences or similarities) for each interview question and each code across teacher race, gender, experience with poverty, level of teaching experience, and number of annual DID referrals. I also looked for patterns by each demographic and disciplinary variable across each interview question and each code. Finally, I looked for patterns according to demographic intersections and noted any additional patterns or significant differences from my single demographic variable analyses. In this way, I was able to identify patterns in teacher thinking about teacher-student relationships, discipline, defiance, and power by each of my study variables and in combination with each other. To supplement the power question analysis, I calculated teacher responses to the power grid to look for patterns across demographic characteristics in how teachers ranked their own power and that of their students.

After analysis across each unit of data, I wrote an analytic memo that summarized any patterns I found. These analytic memos were then used to identify broader patterns at work across disciplinary and demographic variables. I used this same general analytic

process in reviewing my field notes and reflective memos related to the teacher interview process.

To address the second part of this research question (“Do different understandings of these elements translate to different levels of referrals for defiance?”), I focused on the teachers with the most and least DID referrals. The most basic assumption underlying this distinction is that teachers with the most DID referrals have the most challenges with classroom management and relationships with students, as defiance implies that the teacher’s power and authority is disregarded. The corollary to this assumption is that teachers with the fewest DID referrals have the most well-managed classrooms and fewest relationship challenges with students. These assumptions, while perhaps true in general, are overly simplistic.

First of all, as we saw in Chapter II, disciplinary referrals (and DID referrals in particular) tend to increase in middle school. Teachers may thus have elevated levels of DID referrals simply because more students are developmentally prone to testing limits with adults – and not because of their classroom management or student relationship skills. Teachers with high levels of DID referrals may also, for example, have a particularly challenging group of students in one or more of their classes. Teachers with low DID referral levels, on the other hand, may have just stopped addressing student defiance in their classrooms altogether.

In order to account for this complexity, I developed a composite variable across three parameters to identify the 12 teachers with both the highest and lowest scores (top and bottom 25%). The composite variable was comprised of three components:

1. The total number of annual DID referrals issued by the teacher;

2. the percentage of these referrals that were for multiple DID referrals for a single student; and
3. the average number of teacher DID referrals per student.

This composite variable takes into account how many of each teacher's DID referrals were single referrals for a student. In doing so, I assumed that a single teacher-student defiance referral over the course of a school year was due to basic adolescent development or to one or both teacher or student simply having an off day. Multiple defiance referrals between a teacher-student pair over the course of the year, however, were assumed to indicate a particularly challenging relationship between teacher and student, or at least one in which the teacher was having more difficulty than normal in establishing and maintaining his or her power and authority.<sup>29</sup> Because the multiple-referral adjustment is used in conjunction with high overall DID referrals, it is intended to identify teachers who have both high annual DID referrals and multiple-referral students. Since the median number of annual DID referrals per teacher at GSMS is only 10, this means that teachers with, say, even two or three students with recurring defiance issues do not qualify for the top 25% of high-DID teachers.

The composite variable also takes into account the average number of DID referrals per student. A teacher with one or two classes with a particularly challenging set of students, therefore, has a lower composite score when taking into account the number of DID referrals issued across students in all of his classes.

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<sup>29</sup> Because such recurring issues of defiance with a particular student or students also lead to less time spent on teaching and learning in the classroom, another factor to take into account in future studies would be student academic outcomes (e.g., percentage of students deemed 'below proficiency' in the teacher's particular subject). This factor would be particularly helpful in making distinctions between teachers with low DID referral rates who had simply stopped addressing student defiance and resistance in the classroom, and those that maintained a consistent and positive learning environment for all students in their classroom.

Even with these adjustments, however, the composite variable used in this study cannot and does not capture all of the complexity inherent in classroom management and teacher/student relationships. Nevertheless, it provides a better measure of overall high and low teacher defiance referral patterns than simply relying on the number of annual DID referrals.

Table 5 provides information on the parameters used in the composite measure for teachers with both the 12 highest (top 25%) and 12 lowest (bottom 25%) composite scores for DID referrals at GSMS. Table 6 provides information on the demographic and disciplinary characteristics of these two groups of teachers.

<Insert Table 5 here>

<Insert Table 6 here>

Once I identified these teachers, I looked for patterns in coding across their interviews in order to identify any differences in their understanding of the ideal teacher/student relationship, the purpose of discipline, the nature of student defiance, and the extent of teacher and student power at GSMS.

#### **IV. FINDINGS: DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TEACHER AND STUDENT IN DID REFERRALS**

Of particular interest to researchers who focus on the discipline gap is the role that demographic differences between teacher and student might play in the frequency of referrals. This is particularly true for DID referrals, as they are considered to be more subject to interpretation by the teacher -- and thus more subjective -- than, say, possession of a drugs or a weapon, or physical aggression and fighting (Skiba, *et al.*, 2002).

In my review of the literature on the school discipline gap in Chapter II, I argued that the structural theories about the gap's origins, as well as the "cultural mismatch" research, share a common, underlying premise. This premise is three-fold. First, demographic differences imply attendant "cultural" differences that make a teacher more prone to misunderstand and make false, subjective assumptions about student behavior, among other things. Second, the more demographically -- and thus culturally -- different a teacher is from a student, the more likely a teacher is to make such assumptions. Finally, these assumptions by the teacher ultimately lead to higher rates of disciplinary referrals for behavioral infractions.

This underlying premise carries particular weight because of two related facts:

1. Young men of color who experience poverty are those most often and most harshly disciplined, and in disproportionate numbers (Rabrenovic & Levin, 2003; Zhang, Katsiyannis & Herbst, 2004); and
2. White, middle-class, female teachers (the most demographically different from this group) make up the majority of our teaching force (Picower, 2009; NEA, 2011).

The nature of the data collected at GSMS provides a unique opportunity to explore this issue, since the dataset includes demographic information for students and for teachers, and also links referring teacher with student for each disciplinary referral. What we would expect to see, if the “demographic difference” premise described above holds, is that (1) the more demographic differences between teacher and student, the higher the number of DID referrals issued by the teacher, and (2) if young men of color are issued disproportionately more DID referrals than other student groups, then teachers who are white, middle-class, and female, will issue disproportionately more of such referrals.

In Table 7, I present a taxonomy of fitted regression models that display the fitted relationship between the total annual log-count of DID disciplinary referrals received by a student and whether or not there was a demographic difference between the student and the referring teacher as a function of their gender, race, and experience with poverty.<sup>30</sup> In this table, in Model 1, I display the fitted unconditional model, which contains no predictors. In Model 1, I describe the log-count of total annual defiance referrals as a function of difference between student and teacher with regards to gender, race, and experience with poverty, without accounting for effects of grade level or academic tier with respect to either student or teacher. In Model 2, I introduce the fixed effects of teacher grade level taught.<sup>31</sup> In Model 3, I present a fitted model that adds the main effects of teacher/student demographic differences in gender, race, and experience with

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<sup>30</sup> It is important to keep in mind that these results are specific to teachers that do, in fact, issue DID referrals, and that not all GSMS teachers issued DID referrals over the school year 2013-14.

<sup>31</sup> Because none of the following effects had a significant impact on total annual DID referrals, they were eliminated from the model: student grade level, academic tier, and special education status; and teacher experience and teaching grades 6 and/or 7.

poverty to my control variable. In Model 4, I illustrate the relationship among the key predictors and DID referrals by including a key interaction term.

<Insert Table 7 here>

Inspection of parameter estimates from fitted Model 4 indicate that, in general and on average, the log-count of total annual DID referrals is higher when student and teacher differ by race (3.908,  $p < .001$ ) and by gender (3.393,  $p < .01$ ) and lower when student and teacher have different experiences with poverty (-0.979,  $p < .01$ ). On average, and controlling for gender and experience with poverty, when teacher and student differ by race, the number of total annual DID referrals issued by the teacher is 49.8 times the number issued when teacher and student do not differ by race. On average, and controlling for race and experience with poverty, when teacher and student differ by gender, the number of total annual DID referrals issued by the teacher is 29.8 times the number issued when teacher and student do not differ by gender. On average, and controlling for race and gender, when teacher and student have different experiences with poverty, the number of total annual DID referrals issued by the teacher is 0.38 times – or 62% -- less than the number issued when teacher and student have the same experience with poverty.<sup>32</sup>

Model 4 further demonstrates that there exists a statistically significant interaction between teacher/student difference in race and teacher/student difference in gender (-3.951,  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that total annual DID referrals may be somewhat lower when there are differences in both race and gender between teacher and student, than when there are differences only by race or only by gender. Grade level taught by teacher also

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<sup>32</sup> Because all GSMS students are eligible for free/reduced lunch, the significance of this finding is limited to middle-class teachers and students from low-SES families.

has a moderating effect on the number of total annual DID referrals ( $-0.619, p < 0.05$ ). GSMS Grade 8 teachers, in general and on average, have 54% less DID referrals than Grade 6 and Grade 7 teachers.

Contrary to what is suggested by the “demographic difference” theory on the origins of the discipline gap, having more demographic differences between student and teacher does not always translate into higher numbers of DID referrals – at least at GSMS. In Figure 4, I display the fitted results for 4 prototypical scenarios in which teacher and student differ by race and/or by gender with respect to their predicted total annual DID referrals. We see in this figure the impacts on annual DID referrals resulting from differences between teacher in student in race only (0.31 annual referrals with no difference, 15.42 with difference) and in gender only (0.31 no difference, 9.21 with difference). We also see in this figure that when teacher and student differ by both race and gender, a teacher issues fewer (0.96 times) annual DID referrals (8.83) than when teacher and student differ only by gender (9.21). So demographic differences between teacher and student do matter, at least with respect to race and gender – but their effects are not additive.

<Insert Figure 4 here>

Again returning to the premise that the school discipline gap is driven by demographic differences between white, middle-class female teachers and young men of color and who have experience with poverty, let us look more closely at those specific populations at GSMS. Tables 8 and 9 illustrate the number of DID referrals issued by teachers and received by students, respectively. As seen in these tables, white teachers issued 12% more DID referrals than expected ( $p < 0.001$ ), female teachers 1% more than

expected, and middle-class teachers 27% less than expected ( $p<0.001$ ). As a group, white, middle-class female teachers issued 24% less DID referrals than expected ( $p<0.001$ ). Students of color received 2% fewer DID referrals than expected ( $p<0.05$ ), and male students 30% more than expected ( $p<0.001$ ). As a group, male students of color received 40% more DID referrals than expected ( $p<0.001$ ). This data raises doubt about the premise that the more demographically different the teacher is from the student – specifically white middle-class teachers and their male, low-SES students of color – the more DID referrals.

<Insert Table 8 here>

<Insert Table 9 here>

While the final fitted model indicates that differences between teacher and student with regards to their experience with poverty is negligible (0.38 times fewer DID referrals than with no difference), this result needs to be understood in its full context. Because all of the students at GSMS have experience with poverty (i.e., are eligible for free-reduced lunch), only the middle-class teachers at GSMS are different from students on this measure, and thus middle-class teachers drive the results. As seen in Table 8, middle-class teachers do, in fact, issue 27% fewer DID referrals than expected. Teachers who have experience with poverty, on the other hand, issue 58% more referrals than expected ( $p<0.001$ ). With respect to experience with poverty, then, demographic similarity, and not difference, leads to more DID referrals.

The results of the quantitative analysis make clear that, when looking to understand the contribution of student and teacher demographics to DID referrals, it is important to take into consideration both the demographics of the teacher, and the

demographic difference between teacher and student. At GSMS, we see that race difference matters (teacher issues 49.8 times more referrals if teacher and student differ by race), and teacher race matters (white teachers issue significantly more DID referrals than teachers of color). Gender difference matters (teacher issues 29.8 times more referrals if teacher and student differ by race), but teacher gender does not matter (both male and female teachers issue close to expected numbers of referrals). Difference in experience with poverty matters only slightly (teachers issue 0.38 fewer referrals if teacher and student differ by poverty experience), but teacher experience with poverty matters a great deal (teachers with poverty experience issue significantly more referrals than middle-class teachers).

Further, I have shown that demographic differences between teacher and student at GSMS do not necessarily lead to higher levels of referrals for defiance, insubordination, and disrespect (“DID”). In particular, analysis of DID referrals at GSMS does not advance the theory that demographic differences between teacher and student are behind the discipline gap for male students of color from low-SES families. At GSMS, for example, middle-class teachers are 27% ( $p < 0.001$ ) less likely to issue DID referrals than expected, and white middle-class teachers 25% less likely ( $p < 0.001$ ) – even as referrals for male students of color at GSMS are 40% higher than expected ( $p < 0.001$ ). If demographic differences between teacher and student do not fully explain higher rates of DID referrals, then teacher views on the nature of student relationships, defiance, and power warrant exploration.

## V. FINDINGS: HIGH- AND LOW-DID TEACHERS: TEACHER/STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS, STUDENT DEFIANCE, AND THE NATURE OF POWER

In this chapter, I describe the ways in which GSMS teachers with the highest and the lowest annual DID referrals (“high-DID” and “low-DID” teachers) understand their relationship with students, discipline and defiance, and the power of both teacher and student. It is important to clarify at the outset that these differences, while sometimes significant, represent general trends and patterns only: no one high- or low-DID teacher exhibits every characteristic or only the characteristics described in the portraits that follow. In Table 10, I present a summary of the significant findings from my coding and analysis of the high- and low-DID teacher interviews.<sup>33</sup>

Overall, the differences between the high- and low-DID teachers are substantial. High-DID teachers characterize relationships with students as *either* mutual sharing of personal issues *or* as focused exclusively on academic outcomes. Students, rather than teachers, are seen as having primary responsibility for developing and maintaining these relationships. Low-DID teachers, on the other hand, describe their relationships with students as a balance between *both* the personal *and* academic components. Low-DID teachers maintain strong boundaries with their students when providing them with support around personal issues, while at the same time holding high expectations for student learning and academic support, which are at the core of their relationship.

High-DID teachers also focus more on their own needs in the classroom: for example, they see discipline as a primary means of improving their *teaching environment* and making teaching easier or more comfortable for them. High-DID teachers describe

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<sup>33</sup> Due to the small sample size of the high- and low-DID teachers ( $n=24$ ), I used Fisher’s Exact Test statistic rather than the  $\chi^2$  statistic to determine significance.

their students in adversarial terms, and yet seek to be respected, understood, and liked by their students. These factors seem to increase the high-DID teachers' sense of isolation, which they most often express by invoking the lack of support they feel from their students' parents, the GSMS administration, the local school district, and the students themselves.

Low-DID teachers, in contrast, focus more on the needs of their students in the classroom; they see discipline as a means of improving the students' *learning environment*. Low-DID teachers describe the importance of understanding their students – the challenges they face at home, for example, or of simply going through adolescence – but are clear that they seek neither understanding from, or friendship with, their students. They also continue to hold students to high standards and expectations, for both academic and behavioral outcomes. Above all, low-DID teachers seek to develop relationships with their students that include respect, honesty, and care, and to develop a safe, engaging and enjoyable academic experience for students and for themselves.

