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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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The discovery of the implicit pupil-teacher social contract

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Abstract
The study takes a critical realist grounded theory approach to explore the intersection of pupil-teacher relationships and school alienation using experiences of secondary school pupils and teachers. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with both pupils and teachers. Participants' perceptions and experiences were explored, both positive and negative, to develop an understanding of the perspectives of both actors in reciprocal relationships. The methodological framework for this grounded theory diverges from the popular constructivist design and is, instead, influenced by the classic approach. It is developed to be situated in a critical realist philosophy, emphasising the importance of the emancipatory goal of critical realism. Analysis of the data identified that alienated pupils frequently have difficult relationships with their teachers and discovered a subgroup of pupils who experienced more extreme forms of alienation. An implicit pupil-teacher social contract is presented, describing the emergence of observable actions through the causative mechanism inherent to critical realism. The social contract rests upon the concepts of mutual respect and power. When a pupil believes the contract to have been breached, through the perceived violation of one of these concepts, pupil-teacher relationships begin to deteriorate.

KEYWORDS
alienation, grounded theory, pupil-teacher relationships, social contracts

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Context and implications

Rationale for this study

Positive relationships between pupils and teachers are associated with the social, emotional and cognitive development of pupils. The intersection of alienation and pupil-teacher relationships has been scarcely explored in literature.

Why the new findings matter

This study develops an understanding of the constructs that can reduce alienation in secondary schools. The theory can be used to continue exploring relationships between pupils and teachers.

Implications for educational organisations

Multi-academy trusts and educational policy makers could benefit from this research. Understanding the implicit contract and potential implications a critical incident can have on a pupil's academic trajectory, initiatives could be put in place that can reduce pupil alienation from schools. Trainee and early career teachers face a steep learning curve, frequently citing behaviour management as a fear and ongoing area for development. The findings can help trainee and early career teachers to quickly establish positive pupil-teacher relationships, enhancing the experience of both pupils and teachers. The findings can be used to inform professional development opportunities for all teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Disaffected pupils, or social outsiders (Freire, 1970), are alienated from their school environment, and it has been suggested they belong only by nature of their physical presence (Swann, 2013). This ongoing concern about pupil alienation has long been recognised as a problem that needs to be addressed (Trusty & Dooley-Dickey, 1993). Pupil-teacher relationships have been shown to have a significant impact on pupils' development throughout their school careers (