The clearest distinction between the high- and low-DID teachers is their approach to responsibility for their students' disciplinary and academic outcomes. High-DID teachers rarely, if ever, invoke their specific responsibilities as teachers for their students' learning or behavior in their classrooms. Instead, they ascribe student defiance to every realm of the ecology of discipline – students (agency), home and family (culture), and school and district (structure) – except the teacher-student relationship. Low-DID teachers speak in great detail about their specific responsibilities as teachers, especially to ensure an effective learning environment for their students, but also to develop strong personal relationships with their students. They ascribe student defiance primarily to

problems in the teacher/student relationship and see themselves as having not just the power but the responsibility to impact student behavior.

An especially intriguing finding in the interviews with high- and low-DID teachers is the strong connection between this sense of responsibility and power. High-DID teachers, who exhibit a distant sense of responsibility for student outcomes, report a correspondingly low sense of power relative to their students: students have more power than they do. Low-DID teachers, who assume primary responsibility for student outcomes, report that they have more power than their students. This power is strongest in their own classrooms, where they have the time to develop and maintain strong relationships. Low personal responsibility corresponds to low personal power; high personal responsibility corresponds to high personal power.

Also interesting is the finding that low-DID teachers express being uncomfortable with – and even have distaste for -- the word *power*. High-DID teachers have no such qualms when discussing their view of the inappropriateness of students having more power than teachers. This difference stems from a fundamentally different way of understanding the nature of power on the part of high- and low-DID teachers at GSMS. High-DID teachers' sense of frustration around their lack of power indicates that they view power as generally *hierarchical* in nature: as teachers, power is imparted from above (the structure of school and district) and should be respected from below (students). In their eyes, power at GSMS is wielded inappropriately when administrators do not impose consistent consequences on students, the district maintains a policy of social promotion, and students do not respect the authority of the teacher's role.

Low-DID teachers generally view power as *relational* in nature: power is given and conferred through personal relationships, whether between teacher and student, teacher and parent, or teacher and administrator. The teacher's authority is activated by taking on primary responsibility for the teacher/student relationship, beginning with setting and maintaining the boundaries and expectations of the relationship. Only when these boundaries are set and maintained can the teacher and student go on to develop mutual respect, trust, and ultimately caring. In fact, if a teacher does not take on this responsibility, the student does not grant authority (power) to the teacher, and a genuine relationship between the two is improbable. Low-DID teachers appear to be empowered by the relationships that they develop with their students, and not by virtue of their role as teachers.

Ultimately, high-DID teachers at GSMS see power as given to or conferred on them from according to their place in a hierarchical structure – from structural elements, above, or from student agency, below. By giving up their personal power to the power of the hierarchy and, along with it, a sense of their own responsibility, they also give up the opportunity to develop relationships with their students – and thus fail to gain relational power. Low-DID teachers at GSMS take on personal responsibility and, along with it, personal power, as they clearly define the boundaries and expectations of their relationships with students. By focusing more on the needs of their students than on their own needs, low-DID teachers gain power/respect from their students, power/respect that high-DID teachers believe is inherently theirs from their place in the hierarchy.

At GSMS, teachers are empowered not by seeking power, but by seeking relationships. Power is not appropriated from or conferred by others, but built in

relationship. Perhaps this explains why low-DID teachers issue no or few referrals for defiance: students respect the power of these teachers because the students themselves have accorded these teachers power. Students give low-DID teachers power because these teachers express care and concern for them personally and academically. Students do not need to engage in a power struggle with low-DID teachers because they know that the teachers will use their power in service to them, as students.

In the balance of this chapter, I discuss these findings and conclusions in greater detail. I focus on several key areas:

- Personal and academic components of the teacher/student relationship
- Teachers' focus on self or students
- The realms of disciplinary responsibility
- The connection of personal responsibility to personal power, and
- Hierarchical power and relational power

#### **Teacher/Student Relationships: Personal and/or Academic**

One of the key differences between high-DID and low-DID teachers is their description of the primary components of their student relationships. In general, high-DID teachers describe these relationships either in terms of knowing about student's personal issues, or as a purely academic relationship. Low-DID teachers describe student relationships that are both personal and academic in nature. In the personal component of these relationships, low-DID teachers exhibit care and concern for their students while maintaining their authority as teachers, while high-DID teachers seek a more reciprocal relationship that involves connection around personal issues. In the academic component of student relationships, low-DID teachers set and enforce high expectations for both

academic and behavioral outcomes. High-DID teachers describe academic relationships with their students that develop based upon student effort rather than on their own. On the whole, high-DID teachers struggle to develop relationships with their students that include both personal and academic components. One high-DID teacher describes this struggle:

As a teacher [I try to] balance between being more open affectionately and less, just, 'this is the [classroom] goal.' That's my critique of myself. 'This is the goal, let's reach it,' and sometimes overstepping other little important things like, I would say not so much the human side, but like digging deeper into that sensitivity of... middle schoolers.

In general, high-DID teachers emphasize the need for trust between themselves and their students, especially with regards to students being able to come to talk with teachers about their personal problems. In their view, the ideal teacher can be "counted on to discuss personal things that bother [students]." Another teacher said, "If it's an excellent relationship, a teacher is tuned into or is aware of personal problems the student might have." Understanding that these students have (sometimes) challenging personal lives causes one high-DID teacher to "give them breaks, I mean, they're not perfect, and they're kids." Another teacher talks about certain students who are "threatening and nasty and super-aggressive" towards him, and that gaining understanding about their personal lives "was a good learning lesson" for him. As he describes it, "you find out all these awful things [about the students' lives that] in retrospect... didn't make them any nicer or less mean, it just made them more understandable. It was more understanding as to why they were that way."

While agreeing that they should be available for assistance with students' personal problems, low-DID teachers couple their care and concern with continued focus on academic achievement, along with their need to be firmly in charge and in control of the classroom. Understanding students' personal challenges does not mean relaxing their high expectations for student behavior and academic progress. One low-DID teacher shared what she says to students who share personal problems with her in class: "I understand you're having this hard day' or 'I understand what you're going through. However, there are still things that you need to do in here." Unlike the high-DID teachers, low-DID teachers continue to challenge students to meet academic and behavioral expectations even in the face of personal challenges.

High-DID teachers also invoke reciprocity in regards to understanding their students; 42% of them noted the importance of students taking the time to understand and appreciate *them* as teachers, while none of the low-DID teachers did so,  $FET(1, n=12), p = 0.155$ . As one teacher described, "[In an ideal relationship] kids understand the teacher at least as well as teachers have to understand kids." Being understood also includes being appreciated and liked. One teacher described at length the unflattering comments about her made by her students and said that the ideal student would "either say something nice or don't say it all. I don't say mean things to them." Yet another teacher, talking about being surprised and moved by positive feedback from one of his students, said, "She got me right to the T: what I do, how I do it, and why she's here too." He went on to describe watching students put into practice the study tips he has taught them, noting, "They appreciate that. Their appreciation makes that relationship better, too." In seeking this understanding and appreciation by students, high-DID teachers sometimes

loosen the boundaries between teacher and student: one shares personal stories at length in the classroom; another speaks to their students in “kid vernacular.”

Low-DID teachers do not seek this level of understanding or approval from their students. As one of these teachers stated unequivocally:

Me, even though I may have a problem with the kids, I always let the kids know that I love the kids. You don't have to love me back... I don't want you to redefine yourself, okay? ...Stay who you are. But the whole point is... I always... let the kids know I love the kids and I respect the kids.

Low-DID teachers prioritize the development of caring and compassionate relationships with their students: 58% of low-DID teachers referenced care and compassion when asked to describe the ideal teacher-student relationship, and only 8% of the high-DID teacher did so,  $FET(1, n=12), p = 0.027$ . Central to low-DID teachers' relationships with students are the provision of reliance and support, and honest communication between teacher and student: both of these elements of the teacher/student relationship were mentioned by 42% of low-DID teachers and 8% of high-DID teachers,  $FET(1, n=12), p = 0.155$ . At the same time, low-DID teachers make a clear distinction between caring for their students, both in and out of the classroom, and being liked by, or being friends with, their students. Several talked about being “friendly” rather than being an actual friend. As one teacher described, “I want the kids close enough where they feel like they can go to their teachers if they had any type of personal problem or if they have academic problems, [but] I don't want to hear every little thing about who likes who.” Another said more bluntly, “I'm not there to be your

friend.” Still another noted, “My goal is not to be liked... I mean I’m a human being, of course you want to be liked. But that’s not my goal.”

Again, the goal for most low-DID teachers is the growth and learning of their students. A low-DID teacher has compassion and empathy for her students, but still expects those students to work hard in the classroom, regardless of what is going on in their personal lives. Ultimately, the low-DID teachers balance firm control, high academic standards and expectations, and caring for their students. This balance is clearly described by one teacher: “I give them connection so that they can say, ‘Okay you can relate or you can understand...’ [I] tell them, ‘[I] go through craziness at home [too], [but] when [I] come here [to the classroom], [the] show is on!”

High-DID teachers tend to emphasize the personal component of their relationships with students, and seek reciprocity in those relationships, especially with regards to being understood and appreciated by their students. Low-DID teachers balance the personal and academic components of their student relationships, setting clear boundaries and high expectations in both realms. In the next section, we see how these differences are manifested in high- and low-DID teachers’ focus in the classroom.

### **Locus of Focus: Self or Students**

In terms of their experience in the classroom, high-DID and low-DID teachers have a very different locus of focus. In general, high-DID teachers focus on their own (teaching) experience, and low-DID teachers focus on their students’ (learning) experience. This difference is heightened by their differing view of students. Because high-DID teachers tend to see students in a negative light, and their relationships with them as adversarial, they express a sense of isolation in the classroom. Since low-DID

teachers tend to see students as children in need of support and guidance, they express a sense of partnership with students in the classroom.

High-DID teachers describe their students as not caring about their behavior or as needing to be controlled because they lack an internal focus. Many of them characterize their students as “tough” and describe their behavior as generally wrong or inappropriate. More than one teacher said that these students simply “don’t care.” Because high-DID teachers see students as adversaries to a pleasant and productive teaching environment, they consider discipline primarily as a means to correct and punish students: 50% of high-DID teachers cited correction and punishment, while only 17% of low-DID teachers did so,  $FET(1, n=12), p = 0.193$ . Along with envisioning students as adversaries, high-DID teachers also seem to take student defiance personally – as behavior specifically designed to embarrass them or make them uncomfortable. Two high-DID teachers specifically stated that defiant students “enjoyed” embarrassing teachers. One gave the following example:

They pick it up off their friends. It’s cool to bust the hell out of a teacher. It’s cool to watch my face get red because they know it does. It’s cool to watch me get nervous. They know I do. Oh yeah, they know right away: ‘Oh look, Miss’s face is getting red. She’s all mad. Blah, blah, blah.’ What else do they do to bust the teacher up? Some of them, that’s all they know. They repeat that same conduct of behavior over and over and over and over. And they do the same nonsense and they can’t break the mold. Either no one has taught them or they don’t recognize or they don’t care or they think they’re cool.

The notion of students as adversaries also results in one high-DID teacher envisioning the collective power of students in an especially negative manner:

The students outnumber the teachers 100 to 1.<sup>34</sup> So if the students somehow collectively decide, ‘we’re all going to be angels,’ [then] we’re going to have a wonderful place. If they all collectively decide that ‘we’re going to run a riot,’ then there’s nothing we can do. Ultimately, they do control, but they don’t realize that, which is the good thing. If they realized that ‘we can do what we want if we stick together’ --which they could – you could end up with police having to come in here if they wanted to take it to that level.

Low-DID teachers, rather than focusing on their own (negative) experience, focus primarily on their students’ experience in the classroom. Almost all of these teachers (67%) see the primary purpose of discipline as improving their students’ learning environment in contrast to only 25% of high-DID teachers,  $FET(1, n=12), p = 0.099$ . Even when one high-DID teacher references discipline as improving the student’s learning environment, she also sees it as enabling teachers to achieve their own curricular goals (“our goal is set towards something that’s pre-established: the curriculum, getting there”).

Low-DID teachers do not see defiance as directed at them personally, or as willful or negative disregard of their authority, but instead see defiance as a more general and even expected manifestation of adolescence. More than one low-DID teacher noted students’ “middle school mentality” and adolescent hormones, or students’ desire to “feel

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<sup>34</sup> School-wide, the student/teacher ratio at GSMS is closer to 15:1; however, at certain times and in certain areas of the school, such as the hallways during passing between classes and the cafeteria at lunchtime, this figure could hold.

important and in control of their lives,” especially at this stage of their development. Student emotion, and particularly anger (attributed by one teacher to resistance to the many changes that accompanied adolescence), was another primary reason for defiance cited by 42% of low-DID teachers (and no high-DID teachers),  $FET(1, n=12), p = 0.037$ . In addition, such anger was seen not by low-DID teachers as directed personally at them, but as stemming from the many challenging issues they faced at home.

Low-DID teachers also acknowledged that simply being in middle school was a challenge (“middle school is awful!”). As one teacher noted, “We all have [had] those moments when someone really has to help us.” Another teacher recognized that middle school students “don’t know how to manage bad days like we adults do.” For this reason, most teachers in this group stated that their students needed “compassion,” “empathy,” and even “nurturing.” Above all, one teacher said, “[students] have to know that you like them.” Unlike the high-DID teachers, who seek to control or punish defiance, low-DID teachers see in it the need for extra care for their students.

Perhaps because of their focus on their students’ learning environment, 42% of low-DID teachers also ascribe student defiance to their frustration at academic work that is too challenging or overwhelming; no high-DID teachers cited this emic code,  $FET(1, n=12), p = 0.037$ . For students in classrooms where the material is over their head, defiance may simply be an “escape” from the fear of being called out for not knowing the answer to a question: “It’s better to be defiant than to look stupid.” As this teacher describes:

There is that percentage of students that are completely lost academically, that you’ll find are not only frustrated in class because they can’t keep up but also don’t

want to be viewed as somebody who doesn't get it. So [they] are going to be defiant and get out of that situation: 'Hey, let me get kicked out of class because... [t]hey're going to ask me a question that I don't know the answer to. I can't follow along on the reading. I'm just not processing this. I'm five years behind academically. I'm a fish out of water here. Let me joke around. Let me get kicked out. Now, I'm not here anymore.'

Not only do low-DID teachers differ from high-DID teachers in their focus on the student learning environment, but low-DID teachers see students as partners in the classroom, rather than as adversaries. Many low-DID teachers describe their goal of creating a learning environment that is not only challenging, but fun and enjoyable for both teacher and student. One teacher tells her students, "for me to be able to have fun, you need to listen, you need to respect... we want to have fun." Another teacher describes it this way:

It's a partnership. So I told them, who wants to be in a classroom where you can't listen to the teacher or the teacher is always yelling at you? I said none of them want that. So we agreed that we all want the same thing. We want to have fun learning. We want to learn so we come into an agreement... So we respect them. They feel respected. They say it all the time. Or we ask, 'Do we treat you that way?' or 'Do I speak to you in that manner?' and then they are quiet and the other students are like, 'Be quiet.'

In summary, high-DID teachers tend to focus on their own (teaching) experience in the classroom and see their students as adversaries and student defiance as directed at them. Not surprisingly, high-DID teachers exude a sense of weariness and isolation. One

teacher, in fact, describes his disciplinary efforts in his classroom using the imagery of war: “[H]ow much can we do in the trenches? We can fight the war, this and that stuff, okay, which we do. But when you go outside the trench, who is going to continue this discipline?” Low-DID teachers, on the other hand, focus on providing their students with a challenging, supportive, and enjoyable learning experience. In doing so, they enlist student support and continue to strengthen their student relationships. In the next section, we see how these different perspectives on the teacher-student relationship translate into different levels of teacher agency and responsibility.

### **The Realms of Responsibility: Structure/Culture and Agency**

There is no greater difference between high- and low-DID teachers than in their sense of responsibility. And there is no greater demonstration of this difference than in the ways in which high- and low-DID teachers describe the nature of student defiance. High-DID teachers deflect responsibility for their student behavioral outcomes by ascribing student defiance to the policies of the school district and administration (structure), deficit family values (culture), and student agency (negative). Low-DID teachers, on the other hand, ascribe student defiance to family turmoil/trauma and to the teacher/student relationship, for which they take some measure of responsibility. Low-DID teachers are also more likely to describe specific responsibilities that they have to their students across all interview questions and across both academic and personal components of the relationship. High-DID students are more apt to describe the (failed) responsibilities of the students, parents, school administration and district.

More than half (58%) of the high-DID teachers identify structural elements (school administrative behavior and district policies) as responsible for the defiance in

their classrooms, as opposed to only 8% of low-DID teachers,  $FET(1, n=12), p = 0.027$ . Specifically, high-DID teachers describe students as behaving defiantly “because they can,” citing the GSMS disciplinary system (lack of consequences for poor behavior) and administration. In fact, 33% of high-DID teachers, and no DID teachers, specifically point to the administration’s lack of follow-through on disciplinary issues as a primary cause of student defiance,  $FET(1, n=12), p = 0.047$ . One-quarter of high-DID teachers also reference the school district’s policy of social promotion as contributing to students’ refusal to do classwork. These teachers believe that students refuse to do work because they know they will be promoted whether they do it or not. Therefore, students have no incentive to comply with teacher requests that they do either classwork or homework.

More than half of the high-DID teachers also attribute student defiance to the deficit cultural values of students’ parents, in particular poor parenting skills and irresponsibility. The parents of defiant students are described as being young and irresponsible by “not teaching their kids,” coddling them, and not setting boundaries or limits at home. The consensus is that students behave defiantly at school because at home they “get away with it.”

Other high-DID teachers are more indirect in their indictment of defiant students’ parents, using phrases such as “I wasn’t raised like that” to indicate parental responsibility for student behavior. High-DID teachers make frequent references to such “Good Old Days,” which they remember as a time when students respected teacher authority and complied with teacher demands without question. One teacher described his own time in school to illustrate the difference between parents in the Good Old Days and parents today: “If, god help you, you got suspended from school or detention, it was a

really serious thing. It was embarrassing to get detention and a kid that got suspended was a hoodlum and the parents would be on you like white on rice.” Fully one-third (33%) of high-DID teachers reference differences in today’s students as compared to their own days in middle school, while none of the low-DID teachers do so,  $FET(1, n=12), p = 0.047$ .

In contrast, half of low-DID teachers (and no high-DID teachers) understand defiance as stemming from the relationships that they have with their students,  $FET(1, n=12), p = 0.014$ . Further, a majority of the low-DID teachers reference their own role in the relationship with their students. One teacher said that defiant behavior in students was directly related to a lack of communication and respect between teacher and student. Another specifically discussed her willingness to examine and change her own behavior as needed or warranted:

I can’t imagine a child cursing me out. I don’t think it should ever get to that point where [a child feels like they] have to. If a child curses at me, I want to think, ‘What did I do?’ Something happened with that interaction. Something happened along the way where all was lost, to make you come out of your shell and go there. So I wouldn’t blame the child only. I would think and reflect and see what I caused or what I did to ever make someone [curse me out].

Low-DID teachers also identify issues with students’ parents and home life as probable causes of defiant behavior. Unlike the high-DID teachers’ focus on deficit family values, however, the low-DID teachers tend to cite family challenges (i.e., alcoholism, incest, murder, divorce, jail). Some low-DID teachers suggest that parents be given more training in helping their children manage their emotions, or in setting and

maintaining appropriate boundaries and limits. And once again, low-DID teachers in this group are mindful of their own responsibilities to their students. In particular, they reference the care and discretion that they as teachers need to maintain as they interact with students, especially given the turmoil in many students' lives. As one teacher explains,

These kids don't come with manuals, okay? That's the main thing. You don't have a little bubble above this kid's head who says 'My dad beats me.' 'My mother puts out cigarettes in places on me that can't be seen.' It could be anything. So you have no idea. So you don't know when you're being insensitive. You don't know when you're saying something that can trigger a kid. You have no idea, so you have to sort of be careful.

Low-DID teachers talk about their specific responsibilities to students not just in reference to defiance but across all interview questions. When asked to describe the ideal teacher/student relationship, a majority of the low-DID teachers focus on their own role and responsibilities; high-DID teachers most often focus instead on student responsibilities to the relationship. For example, both high- and low-DID teachers cite "mutual respect" as a key element of the teacher/student relationship. Low-DID teachers go on to describe how they generate such respect through responsibilities that are primarily related to their students' academic development, such as developing lesson plans that were both engaging and fun, and setting high expectations for all of their students. Low-DID teachers also cite their own responsibility to be someone that their students can trust and rely on, since "teacher[s] learn from students too." High-DID teachers, in contrast, focus more on the conditions required for them to grant respect to

their students, thus placing the onus of responsibility for generating mutual respect on their students. As one high-DID teacher said to his students, “I’ll show you respect if you respect me and show you want to learn.” Another teacher said, “I feel like I have more of a rapport with the students who try harder.” These teachers are willing to develop stronger relationships with their students – if their students make the first effort.

Even when asked to describe how much power teachers and students should have ideally, low-DID teachers describe “shared responsibility” for the learning that takes place in the classroom. As they see it, teacher and student should have a “fair” relationship, one in which “the student learns and the teacher teaches.” Yet in describing this type of relationship, one in which both student and teacher have responsibilities, the teachers in this group focus almost entirely on their own responsibilities, as both adults and teachers, to their students. As they describe it, students should feel “safe” in their classrooms, “not be afraid to ask questions,” and “know that the teacher is [t]here to help them.” While teachers must “demand” a certain level of respect and neither “expect” or “reward” it, they must also demonstrate respect for their students. Teachers should develop relationships with their students so that “[students] know what you want and you know what they want.” More than one teacher references the importance of providing students with a voice, both in the classroom and in the wider culture of the school. Several teachers in this group describe the importance of self-reflection and especially in recognizing and admitting their own mistakes: “You can’t think you never make mistakes.” Finally, more than one low-DID teacher describes the importance of laughter; as one teacher said, “[You] need to know when to be an adult and when to kick back and laugh with them.”

To summarize thus far, high-DID teachers generally seek to be understood, appreciated, and liked by their students at the same time that they see students as their adversaries. They tend to focus on their own experience rather than on their students' experience in the classroom and rarely if ever speak about student academic outcomes. Student defiance is largely ascribed to forces beyond their individual control, such as students' (deficit) family and home culture and ineffective administrative and District policies. On the whole, high-DID teachers express frustration and displeasure with the current school climate.

Low-DID teachers develop strong student relationships that consist of care and compassion, firm boundaries and expectations, and a consistent focus on student academic and behavioral outcomes. They see student defiance as the result of a breakdown in the teacher/student relationship, a relationship for which the teachers themselves have primary responsibility. On the whole, low-DID teachers express confidence in students' ability to meet their expectations, both academic and behavioral. In the next section, we see how teachers' different relationships with individual responsibility translate into different perceptions of their own power.

### **Personal Responsibility = Personal Power**

I proposed in Chapter I that student defiance can be seen as a statement about whether or not the teacher's power is recognized as authentic or legitimate. In essence, a defiant student is saying to the teacher: "I do not recognize your power. I do not grant you power." Given this notion, it is interesting to note that teachers' sense of their own power is closely aligned with their sense of individual responsibility to their students. High-DID teachers, who ascribe student defiance/power to every realm but the teacher-

student relationship and their own agency, have a much lower sense of power than low-DID teachers, who see defiance as an indicator of the health of the teacher/student relationship or as developmental in nature.

Tables 11 and 12 summarize teacher rankings of their perceived power and that of their students both currently (Table 11) and in an ideal setting (Table 12).<sup>35</sup> As demonstrated in Tables 11 and 12, high-DID and low-DID teachers rank student and teacher power very differently. High-DID teachers perceive students to have more power than they do, both in and out of the classroom. On a scale of 1-10, high-DID teachers give themselves a 5.0 power rating, 1.2 points below average and 1.6 points below students. Low-DID teachers, on the other hand, perceive themselves as having more power than their students. While this power differential is minimal outside of the classroom (7.2/10 teachers, 6.9/10 students), within their classrooms it is the largest power rating of all teacher (demographic) groups, at 8.4/10 (2.0 points above average, and 2.1 points higher than their students). In an ideal school setting, low-DID teachers actually seek a power level higher than do high-DID teachers (7.6 vs. 7.0), but low-DID teachers also would give students more power (5.5 vs. 4.5) in such a setting.

<Insert Table 11 here>

<Insert Table 12 here>

Overall, low-DID teachers view themselves as having a great deal of power and agency. This agency is correlated with a focus on their own contributions and

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<sup>35</sup> The high- and low-DID teachers are a small sample to begin with and not every teacher completed the power grid. Further, the 1-10 scale used in the grid is a crude and simple measure of a complicated concept. Therefore, differences in these results are not indicative of real or significant differences between the two groups. Nevertheless, the results point to an interesting trend that bears additional exploration. For example, while 4 of the high-DID teachers did not assign numerical values to their current sense of power, they all said that they felt that students had more power than they did, mirroring the trend indicated by the numbers.

responsibility to the relationships they develop with their students, and as a teacher. For example, when discussing how much power teachers and students should ideally have, 42% of low-DID teachers reference their own responsibilities, while none of the high-DID teachers do so,  $FET(1, n=12), p = .037$ . Low-DID teachers are particularly mindful of the way in which they use their power. As one teacher notes, “We can use [power] in a good way or bad way.” Another teacher warns against letting power go to teachers’ heads and possibly damaging their relationships with students: “You can't go into that classroom and think that every decision that you make is the right one, bellow at them all day long, or they walk in -- "sit down!" -- You've set them off, you've set them off. You need to know when to be the adult.” Low-DID teachers’ sense of responsibility to students is also evident in their ascription of student defiance to problems in the teacher/student relationship and their personal accountability when those relationships fail.

High-DID teachers, on the other hand, do not tend to reference student outcomes and ascribe student defiance to people and conditions outside the classroom who have failed to meet their responsibilities. High-DID teachers refer to the disciplinary consequences faced by students as ineffective, both due to the nature of the consequences themselves and because the students have no fear of the consequences they face for their (mis)behavior. They point to the fact that GSMS cannot afford late busses for detention except on a very limited basis, that GSMS’ limited administrative capacity means there is “no immediacy” to disciplinary consequences, and that the district’s social promotion policy means that students do not feel that they must complete their work because they will be promoted regardless. High-DID teachers view the lunch detention option as self-

punishment (“You have to sit in your classroom during your lunch break, so you’re punishing yourself, too”) and repeatedly express their frustration at calling parents (another common consequence), citing parents who do not answer, do not return phone calls, or repeatedly lose or break their cell phone or change their phone number. Even those teachers who do not cite existing disciplinary policies and procedures per se as ineffective state their belief that students do not take these consequences seriously. One teacher, while not explicitly critical of GSMS disciplinary practices, nevertheless notes more than once that she notices students “wandering the building all day.” Another teacher references students who “get away with telling a teacher to f\*\*\* off,” and still another says, with resignation, “[T]here is nothing you can do to them or about them.”

This statement -- “there is nothing you can do to them or about them” -- captures the powerlessness felt by most high-DID teachers in relation to their students’ behavior. Other high-DID teachers echoed this feeling of being powerless in relation to their students. One teacher spoke of being repeatedly threatened and even hit by his students. Another talked about feeling “powerless” and “bullied” by students who “just think that they own the building.” While he acknowledged that these students are “very few,” he nevertheless accorded them powerful sway over GSMS:

How can you have the few controlling the many? And the many feel powerless. We just feel like our hands are – you want to do something. It’s like bullying. We’re being bullied by the few that have that power, and just so you won’t be bullied, you’re in that majority and you say, ‘I don’t want to be the one that sticks out and [is] bullied. You kind of lay low-key and go along for the ride. That’s what I see in a lot of these kids.’”

Especially interesting is this teacher's use of the words "we" and "I" even as he ultimately connects his observations to students; perhaps he is describing his own reluctance to stand up to the powerful student minority. In fact, this teacher's sense of powerlessness is clearly stated further into the interview: "There's no power, I think. I think that we just... teach."

In both high- and low-DID teachers' discussion of their sense of personal power and agency, we see that power and responsibility are inextricably linked. As the high- and low-DID teachers themselves have demonstrated, low personal responsibility corresponds to low personal power; high personal responsibility corresponds to high personal power. By minimizing responsibility for their students, then, high-DID teachers literally minimize their own power and sense of personal agency as teachers. In the next section, we will see how these different approaches to responsibility manifest themselves in different conceptions of the nature of power.

### **Hierarchical Power and Relational Power**

Both high- and low-DID teachers have remarkably similar ways of describing their authority vis-à-vis their students. Both groups agree that teachers should be accorded authority because they are adults, and that children should "know their place" in the classroom. As one low-DID teacher explains simply, "the adult is the adult and the child is the child." Yet despite this similarity, high- and low-DID teachers have very different perceptions of the nature and basis of their own power and that of their students. When high-DID teachers claim authority as teachers, they are taking their place in a clear hierarchy in which the school district and administration are above them, and the students below. When low-DID teachers claim authority as teachers, they are signaling to their

students that they are firmly in control of a relationship that is dedicated to them as students, and to developing their success, both personal and academic. In the balance of this chapter I describe in further detail high-DID teachers' understanding of *hierarchical* power, and low-DID teachers' understanding of *relational* power.

If high-DID teachers tend to minimize responsibility for their student outcomes, and since responsibility and power are linked, then high-DID teachers have minimal power. Further, if they ascribe that responsibility to structural and cultural elements and the students' own (negative) agency, then power must reside in structural and cultural elements and in the students themselves. Power is thus outside and beyond the high-DID teacher, and as such can be considered hierarchical, insofar as high-DID teachers believe that it can be conferred upon or given to them. High-DID teachers' frustration at school administrators' lack of disciplinary follow-through, for example, indicates that they see power (in disciplinary matters, at least) as being conferred from above. This notion -- that power is conferred from above -- is also behind statements by some high-DID teachers who express their sense that students are "empowered" by the GSMS administration, who they feel "sides with students" over teachers and "caters to kids." As one teacher says, "[Students] have got that whole mile to take. If they go two miles, maybe they'll get in trouble. But they have got a whole mile to play with." If the school administration and the students have power, then, high-DID teachers are necessarily disempowered.

High-DID teachers' frustration at their students' defiance and lack of respect -- or students' lack of recognition or respect of their power as teachers -- further indicates that they believe power should be accorded them from below, simply by virtue of their place

in the hierarchy. As one high-DID teacher says in explaining why teachers should have more power than students, “I think teachers should have a little bit more of an edge, because we are the adults in the building and we’ve been there and we know what’s best for them. We’ve been there before.”

In a hierarchical power structure such as that envisioned by the high-DID teachers, teacher power can only be realized if it is validated and supported from the level above: at GSMS, the school administrators. The frustration felt by many of the high-DID teachers at their lack of power in a hierarchical structure – both from the administration above and the students below -- is summed up by the following teacher:

You have the power to fail a kid, but it’s meaningless if the kid is going to be promoted. You have the power to write a kid up, but it’s meaningless if the kid doesn’t care about being written up. You have the power to call home, but it’s meaningless if a parent doesn’t do anything about it or could care less or will get mad at you for calling. So what do you have left?

Just as low-DID teachers exhibit high levels of responsibility in relationship with their students, they report high levels of power in relation to students. In fact, low-DID teachers appear to generate power specifically from their relationships with students, through what I call *relational power*. This relational power stems in part from the tendency of low-DID teachers to describe their student’s agency in positive terms. One-third (33%) of low-DID teachers ascribe positive characteristics to student agency and power, citing, for example, students’ “power to learn” and to “make the right decisions.” In contrast, none of the high-DID teachers described student agency in a positive fashion,  $FET(1, n=12), p = 0.047$ .

Unlike their high-DID counterparts, half of the low-DID teachers make a distinction between the power they feel in their own classroom (high) versus the power they feel in the GSMS hallways (low). They attribute this lower sense of power in the hallways to the size of the school and the high number of students. The hallways are filled with students whose names the teachers do not necessarily know; in other words, with whom they do not have a relationship. Low-DID teachers thus see relationships with students as enhancing their power.

Perhaps because our society is more acclimated to hierarchical power, most of the low-DID teachers express discomfort at using the word *power*, calling it “odd” or “strange.” Others struggled to re-define the word. One teacher stated, “I don’t want to say ‘power’ [because it] is negative.” Another teacher reframed the question: “I wouldn’t say it’s a power thing, I would say it’s a respect thing.” Still another teacher stated bluntly, “I hate that word. It’s shared, it should be shared, it’s responsibility.” In her words we see the direct recognition that power and responsibility are partners. Finally, one teacher directly captures the difference between hierarchical power and relational power: “In any profession people can get consumed with [*hierarchical*] power and you lose track of what your job is here: to make every kid move, every kid feel positive, find something good in every child [*i.e., relational power*]” (emphasis mine).

In a relational power structure such as that envisioned by the low-DID teachers, both teacher and student are empowered by their relationship. However, empowerment of both parties does not necessarily mean that both parties will have equal power. In fact, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, both high- and low-DID teachers are

adamant about establishing and maintaining their authority, both as teachers to students, and adults to children.

Low-DID teachers generally agree that the teacher must be clearly and firmly in charge of the classroom. A firm teacher is framed as something that students themselves want: “I think most kids want to be in a safe, non-chaotic environment, and most kids want to learn. They don’t like when they’re in a room when it’s crazy. They don’t like [being] in a room when the adult’s not in control.” In fact, one of the low-DID teachers actually reframes defiance as an expression of this need of students for adult control:

I think some students are still struggling with this power. They think they have more power [than teachers]. And so that’s why they try to... I won’t say trick us, but... they’re trying to test us. Is [the teacher] a person of her word or not? Or she’s flexible, or she’s weak. So they would throw us a few things because they want to test if she’s strong or not.

Like the low-DID teachers, high-DID teachers also make multiple references to the role of discipline in setting limits. As one high-DID teacher stated, “I think [discipline] sets order. [Students] need to know what they can get away with and what they can’t. And that’s what they test. I think that it’s human nature. You get away with a little, let’s see what else I can do.” While this teacher also equates student defiance with testing limits, there is a difference in how high- and low-DID teachers frame the purpose of these limits, in line with their different views of power. High-DID teachers see limits as instrumental in “keeping order” and “drawing the line” between acceptable and non-acceptable behavior. Many high-DID teachers describe the purpose of setting limits as teaching students behavioral skills that will serve them throughout their life. In fact, one-

third of the high-DID teachers cite the purpose of discipline as preparing the students for high school and the real world in terms of developing skills such as focusing, paying attention, and being accountable for their actions. Such an understanding is in keeping with high-DID teachers' view of power as hierarchical: the teacher knows more and knows better due to her place in the hierarchy, and will draw the line at certain behaviors in order to educate students about the limits of their power.

Low-DID teachers understand the setting of limits – and students' testing of limits – in a very different way, according to their view of power as relational. In describing the need of a student to test limits, the low-DID teacher previously cited references the student's desire to determine “whether [the teacher] is a person of her word or not” and whether the teacher is “weak or strong.” This teacher is describing the student's need to determine whether or not an honest and legitimate relationship can be built with the teacher, not simply “what he can get away with or not.” Another low-DID teacher also describes defiance as a means of assessing the viability of a strong and close relationship with the teacher:

I mean, think about, why do people all of a sudden start getting in fights with one another? ...They get in fights because something's not really going right in their life, and they're angry and they're frustrated and they will take it out on a source they feel they can. [I]n essence, defiance is almost a compliment if you were to really think about it, because they trust that you will still stand by them.

Low-DID teachers see defiant students as seeking relationship with them – and a specific kind of relationship at that. Beyond student questions about whether the teacher keeps their word, or is strong, or can be trusted to stand by them, is the fundamental

question of whether the teacher can be trusted with the student's power or not. In order to trust the teacher, and ultimately cede their own power to the teacher, students need to know that the teacher will care for them, challenge them, have their best interests at heart – and genuinely like them. Most important, students seek teachers who will take responsibility for their learning and growth, both personal and academic. Students will *give power* to teachers who *take responsibility*.

Some low-DID teachers seem to understand this concept instinctively. One teacher goes so far as to say that students “don't need power, they're children. Children like to be told what to do. They flourish with that, if you tell them in a positive way.” Other low-DID teachers concur with this assessment. “What do they need power for?” asks one, while another states that, “If you have a supportive teacher, you don't need power.”

Low-DID teachers use their power and authority as adults and as teachers to develop positive, affirming relationships with students. By being clear about their responsibility for their relationships with their students, they generate not only personal power for themselves, but power from their students. Students willingly give power to such teachers, and acknowledge the teacher's authority, because they know they will be cared for, respected, and challenged. In the presence of relational power, rather than hierarchical power, there is no need for student defiance. One teacher describes the result:

[T]he defiance, it's not popular in [my] class. So when somebody does it, other kids look at him like, 'What a...' so I will tell them, 'Are you happy with yourself?' So they all imitate, 'Are you happy with yourself?' or they will ask the student, 'Oh

chill, chill, not with my teacher.’ [T]hey become very... protective of us [teachers] because it is not the thing to do. So just the fact that the other students feel like that when one of them does it, they get to go and they always come back, ‘Oh I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it.’ It’s always, ‘I’m sorry.’ And we’re like, ‘Okay but the next time...’

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

The results of this exploratory study add to our existing knowledge about the discipline gap and have implications both for future research and for more immediate practice. In this chapter, I summarize the key results of the study in four areas: demographic differences between teacher and student, teacher/student relationships, the nature of student defiance, and the nature of power. I also address the limitations of the study and outline possible ways in which these limitations can be addressed in future research.

### **Demographic Differences Between Teacher and Student**

The analysis of teacher and student demographics at GSMS makes clear several points about using the demographics of race, gender, and SES to predict or explain disciplinary outcomes. First, it is important to examine disciplinary datasets from more than one demographic category, as interactions are likely to exist and produce unexpected patterns. It is also important to include teacher and student demographic data as linked through each disciplinary referral. As seen at GSMS, teacher demographics influence disciplinary referrals, but so do differences in demographics between teacher and student. At GSMS, for example, a teacher's gender did not matter with respect to DID referrals, but *differences* in gender between teacher and student did matter. At the same time, a teacher's experience with poverty mattered with respect to DID referrals, but differences in experience with poverty between teacher and student did not. These results demonstrate the complicated relationship between teacher and student demographics and DID referrals. Given the multitude of influences at work in the disciplinary encounter, we must be especially careful not to focus too narrowly on either student or teacher.

Further, while teacher/student differences in race and differences in gender are associated with significantly higher numbers of annual DID referrals at GSMS, there was no additive effect. That is, additional demographic differences between teacher and student did not translate into more DID referrals. These results diminish the theory that demographic differences between teacher and student are behind the existing national discipline gap for male students of color from low-SES families. To be more specific, white middle-class female teachers may not necessarily issue more disciplinary referrals to low-SES male students of color due to the “cultural” differences associated with their demographic differences – this is not the case at GSMS, at least.

However, it remains important to conduct analysis using demographic intersections rather than demographic dichotomies, as evidenced by the complex relationship between teacher and student race, gender, and experience with poverty illustrated above. At GSMS, for example, white teachers who had experience with poverty issued significantly more referrals than expected. In an earlier study that I conducted (Liiv 2013), white male students from low-SES families were significantly more likely to be disciplined than any other students, and across all types of infractions. Research such as this suggests that we need to be careful in assuming that disciplinary disproportion is limited to certain teacher and/or student demographic intersections. Again, the landscape of discipline with respect to demographics is complex.

Perhaps most critical in future research on the discipline gap is ensuring the collection of richer and fuller disciplinary data, especially in larger datasets such as those maintained by school districts, cities, and states. When collecting, analyzing or interpreting disciplinary data, it is important to keep in mind the full spectrum of the

disciplinary encounter as illustrated in the ecology of discipline model. That is, we need to focus on both of the actors in the encounter – teacher and student. Gathering data only on student outcomes, or only on teacher referrals, will result in only partial understanding of the disciplinary landscape.

At whatever scale is feasible, whether single school or district-wide or by state, it is also important to keep overall disciplinary infraction categories simple, consistent, and to a minimum. Such simplicity makes data collection easier and more manageable for teachers and administrators, and supports teachers in practice to collectively enforce a school-wide code of conduct. It also may facilitate more immediacy in disciplinary data analysis and thus increase the utility of such data. For example, identifying what GSMS terms “frequent flyer” students (those students who persistently receive disciplinary referrals across all infraction categories) is more likely to happen on a weekly or even daily basis if data about each infraction is easy to document by teachers and easy to collect and analyze by administrators. Identifying frequent flyer students – and teachers – on a regular basis makes it possible to provide them with additional support that is both targeted and timely.

In the end, though, disciplinary data that is both richer and more useful can only be developed if teachers and administrators develop general agreement on the purpose of discipline at their school. Coming to consensus around this basic issue is critical. Is discipline simply a mechanism through which to punish a behavioral transgression? Should the goal of discipline be to change a student’s behavior? If the purpose of discipline is to change behavior, towards what ideal should students and teachers strive? Where do the ideas of apology and restitution fit in? How can discipline be used to build

a stronger school community? To the extent that the adults throughout the school community can agree on the basic purpose of discipline, the easier it will be to identify behavior that is detrimental to the school community's wider goals. Teachers will feel more collective support around setting clear and consistent expectations for their students and holding students to these expectations. Ultimately, to the extent that teachers can demonstrate that these expectations are for the growth and benefit of their students, the less defiance is likely to be manifested in the classroom.

### **Teacher/Student Relationships**

As already mentioned, it is important to remember that the portraits of high- and low-DID teachers generated in this study reflect general trends and not specific individuals. Many of the high-DID teachers at GSMS who struggled the most with classroom and behavior management are also the most vocal about how much they care for their students and even love their jobs. Other high-DID teachers are very knowledgeable and effective teachers who are understandably frustrated with the time they spend on managing student behavior instead of teaching the subject in which they were trained and certified and about which many are so passionate. That said, there is still much that can be learned from the generalized portraits of high- and low-DID teachers, including alignment with prior research on effective teachers, and appropriate strategies and supports for improving disciplinary practices of high-DID teachers.

At GSMS, low-DID teachers attend to both the personal and academic lives of their students. In the personal realm, they prioritize the provision of care, compassion, reliance, and support, while maintaining firm charge of the classroom in their roles as teacher and as adult. In the academic realm, they provide engaging and challenging

lessons and hold the students to high academic standards. These characteristics align closely with those of highly effective teachers known as “warm demanders” (Kleinfeld, 1975). As described in Chapter II, “warm demanders” combine warmth and caring for their students with high behavioral and academic expectations (Hooks & Miskovic, 2011; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Ware 2006; Antrop-Gonzalez & DeJesus, 2006; Tosolt 2010).

High-DID teachers, unlike their low-DID counterparts, seek reciprocity in their relationships with students and prioritize a connection with students around personal issues. At the same time, they tend to see students in an adversarial light, and student behavior as something to be controlled, corrected, and punished. These differences between high- and low-DID teachers reflect the distinction, first made by Baumrind (1966), between authoritarian and authoritative teachers. Authoritarian teachers, like high-DID teachers, value order, control, and obedience, and use punitive and forceful measures to keep the student in their place. Authoritative teachers, like low-DID teachers and other “warm demanders,” also value control in the classroom but combine firm discipline with nurturance, positive encouragement, and respectful communication with the student.

### **The Nature of Student Defiance and the Nature of Power**

In this study, I found differences in the ways in which high- and low-DID teachers took on personal responsibility and conceived of power. High-DID teachers were less likely to reference any specific responsibility for their students’ academic outcomes and/or learning environments, and tended to ascribe such responsibility and power to sources outside themselves. Low-DID teachers took personal responsibility for their students’ behavioral and academic outcomes, drew power from the relationships

with those students, and had a high sense of personal agency and power in their classrooms.

These differences between high- and low-DID teachers are reminiscent of the differences between the 3d and 4th orders of mind described by Kegan (1994) in his research on adult development. Third-order thinkers (“socialized” or “traditional” mind in Kegan’s framework) are governed by the expectations of others, whether a group of people or an institution (like a political party or a school system). They follow the rules and dictates of these groups and institutions because they have not yet developed an internal sense of self with its own rules and dictates. As Berger (2010) describes, and apropos to the high-DID teachers in this study, third-order thinkers’ “esteem is entirely reliant on others because they are, in many ways, made up of those around them” (p. 5). This depiction brings to mind the need of high-DID teachers to be understood, appreciated, and liked by their students. It also evokes the high-DID teachers’ conception of power, with clear roles and rules governing each step of the hierarchy. Like third-order thinkers, high-DID teachers seek to follow the rules and to ensure that others also follow the rules.

Fourth-order thinkers (“self-authored” or “modern” mind in Kegan’s framework) have an internal sense of self that provides them with their own rules and sense of order. Berger (2010) describes fourth-order thinkers as “self-guided, self-motivated, and self-evaluative” (p. 5), a description that mirrors the low-DID teachers’ sense of power and control in their classroom. Berger notes that a fourth-order thinker “would make a good chief because she has her own internal governing system. She could create the rules from

her internal system and fight hard to protect those rules. This guidance would help the [classroom] run smoothly according to her inner vision of [classroom] life” (p. 5).

Perhaps low-DID teachers are able to take personal responsibility for the students in their classroom precisely because of this “internal governing system,” while high-DID teachers must rely instead on the rules imposed by the system outside of themselves; in this case, the school administration and district. Because they cannot draw from an internal sense of self to develop relationships with their students, high-DID teachers may draw from the rules of society that they know best – the Good Old Days. Future research might examine whether high- and low-DID teachers actually do reflect different orders of mind according to Kegan’s (1994) framework.

One of the biggest challenges to improving any school’s disciplinary outcomes is in providing appropriate and respectful support to those teachers who struggle most with discipline and classroom management. If the differences between third- and fourth-order thinkers in Kegan’s (1994) framework resonate, and we want to support high-DID (3d order) teachers in becoming low-DID (4th order) thinkers, then there are practical considerations to be gained from Kegan’s model.

According to Kegan (1994), two ingredients are needed for development and transition from one order of thinking into the next: challenge and support. Berger (2010) describes such challenges as “anything that prompts us to question what we used to take for granted.” (p. 12). Kegan (1994) defines effective support as constituting a “holding environment that provides both welcoming acknowledgment to exactly who the person is right now as he or she is, and fosters the person’s psychological evolution” (p. 43). It is also interesting to note, given the high-DID teachers’ frustration and sense of

powerlessness, that Kegan (1994) notes that environments “that are weighted too heavily in the direction of challenge without adequate support are toxic; they promote defensiveness and constriction [and] lead to withdrawal or dissociation from the context” (p. 42).

High-DID teachers at GSMS are clearly challenged by their students and especially their student’s defiance. What is also clear is that they do not feel supported, especially from the school district and administration, but also from the students’ parents and the students themselves. Kegan (2009) is specific in the type of support needed to transition from 3d to 4th order thinking: it would provide, among other opportunities, “invitations to question authority [and] register dissent, [and] invitations to self-evaluate.” In the words of a low-DID teacher referring to students, “if you have a supportive teacher, you don’t need power.” Perhaps if high-DID teachers were provided specific support around their disciplinary concerns, they would move from needing hierarchical power from outside of their classrooms to drawing on relational power developed with their students.

Specific support for high-DID teachers that takes into account their view of power as hierarchical and Kegan’s (1994) adult development framework might include support from both above (school administration) and below (students). Administrative support of this type could include the recognition and validation by an administrator of a high-DID teacher’s (1) existing good practices or other teaching and classroom achievements and (2) frustration and concern about student defiance and perceived constraints to alleviating this defiance. At the same time, the high-DID teacher can be invited to evaluate both their own practices in the classroom, focusing on areas for possible improvement, as well

as specific and positive ways to improve existing conditions. If at all possible, administrative support for these improvements – both personal and systemic – should be provided. Student support for high-DID teachers in the classroom can also be solicited, perhaps by identifying and cultivating student allies who can provide the high-DID teacher with their own perspective of what does and does not work in the classroom with regards to the defiance and disrespect of other students. Finally, providing collective support from other teachers is critical. Many high-DID and low-DID teachers talked of the isolation they felt in the classroom throughout the school day. This isolation can be especially acute for teachers who do not have strong relationships with their students. Whenever possible, time for teachers to meet with each other during the school day, or share ideas and feedback through an on-line forum, should be provided.

Low-DID teachers' conception of power as relational, and their understanding of student defiance as a means of testing the teacher's worthiness to wield power, also aligns with recent research that explores the role of student consent in granting power and authority to teachers (Ford & Sassi, 2014). Ford and Sassi, in a small qualitative study of two teachers, explored the ways in which students of color viewed and legitimized the authority of a black teacher and a white teacher. Because black students tend to "view authority as earned by personal efforts and traits" (p. 42), the focus of low-DID teachers at GSMS on building strong and genuine relationships with their students appears to be a strategy that can be effective for both white teachers and teachers of color. This is a promising area of future research, especially given the demographic make-up of the public schools with the highest disparities in disciplinary outcomes.

Delpit (1995, p. 35) also notes the difference between teacher authority being seen by people of color as “earned by personal efforts and exhibited by personal characteristics” and by middle-class cultures as earned through “the acquisition of an authority role.” This mirrors the relational and hierarchical views of power exhibited by the low- and high-DID teachers in this study, respectively. However, at GSMS, middle-class teachers and those of color had the lowest annual DID referrals. This finding, while it aligns with Delpit’s assertion that people of color see power and authority as derived from relational attributes, contradicts her assertion that middle-class individuals see authority in a hierarchical sense. Future research could focus more closely on teacher views of relational and hierarchical power and make more nuanced demographic distinctions within the results. Future research could also focus on student perceptions of teacher power, and specifically on what teacher qualities and attributes contribute to students’ determination of the legitimacy and validity of teacher power. This is a particularly important line of research with respect to understanding the origins of the discipline gap, since students who view the school/teacher’s power and authority as illegitimate exhibit more noncompliant behavior (Deutsch & Jones, 2008; Way, 2011).

Finally, despite the demographic makeup of teachers and students at GSMS, with an overwhelming majority of students of color from low-SES families, very few teachers broached the topic of socio-economic status in their interviews, and even fewer mentioned race and gender. While teachers’ silence on race has been well-documented (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo & Pollock, 2014; Pollock, 2005), future research on the discipline gap might explore whether teachers from “power” demographic categories have different conceptions about the role of race, gender, and SES than those who do not

inhabit those categories. Such a study could, for example, examine whether teachers' conception of power differs to the extent that they are accorded – or even acknowledge -- the power inherent in the demographic categories comprising whiteness, maleness, and money.

### **Limitations**

Because this study focuses on a single school, its findings are not generalizable to other teachers or other middle schools. However, since this study is unique in its focus on teacher attitudes about power and authority and their connection to defiance, its findings may benefit other schools and teachers seeking to improve disciplinary effectiveness and classroom climate. This may be especially true for schools that are, like GSMS, large, urban middle-schools, comprised primarily of students of color from low-SES families, and taught by the typical U.S. teacher: a white, middle-class female.

The primary limitation to this study is imposed by the demographic makeup of GSMS. First, because the student body is overwhelmingly comprised of students of color from low-SES families, and the teachers are predominantly white and middle-class, the results of this analysis can only be said to have validity in one direction. That is, they apply for white middle-class teachers and students of color from low-SES families, but not necessarily for teachers of color who have experienced poverty and white middle-class students. Unfortunately, the trending re-segregation of our public schools, as well as the dominance of white middle-class females in both teaching preparation programs and the public school teaching force, makes it unlikely to find a more demographically balanced public school almost anywhere in the country, let alone one in which might serve as a demographic mirror to GSMS.

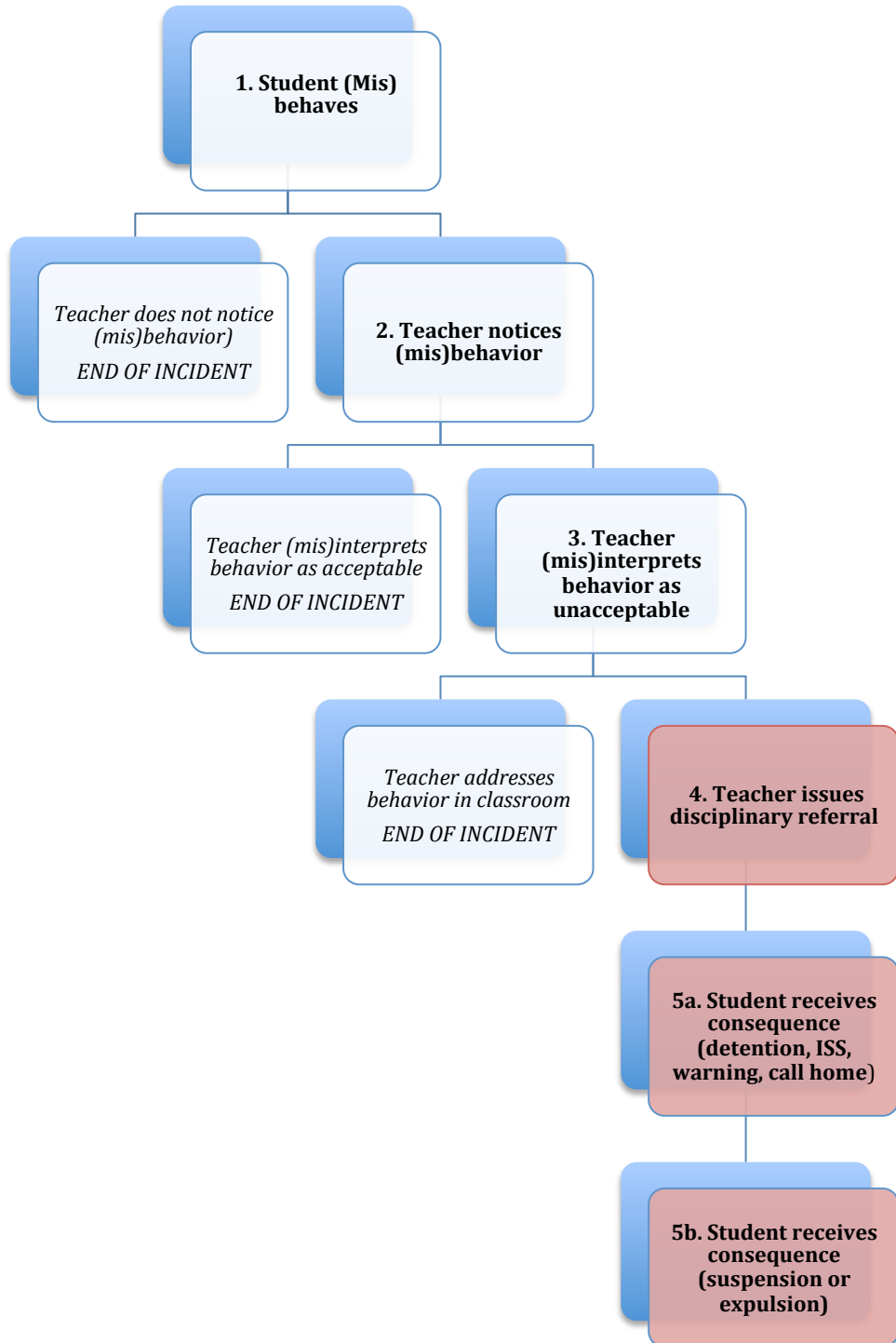
Second, while the use of demographic intersections can obviously provide a far more nuanced understanding of exactly how race, gender, and SES combine to shape our understanding of students and their behavior, certain demographic intersections are too far and few in our teaching force as currently constituted. Particularly troubling is the dearth of males of color as public school teachers and consistent role models for academic prowess and success for all of our schoolchildren, but especially the young men of color who are disproportionately affected by the discipline gap. Working to develop a more widely diverse teaching force would certainly make for more robust research studies, but more importantly would go a long way to putting our notions of equality in education into practice.

Finally, the absence of student voices limits the complexity of the analysis. Their inclusion would serve to triangulate the results of this study and provide important insight into the ways in which power and authority are negotiated on a daily basis at GSMS, both in and out of the classroom. As seen in this study, there is important knowledge to be gained in talking with teachers, knowledge that should be more widely acknowledged, gathered, analyzed, and disseminated. When the voices of teachers are combined with those of their students, strong and caring teacher/student relationships can develop, and perhaps along with them, less defiance and more learning in our classrooms.

Table 1  
*Data Collection Sources and Items*

Data Source	Data Item
Quantitative	
Teacher/Administrator Demographic Survey (n=68)	Teacher Race Teacher Gender Teacher Experience with Poverty Teacher Years Experience
School Teacher Database (n=57)	Teacher Grade Level Taught Teacher Academic Tier Taught
School Student Demographic Database (n=1,030)	Student Race Student Gender Student Eligibility for Free/Reduced Lunch Student Grade Level Student Academic Tier Student Special Education Status
School Discipline Database	Number of DID Referrals by Teacher Number of Students Referred by Teacher for DID Number Students/Number DID by Teacher Number of DID Referrals by Student Number of Teachers Referring for DID by Student Number Teachers/Number DID by Student
Power Grid (n=65)	Teacher Rating from 1-10 of perceived student and teacher power level, both current and ideal
Qualitative	
Teacher/Administrator Individual Interviews (n=65)	Ideal Teacher-Student Relationship Purpose of Discipline Nature of Student Defiance Power of Student (current and ideal) Power of Teacher (current and ideal)
Student Conduct Referral Forms (DID Referrals only)	Teacher Description of Incident

Figure 1  
*Steps in the School Disciplinary Process*



*Note.* Data is generated only in final steps 4 and 5 of the process.

Figure 2  
*Configuration of Influence*

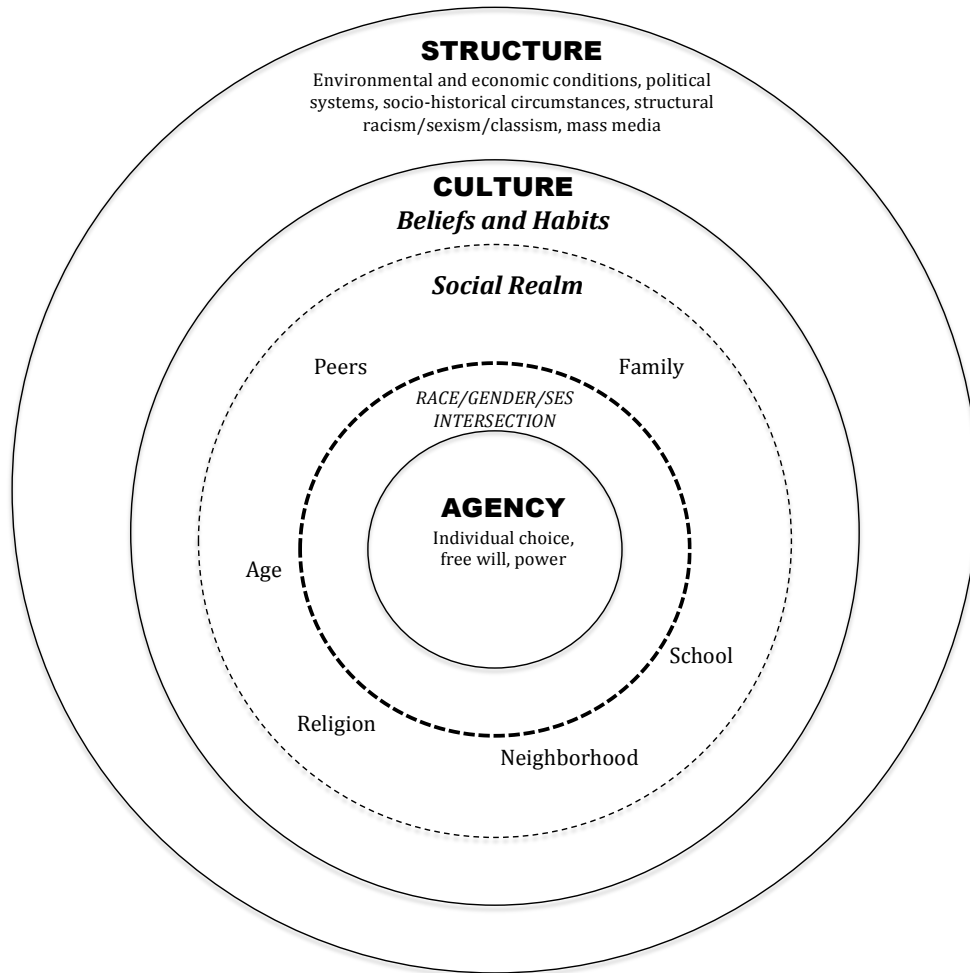


Figure 3  
*Ecology of Discipline*

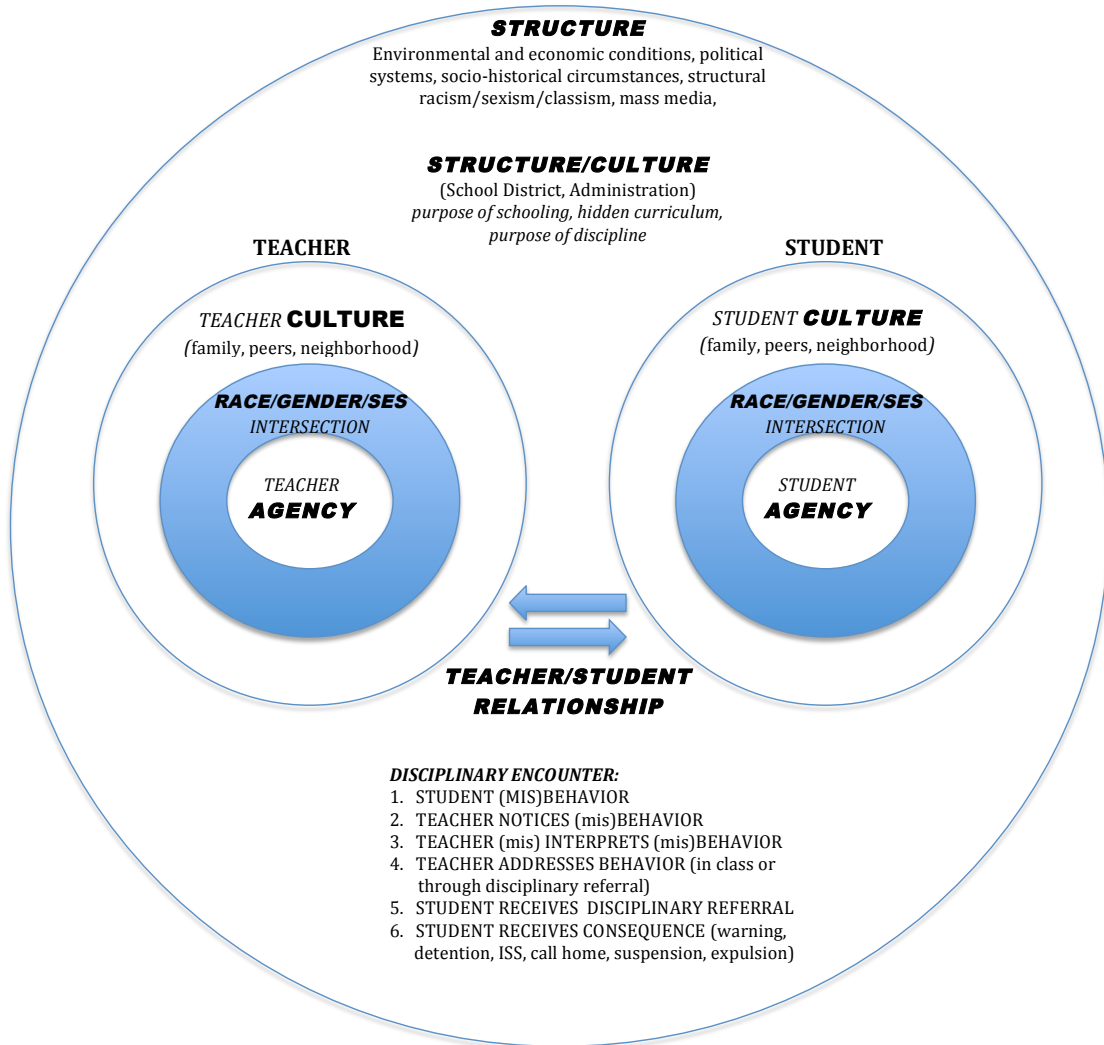


Table 2  
*Student and Teacher DID Dataset Sample Characteristics*

Characteristic	Participant	
	Student ( <i>n</i> = 254)	Teacher ( <i>n</i> = 50)
	Race	
White	5.5%	86%
Of Color	94.5%	14%
	Gender	
Female	30.3%	64%
Male	69.7%	36%
	Socio-Economic Status	
Middle-Class	0%	70%
Poverty-Experienced	100%	30%
	Grade Level <sup>a</sup>	
6	31.9%	27%
7	39.8%	35%
8	28.4%	29%
	Academic Tier	
Advanced	16%	24%
Regular	83%	58%
Special Education/Intervention	20%	18%

<sup>a</sup> Percentages of teacher grade levels taught do not add to 100% because some teachers teach students from more than one grade level.

Table 3  
*Distribution of GSMS Defiance Referrals Received by Student and Issued by Teacher, 2013-14*

Number of Annual Defiance Referrals	Frequency (%)	
	Received by Student	Issued by Teacher
1	167 (65.8)	3 (6.0)
2	43 (16.9)	2 (4.0)
3	24 (9.5)	3 (6.0)
4	8 (3.2)	2 (4.0)
5	5 (2.0)	6 (12.0)
6	3 (1.2)	1 (2.0)
7	1 (0.4)	1 (2.0)
8	1 (0.4)	4 (8.0)
9	1 (0.4)	2 (4.0)
10	1 (0.4)	2 (4.0)
11	---	1 (2.0)
12	---	2 (4.0)
13	---	2 (4.0)
14	---	1 (2.0)
15	---	1 (2.0)
17	---	1 (2.0)
19	---	1 (2.0)
20	---	3 (6.0)
22	---	2 (4.0)
24	---	2 (4.0)
25	---	1 (2.0)
26	---	1 (2.0)
29	---	1 (2.0)
49	---	1 (2.0)
53	---	1 (2.0)
79	---	1 (2.0)
91	---	1 (2.0)
155	---	1 (2.0)
TOTAL	254 (100%)	254 (100%)

Table 4  
*GSMS Teachers (n=57) and Administrator/Staff (n= 14) Demographic and Disciplinary Data*

Data Point	School-Wide (N=71)	Admin/ Staff (n=14)	Teachers		
			Dataset (n=50)	Interviewed (n=51)	All (n=57)
Race (%)					
White	50 (70%)	11 (79%)	32 (64%)	42 (82%)	47 (18%)
Of Color	21 (30%)	3 (21%)	18 (36%)	9 (18%)	10 (18%)
Gender (%)					
Female	46 (65%)	9 (64%)	43 (86%)	33 (65%)	37 (65%)
Male	25 (35%)	5 (36%)	7 (14%)	18 (35%)	20 (35%)
Socio-Economic Experience (%)					
Middle-Class	50 (70%)	9 (64%)	35 (70%)	35 (69%)	41 (72%)
Poverty	21 (30%)	5 (36%)	15 (30%)	16 (31%)	16 (28%)
Years Experience (Average)					
	17.5	19.6	17.2	18.6	18
Annual Defiance Referrals (Average)					
	13.4	2.4	18.4	16.2	17.5

Table 5  
*Parameters Used to Determine Teachers with Highest and Lowest Composite Scores for Defiance Referrals*

ID	Number DIDs (Annual)	Percentage Multiple Referrals	DIDs/ Student	Composite Score
Highest				
0XX7	155	0.87	5.40	9.30
8XX4	91	0.82	2.86	6.64
0XX7	79	0.82	2.39	5.16
7XX5	25	0.84	2.50	3.66
0XX5	17	0.88	2.43	3.39
7XX3	20	0.80	2.50	3.34
1XX4	53	0.66	1.89	3.29
6XX0	49	0.61	1.63	2.61
1XX7	20	0.75	2.00	2.46
1XX9	26	0.73	1.86	2.43
9XX4	22	0.68	1.69	1.88
2XX9	20	0.60	1.67	1.50
Lowest				
3XX7	0	0.00	0	-3.58
8XX8	0	0.00	0	-3.58
2XX4	0	0.00	0	-3.58
6XX9	0	0.00	0	-3.58
7XX3	0	0.00	0	-3.58
9XX6	1	0.00	1	-2.12
9XX5	1	0.00	1	-2.12
0XX8	1	0.00	1	-2.12
7XX6	2	0.00	1	-2.08
8XX1	2	0.00	1	-2.08
9XX8	3	0.00	1	-2.04
6XX7	3	0.00	1	-2.04

Table 6  
*Demographic and Disciplinary Data for Teachers with Highest and Lowest Composite Scores for Defiance Referrals*

Demographic/ Data Point	High Teachers	Low Teachers
Gender (%)		
Female	8 (67%)	8 (67%)
Male	4 (33%)	4 (33%)
Race (%)		
White	11 (92%)	8 (67%)
Of Color	1 (8%)	4 (33%)
Socio-Economic Experience (%)		
Middle-Class	7 (58%)	9 (75%)
Poverty	5 (42%)	3 (25%)
Disciplinary Data		
Years Experience (Average)	16	22
Annual Defiance Referrals (Average)	48	1.1
Percentage Multiple Referrals (Average)	76%	0%
Defiance Referrals/Student (Average)	2.16	0.58

Table 7

*Taxonomy of linear regression models that displays the fitted relationship between the total annual log-count of defiance referrals issued by a GSMS teacher as a function of their difference with student in race, gender, and experience with poverty, and controlling for teacher grade level taught, 2013-14 (N=524, n=50)*

	Fitted Regression Models			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	2.299***	2.599***	2.531***	-0.128
Teaches Grade 8		-0.518	-0.491	-0.619*
Difference in Race			0.776	3.908***
Difference in Gender			-0.174	3.393**
Difference in Socio-Economic Experience			-0.735*	-0.979**
Difference in Race X Difference in Socio-Economic Experience				-3.951**
<u>Goodness-of-Fit:</u>				
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.00	0.04	0.08	0.29

~ $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 8  
*Numbers of Observed and Expected Defiance Referrals Issued by Teacher, by Demographic Group*

Defiance Referrals (N=922)			
Demographic (%)	# Observed	# Expected	% Difference
Race			
White (82%)	848	756	+12%***
Of Color (18%)	74	166	- 55%***
Gender			
Female (65%)	603	599	+ 1%
Male (35%)	319	323	- 1%
Socio-Economic Experience			
Middle-Class (72%)	485	664	- 27%***
Poverty (28%)	437	258	+ 69%***

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Table 9  
*Numbers of Observed and Expected Defiance Referrals Received by Student, by Demographic Group*

Demographic (%)	Defiance Referrals (N=922)		
	# Observed	# Expected	% Difference
	Race		
White (6.5%)	76	60	+21%*
Of Color (93.5%)	846	863	- 2%*
	Gender		
Female (49.6%)	253	457	- 45%***
Male (50.4%)	669	465	+30%***
	Socio-Economic Experience		
Poverty (100%)	922	922	----
	Intersections		
White Females (2.8%)	10	26	-61%***
White Males (3.7%)	66	34	+94%***
Females of Color (46.8%)	243	431	-44%***
Males of Color (46.7%)	603	431	+40%***

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Table 10  
*Overview of Significant<sup>a</sup> Findings for High- and Low-DID Teachers (n=24)*

Interview Question	Teacher Group	
	High-DID Referrals	Low-DID Referrals
Ideal Teacher/ Student Relationship	---	Care/Compassion (Low 58%, High 8%)*
Purpose of Discipline	---	Improve Learning Environment (Low 67%, High 25%)~
Why Students Are Defiant	Structure: District + School Administration (High 58%, Low 8%)*	Teacher/Student Relationship (Low 58%, High 0)*
	Good Old Days (High 33%, Low 0)~	Student Emotions: Anger (Low 42%, High 0)~
		Academic Frustration (Low 42%, High 0)*
Current Power Level (1-10 scale)	Students 6.6 Teachers 5.0	Students 6.6 (Avg) <sup>b</sup> Teachers 7.8 (Avg) <sup>b</sup>
		Positive Student Agency (Low 33%, High 0)~
Ideal Power Level (1-10 scale)	Students 4.5 Teachers 7.0	Students 5.5 Teachers 7.6
		Teacher Agency/ Responsibility (Low 42%, High 0)*

<sup>a</sup> Using Fisher's Exact Test for 2-tailed *p*-values

<sup>b</sup> Low-DID teachers made a distinction between power in their classrooms (students 6.3, teachers 8.4) and outside of their classrooms (students 6.9, teachers 7.2)

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Figure 4  
*Predicted Annual Defiance Referrals by Demographic Differences in Race and Gender Between Teacher and Student*

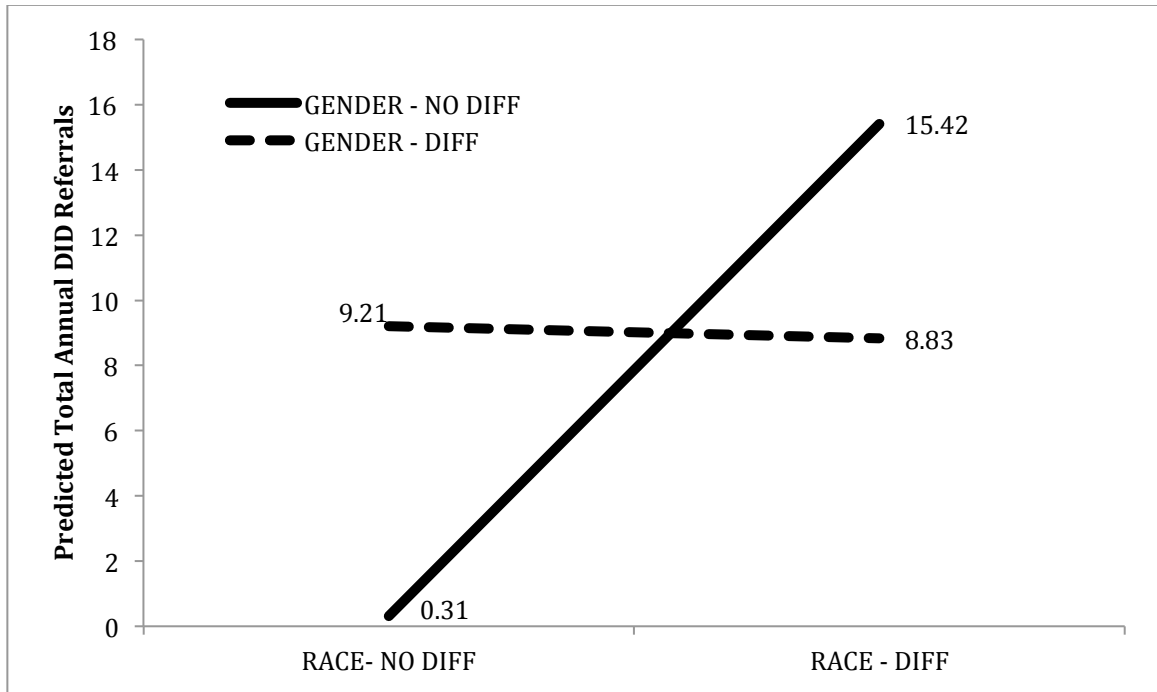


Table 11  
*GSMS Teacher Assessments, on a Scale of 1-10, of Their Own and GSMS Students' Current Levels of Power*

Teacher Demographic	Students		Teachers	
	In Class	Out of Class	In Class	Out of Class (Student Differential)
All (n=51)	5.8	6.2	6.4 (+0.6)	5.9 (-0.3)
Race				
White	6.3	6.7	6.3 (=)	5.6 (-1.1)
Of Color	4.1 <sup>a</sup>	---	7.4 (+3.3)	---
Gender				
Female	5.7	6.2	6.3 (+0.6)	5.7 (-0.5)
Male	6.6	6.9	6.7 (+0.1)	6.2 (-0.7)
Socio-Economic Experience				
Middle-Class	6.1	6.3	6.7 (+0.6)	6.1 (-0.2)
Poverty	5.9	6.6	5.8 (-0.1)	5.2 (-1.4)
Defiance Referral Levels				
High	6.6 <sup>a</sup>	---	5.0 (-1.6)	---
Low	6.3	6.9	8.4 (+2.1)	7.2 (+0.3)

<sup>a</sup>Teachers of color and teachers with high defiance referral levels did not make a distinction between the levels of power they experienced in their classrooms and outside of their classrooms.

*Note.* While all teachers were asked to rank level of student and teacher power on a scale of 1-10, not all teachers responded with a numerical answer.

Table 12  
*GSMS Teacher Assessments, on a Scale of 1-10, of Their Own and GSMS Students' Ideal Levels of Power*

Teacher Demographic	Students	Teachers (Differential)
All (n=51)	4.7	7.6 (+2.9)
	Race	
White	4.9	7.6 (+2.7)
Of Color	5.5	7.6 (+2.1)
	Gender	
Female	4.7	7.7 (+3.0)
Male	5.8	7.3 (+2.1)
	Socio-Economic Experience	
Middle-Class	5.0	7.7 (+ 2.7)
Poverty	5.1	7.2 (-1.4)
	Defiance Referral Levels	
High	4.5	7.0 (+2.5)
Low	5.5	7.6 (+2.1)

*Note.* While all teachers were asked to rank level of student and teacher power on a scale of 1-10, not all teachers responded with a numerical answer.

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APPENDIX A  
Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Defiance, Disrespect, and Insubordination: Perceptions of Power in Middle-School Discipline

Researcher: Karin E. Liiv, Ed.M.

Dear Teacher/Administrator,

Please read this consent agreement carefully before agreeing to participate in the research study. Thank you for considering participating in this work.

Purpose of the research:

This research study is being conducted by Karin Liiv, a doctoral student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE), at the [Gold Star Middle School (GSMS)]. The purpose of the study is to help me better understand how teachers and school administrators think about school discipline, specifically (1) how they define and understand defiance, insubordination, and disrespect, and (2) how much power and authority they think students and teachers should – and do – have at [GSMS].

Research Process:

Your participation will involve completing a very short demographic survey and a 30 minute interview. The demographic survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete and is being distributed along with this consent form. The interview will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you. With your permission, I will make an audio recording of the interview for note-taking purposes only. I do plan to transcribe the interviews, but any information that might possibly identify you (such as your room number or the subject you teach, if those come up during the interview) will not be included in the transcript.

I also plan to analyze existing student disciplinary records at the end of this year (2013-14) to identify any demographic patterns in referral rates for defiance, disrespect, and insubordination for both referring teachers and students. If feasible, I will also analyze teacher comments on Student Conduct Referral Sheets for defiance, insubordination, and disrespect concerning the nature of the incident.

Risks & Confidentiality:

No risks are anticipated in this study.

Both the demographic survey and the interview data will be kept confidential: I will not share the raw data with anyone and will report only aggregate responses. The school's disciplinary data will be downloaded and provided to me as an Excel spreadsheet on a flash drive. Prior to transmitting the data to me, the school data administrator will assign

random and unique identification numbers to replace student and teacher names. The code connecting the ID numbers and participant names will be maintained separately and securely at [GSMS] by the school data administrator; therefore, at no time will the code and the data be in the same location. To further protect your privacy, the demographic surveys and any audio recordings and transcripts of interviews will also be identified only by this randomized ID number (the school data administrator will translate your name into your respective ID number prior to any paper or electronic files leaving the school building). Finally, during the transcription of any interviews, descriptive information that could identify you or the school will be removed.

The data I collect will be kept in a locked office to which only I have access, and all paper files will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in this office, along with the study flash drive. All electronic data files will be stored on a password-protected computer system. The consent forms will be stored separately from the surveys and interview recordings and transcripts. Reports of the study results will also remove any information that could allow someone to identify you or this school.

Benefits:

I cannot promise any direct benefits to you from your taking part in the research. However, possible benefits include improved discipline policies and procedures at [GSMS], which would benefit both teachers and students. Research results and any interesting lessons learned will be shared with the school community at large either in a faculty meeting or through a written memo.

Participation and withdrawal:

**Your participation in this research is completely voluntary** and you may withdraw at any time without penalty simply by informing the researcher that you no longer wish to participate. No questions will be asked.

Contact:

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or if you wish to withdraw from the study, please contact:

*Researcher:*

Karin Liiv

(401) 575-7597

kel278@mail.harvard.edu OR Karin.Liiv@gmail.com

*Faculty Sponsor:*

Dr. Hunter Gehlbach

Assistant Professor of Education

Harvard Graduate School of Education

316 Longfellow, Appian Way

Cambridge, MA 02138  
617-496-7318

This research has been reviewed by the Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research at Harvard University. They can be reached at 617-496-2847, 1414 Massachusetts Avenue, Second Floor, Cambridge, MA 02138, or [cuhs@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:cuhs@fas.harvard.edu) for any of the following:

- If your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team,
- If you cannot reach the research team,
- If you want to talk to someone besides the research team, or
- If you have questions about your rights as a research participant.

Agreement:

Your signature below indicates your permission to take part in this research. You will be provided with a copy of this consent form.

The purpose and nature of this research have been sufficiently explained and I agree to participate in this research. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without incurring any penalty.

Please check only one of the following options:

I agree to take part in both the survey and interview for this study.

I agree to take part in the survey only.

I agree to be interviewed only.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B  
Teacher/Administrator Demographic Survey

Study Title: Defiance, Disrespect, and Insubordination: Perceptions of Power in Middle-School Discipline

Researcher: Karin E. Liiv, Ed.M.

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Gender (Circle One):      Male              Female

3. Race/Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

4. At any time in your life, have you lived in poverty or experienced food or shelter insecurity? (Circle One):      Yes              No

5. How many years of teaching experience do you have?  
\_\_\_\_\_ years (total)  
\_\_\_\_\_ years (at this school)

6. Would you be willing to take part in an interview about student discipline? The interview should take no more than 20-30 minutes and will be scheduled during school hours at a time that is convenient for you. Participants will be selected from among all those who are willing to take part.

(Choose One):              Yes              No

If yes, please indicate the best days and times for you to be interviewed (please be as specific as possible):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C  
Interview Protocol: Teacher/Administrator

Study Title: Defiance, Disrespect, and Insubordination: Perceptions of Power in Middle-School Discipline

Researcher: Karin E. Liiv, Ed.M.

*Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today about your experience with discipline at this school. The purpose of this interview is to help me better understand how you think about school discipline, specifically (1) how you define and understand defiance, insubordination, and disrespect, and (2) how much power and authority you think students and teachers should – and do – have here at [GSMS].*

*The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. Your responses to my questions will be kept confidential, meaning that I will not be sharing the raw data with anyone but will aggregate responses across the set of interviews to develop key themes and lessons.*

*I would like to record this interview for note-taking purposes only. Also remember that this recording will only be identified by your randomized study ID number. [The GSMS Data Administrator] will give me your ID number, and I will put it on any notes I take here as well as using it to name the audio file for this interview, before I leave the building today. Any notes I take will just be about the time when we start different sections of the interview, so I can find and listen to specific sections more easily later on. Is it OK for me to record the interview?  
(if yes, then turn recorder on).*

*I also plan to transcribe this interview, but any information that might possibly identify you (such as your room number or the subject you teach, if those come up during the interview) will not be included in the transcript.*

*Do you have any other questions for me? (Answer any questions.)*

*One last reminder: You can stop this interview at any time if you want to and you can skip any question you don't want to answer, for any reason. OK?*

*OK! Let's begin by talking about your overall experience teaching/working at this school.*

**1. How long have you been a teacher/administrator?**

**2. How long have you been working at this school?**

**3. How would you describe the ideal relationship between a student and a teacher?**

PROBES: In terms of how they treat each other?  
How should a teacher treat a student?  
How should a student treat a teacher?

**4. Overall, how would you describe your relationships with your students?**

PROBES: If generally good, why do you think that is?  
If generally challenging, why do you think that is?  
If mixed, what is the difference between the students you have good relationships with and those with whom you do not?  
Think about your favorite students. (Do not mention their names). Why are they your favorites? How do they treat you?  
Think about students that challenge you. (Do not mention their names). What is most challenging about them? How do they treat you?

**5. What about other teachers at this school? In general, how would you describe their relationships with students?**

PROBES: If generally good, why do you think that is?  
If generally challenging, why do you think that is?  
If mixed, what do you think is the reason some teacher-student relationships are better than others?

*Now let's talk more specifically about school discipline.*

**6. What would you say is the primary purpose of discipline?**

PROBES: Should students be punished for misbehavior?  
Should students be taught why some behavior is not appropriate?  
Should students be taught about what behavior is appropriate and why?

*Now let's focus on defiance, insubordination, and disrespect (DID). As you know, on the [District] disciplinary referral sheet these offenses are considered as one category.*

**7. How would you define DID infractions?**

PROBES: Can you me an example of each?  
Do you think that these offenses should be grouped together?  
If yes, what makes them similar? What do they have in common?

If not, why not? How would you describe those differences?  
Is there is a difference between defiance and disrespect? between  
defiance and insubordination?

### **8. What does DID tend to look like at this school?**

PROBES: What types of behavior do you see in the hallways? In the  
lunchroom?  
If you have worked at other schools, would you say that, in  
general, students at this school have more issues with DID  
than at other schools?  
Is the school atmosphere/climate here different than you have  
experienced at other schools? How so?  
What is it about this school that makes it different than others?

### **9. Why do you think students in general act defiantly or disrespectfully?)**

PROBES: What makes students act defiantly?  
Is there something about the teachers that makes the students  
(more, less) defiant?  
Is there something about the students that makes them (more, less)  
defiant?

### **10. Do you think that DID referrals are given out fairly and consistently at this school?**

PROBES: Do some teachers give out too many DID referrals?  
If yes, why do you think they give out more DID referrals?  
What kind of relationship do you think they have with their  
students?

*We are almost done! I'd just like to ask a little more about what you think about the  
relationship between teachers and students.*

### **11. How much power do you think students have at this school?**

PROBES: If too much, in what areas do they have too much?  
If too little, in what areas do you think they need more power?  
If just right, what do students control? What do teachers control?  
What do administrators control?  
Curriculum decisions?

Classroom management?  
School rules?  
No consequences for behavior? (what behavior exactly?)

*We are done! Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me. I really appreciate your willingness to help with this research.*

**12. Is there anything else you would like to say about school discipline that I haven't specifically asked?**

*Thanks again for your help! If you have any questions at all about my research, please feel free to contact me. My contact information is on the copy of your consent form, and here is my business card.*

APPENDIX D  
Power Grid

**STUDENT HIGH (10)**

T E A C H E R			T E A C H E R
L O W			H I G H

**STUDENT LOW (0)**

**APPENDIX E  
GSMS Student Conduct Referral Form**

**STUDENT CONDUCT REFERRAL *Confidential***

STUDENT \_\_\_\_\_ SLC/TEAM/HR \_\_\_\_\_ GRADE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
NAME

SCHOOL \_\_\_\_\_ REFERRER \_\_\_\_\_ TIME \_\_\_\_\_  
NAME ROLE

**REASON FOR CONDUCT REFERRAL (check one)**

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic Abusive Language /Inappropriate language  | <input type="checkbox"/> Bomb Threat/ Fire Alarm   | <input type="checkbox"/> Skip class/truancy                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic Disruption  | <input type="checkbox"/> Property theft/Forgery    | <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic lying/cheating                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Property Damage/ Vandalism  | <input type="checkbox"/> Use/Possession of weapon  | <input type="checkbox"/> Dress code violation                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Defiance/Insubordination/Disrespect   | <input type="checkbox"/> Use/Possession of drugs   | <input type="checkbox"/> Technology violation                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fighting/ physical aggression   | <input type="checkbox"/> Use/Possession of alcohol | <input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate display of affection         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bullying  | <input type="checkbox"/> Use/Possession of tobacco | <input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate location/ Out of bounds area |
| Harassment to include:   | <input type="checkbox"/> Gang affiliation display  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Behavior                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual <input type="checkbox"/> Racial <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual Orientation |  |   |

**DESCRIPTION OF OBSERVED BEHAVIOR (please be specific)**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Location: Check one**

<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom	<input type="checkbox"/> Hallway/Stairwell	<input type="checkbox"/> Cafeteria	<input type="checkbox"/> Gym	<input type="checkbox"/> Library	<input type="checkbox"/> Bathroom	<input type="checkbox"/> Schoolyard	<input type="checkbox"/> Unknown Location
<input type="checkbox"/> Locker Room	<input type="checkbox"/> Parking Lot	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Event/ Assembly/Field Trip	<input type="checkbox"/> Off Campus	<input type="checkbox"/> Stadium	<input type="checkbox"/> Bus Room	<input type="checkbox"/> Office	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Location

**Motivation/Trigger: Check one**

<input type="checkbox"/> OBTAIN PEER ATTENTION	<input type="checkbox"/> OBTAIN ADULT ATTENTION	<input type="checkbox"/> AVOID WORK	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER MOTIVATION
<input type="checkbox"/> OBTAIN ITEMS/ACTIVITIES	<input type="checkbox"/> AVOID ADULTS	<input type="checkbox"/> AVOID PEERS	<input type="checkbox"/> UNKNOWN MOTIVATION

**Others Involved: Check one**

<input type="checkbox"/> None	<input type="checkbox"/> Peers	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Substitute	<input type="checkbox"/> Unknown	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
-------------------------------	--------------------------------	--------------------------------	----------------------------------	-------------------------------------	----------------------------------	--------------------------------

**INTERVENTION PRIOR TO REFERRAL (check all that apply)**

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conference w/ Student            | <input type="checkbox"/> Counsel with Colleague(s)                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment of Learning                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apology verbal or written        | <input type="checkbox"/> Referral to Nurse                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Modification of Instructional Practice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom Community Service      | <input type="checkbox"/> Referral to Counselor, Social Worker, Psychologist | <input type="checkbox"/> Referral to Special Education          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Withheld Non-Academic Privileges | <input type="checkbox"/> Mailed Letter to Family                            |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mediation                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Conference w/ Family                               |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Behavior plan w/ Student         | <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone Conversation w/Family                    |   |

TELEPHONE # \_\_\_\_\_  
 NAME OF FAMILY MEMBER \_\_\_\_\_

**ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION (check one)**

APPENDIX F  
Table F-1  
*Overview and Structure of Dataset GSMSDATA.dta.*

Dataset	GSMSDATA.dta
Overview	Dataset on student defiance referrals (grades 6 through 8) at the Gold Star Middle School in 2013-14 as a function of demographic difference between referring teacher and student as regards race, gender, and socio-economic experience.
Source	Principal, Gold Star Middle School, New England
Sample Size	254 students and 50 teachers comprising 922 defiance referrals
Last Updated	March 6, 2015

Col. #	Variable Name	Variable Description	Variable Metric/Labels
1	STID	Student Identification Code	Integer
2	SRACE	Whether student is white or of color	Dichotomous variable: 0=White 1=Student of Color
3	SGENDER	Whether student is female or male	Dichotomous variable: 0=Female 1=Male
4	SFR	Does student qualify for free or reduced lunch status?	Dichotomous variable: 0=No 1=Yes
5	SGRADE	Grade level of student	Continuous variable, between 6 and 8
6	STIER	Whether student is enrolled in regular academic program, advanced academic program, or special education/intervention classes	Categorical variable: 1=Regular 2=Advanced 3=Special Education/ Intervention
7	DDRACE DDGENDER DDPOVX	Set of dummy variables that indicates whether or not student and teacher are demographically different, specifically whether they share the same race (DDRACE), gender (DDGENDER), and/or experience with poverty (DDPOVX)	Dichotomous variable: 0=No 1=Yes
8	TOTDID	The annual number of disciplinary referrals issued by a teacher for defiance, insubordination, or disrespect (DID)	Count variable with log-outcome distribution

9	TCHID	Teacher Identification Code	Integer
10	TRACE	Whether teacher is white or of color	Dichotomous variable: 0=White 1=Teacher of Color
10	TGENDER	Whether teacher is female or male	Dichotomous variable: 0=Female 1=Male
12	TPOVX	Has teacher ever experienced poverty or food insecurity?	Dichotomous variable: 0=No 1=Yes
13	TEXP	Years of teaching experience	Continuous variable, ranging from 1 to 36
14	TGR6 TGR7 TGR8	Set of dummy variables that indicates whether or not teacher teaches students in Grades 6 (TGR6), Grade 7 (TGR7), and/or Grade 8 (TGR8)	Dichotomous variable: 0=No 1=Yes
15	TTIER	Whether teacher teaches primarily in regular academic program, advanced academic program, or special education/intervention classes	Categorical variable: 1=Regular 2=Advanced 3=Special Education/ Intervention

APPENDIX G  
GSMS Interview Codebook

If no appropriate sub-code, use broader category or sub-category headings:

- Individual Agency
- Culture (Social Realm, Values/Beliefs)
- Structure (Societal, School/District)
- Race/SES/Gender
- Teacher-Student Relationship (Learning/Teaching, Relational Elements, Discipline)
- Power/Authority
- Key Emic Codes (use for consistent theme not already represented in codebook)

Note that there are three codes for what is NOT said, or silence around specific issues: racial silence, gender silence, and SES silence

Assumption is that students are being referenced; make note if teacher is referring to self or other teachers instead

Assumption is that conditions being referenced are current; make note if interviewee is speaking about conditions that are ideal

<b>Code (Citation)</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b><i>Individual Agency (IA)</i></b>	
Biology	Biological states or issues, such as ADHD, nutrition
Emotions	Personal or individual emotional states or issues, such as self-respect, anger, enjoyment, laziness
Developmental Stage	Developmental level of individual, such as adolescence or middle-school years
Attention-Seeking	Desire or need for the attention of others; can be positive or negative
Nature/Essence	References an element as an intrinsic and/or essential component of the individual and sometimes implying willfulness and/or immunity to change (e.g., “It’s in their nature,” “They just don’t care”)
Habit	Behavior or trait that is habitual in nature
Choice/Decision-Making	Desire, need or ability to make choices or decisions
Assertion of Independence	Student assertion of independence from teacher or other adult (e.g., “You can’t tell me what to do”)
Autonomy	The desire, state or ability to act on one’s own behalf without outside constraints or influence
Accountability/ Responsibility	Being accountable and taking responsibility for circumstances that result from one’s own actions; includes the idea that every individual choice leads to certain consequences, whether good or bad [see also TSR: Discipline: Consequences]
Self-Control/Self-Discipline	Individual control over their reaction to a person or situation; ability to refrain from acting on impulse or to delay personal and/or immediate gratification

<b><i>Culture</i></b>	
<b><i>Culture: Social Realm (groups that constitute individual’s social realm)</i></b>	
Home/Parents	Elements of student’s home or parents (e.g., home life, parent age)
Peers	Personal or professional peer group
Neighborhood	Setting or vicinity in which individual lives (e.g., West Side, suburban)
Religion	Religious group or affiliation

<b>Code (Citation)</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<i>Culture: Values/Beliefs (associated with groups in social realm)</i>	
Family Values	Values, beliefs, and norms of the individual's family (e.g., valuing education, setting limits, coddling, role modeling)
American society	Values, beliefs, and norms of American society as a whole
Peer Culture	Values, beliefs, and norms of the individual's peers
Neighborhood Values	Values, beliefs, and norms associated with the setting in which the individual lives
Religious Values	Values, beliefs, and norms associated with specific religious groups
[Mass media]	Sub-genres of mass media <i>specific to the individual</i> (e.g., country music, vampire movies, Minecraft video game) [see also Structure: Societal]
Deficit/At-Risk Frame	Framing students and/or their families as lacking or missing some quality or experience
<b>Structure</b>	
<i>Structure: Societal</i>	
Socio-historical circumstances	References to socio-historical events (e.g., the GI Bill, the Civil Rights movement, etc.)
Political Context/Climate	References to political conditions or political parties or events, such as elections, legislative climate, etc.
Economic Conditions	References to economic conditions, whether past or current
[Mass media]	Mass media <i>writ large</i> , including television, music, and websites, and the images and messages therein [see also Culture: Values/Beliefs]
<i>Structure: School/District</i>	
School Disciplinary Practices	School-wide elements such as in-school suspension (ISS) or detention late busses
School Administration	References to administrative constraints and enablers, such as support from (vice) principals, limited staffing, etc.
District Policies	References to district policies, such as social promotion and teacher evaluation measures

<b>Code (Citation)</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b><i>Race/Gender/Socio-Economic Status (SES)</i></b>	
<b><i>Race</i></b>	
Colormute (Pollock, 2005)	Race is not mentioned throughout the interview, particularly when discussing discipline and/or DID-related issues
Racial difference	Reference to racial differences
Inequities and/or Power Differentials by Race (Oyserman, 1995)	Expressed awareness and/or recognition of inequities and/or differences in power between racial groups
Color-Blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2009)	Claiming unawareness of race or not “seeing” race
<b><i>Gender</i></b>	
Gender-Mute (a la Pollock, 2005)	Gender is not mentioned throughout the interview, particularly when discussing discipline and/or DID-related issues
Gender difference	Reference to gender differences
Inequities and/or Power Differentials by Gender	Expressed awareness and/or recognition of inequities and/or differences in power between gender groups
“Boys will be boys”	Dismissing aggressive or inappropriate behavior on the part of male students
<b><i>Socio-Economic Status (SES)</i></b>	
SES-Mute (a la Pollock, 2005)	SES is not mentioned throughout the interview, particularly when discussing discipline and/or DID-related issues
SES difference	Reference to SES differences
Inequities and/or Power Differentials by SES (McLeod, 1987)	Expressed awareness and/or recognition of inequities and/or differences in power between socio-economic groups
Meritocracy	Dominant U.S. narrative that negates social structures and institutionalized isms: “If you work hard, you will get ahead”
Growth Mindset (Dweck, 1993)	Belief that effort determines success (rather than innate, fixed ability)

<b>Code (Citation)</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b><i>TSR (Teacher-Student Relationship)</i></b>	
<b><i>TSR: Learning and Teaching (Environment)</i></b>	
Effective Teaching/ Learning Environment	Environment or atmosphere in which teacher is able to teach and/or all students are able to learn
Academic Work	Academic or subject-oriented coursework or homework
Academic Frustration	Student is behind academically or by grade level or does not understand the course material, or school work is too demanding or too boring, leading to student misbehavior
Soft Skills	Non-academic skills such as perseverance, promptness, tidiness, focus/attention, etc.
Preparing for Future	Preparation of student for their future, whether high school, college, job, or life in general
Order/Structure/Organization	Classroom environment is systemic, structured and organized (refers to practices and procedures)
Limits/Boundaries	References to classroom or teacher practices or directives that serve to contain student(s) or create holding environment
Rules/Expectations	Explicit guidelines for student behavior and/or academic performance
Safety	Physical and psychological safety of the student and/or teacher
Fun/Enjoyment	Learning or teaching as fun or enjoyable; teacher or student demonstrates pleasure or excitement in teaching/learning
<b><i>TSR: Relational Elements</i></b>	
Communication or Dialogue	Open, honest communication between teacher & student
Respect	Admiration, esteem, high regard for another person
Responsibility	Acknowledgment of personal responsibility in developing and maintaining TSR, and the qualities attendant to this responsibility (e.g., come to class prepared to teach/learn, admit mistakes)
Partnership	Relationship characterized by both teacher and student working toward mutual goal; can include cooperation, collaboration
Friendship (vs. Friendly)	Teacher and student experience peer-level relationship as friends (not to be confused with teacher and student having a friendly relationship, e.g., getting along well)

High Expectations: Academic, Behavioral	Teacher holds student to high academic and/or behavioral standards
Caring/Love (Noddings, 1998)	Concern, caring, or love for student(s)
Warm Demander (Ladson-Billings, 1994)	Combination of high expectations and caring by teacher for student
Support/Reliance	Student feels that they can rely on their teacher and/or is supported by their teacher
Role Modeling/Guidance	Teacher serves as role model or guide for student, whether in academic or personal realm
Personality Conflict	Difficulties in teacher-student relationship are attributed to conflicts between individual personalities
<i>TSR: Discipline</i>	
Punishment	Punitive measures or punishment of students for (mis)behavior
Correct/Rectify	Seeks correction or rectification of behavior; implication is that behavior is wrong, incorrect, or inappropriate
Limits/Boundaries	Behavioral limit or boundary beyond which student is not allowed, as determined by teacher (e.g., “They crossed the line”)
Restrict/Constrict/Remove	Seeks to lessen or diminish student agency, benefits or privileges (e.g., no lunch in cafeteria,
Change/Improve	Seeks to change or improve student behavior, outlook, or understanding
Consequences	Follow from every individual action; can be positive or negative; includes the phrase “getting away with it,” which implies that an individual choice to (mis)behave did not result in any consequence [see also Individual Agency: Responsibility/Accountability]

Code (Citation)	Definition
<b><i>Power/Authority [see also Individual Agency]</i></b>	
Power Constraints/Enablers	People, conditions, or issues that either constrain/limit an individual's power, or enable/enhance an individual's power
Hierarchical control (O'Donoghue, 2006)	Emphasis on control <i>over</i> others (whether teacher, student, or peers)
Role Authority: Teacher or Adult (Delpit, 1995; Cooper, 2003; Obidah & Teel, 2001)	Ascribes power/authority to the teacher or adult solely by virtue of their roles as teacher or adult (e.g., "I should be respected because I am their teacher," "I am the adult and they are the child," "Children should know their place")
"Teacher Knows Best"	Teacher asserts that as teacher or adult, they know better than their students and/or what is best for them
Power Struggle/Power Trip	Specific reference to struggle between teacher and student to assert individual control over the other person or the situation/task at hand
Collective Power	The power of a group rather than an individual
Shared Power (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009)	Power that is shared equally or in part by one or more individuals or groups; also referred to as cooperative or collaborative power
(Dis)Empowerment	Power that is accorded (or removed) from one person or group by another person or group; empowerment can be either positive ("Her action empowered me to stand up for myself") or negative ("The lack of consequences empowers students to behave however they want")
Responsible Power	Recognition that with power comes increased responsibility, and/or a detailing of the responsibilities attendant in a position of power or authority
Awareness of Power Differentials: Race, SES, Gender	Expressed recognition of differences in power between groups along demographic lines
Codes of Power (Delpit, 1988)	Recognition/analysis of kinds and sources of power

<b><i>Key Emic Codes</i></b>	
Good Old Days	Teacher references differences between how school functions now versus in their time. Includes variation, “I wasn’t raised like that,” [which also raises differences in parent values]
Validation Seeking	Teacher seeks affirmation/validation through statements such as, “I’m sure you have heard this before/already” or questions such as, “Other teachers said the same thing, right?”

VITA  
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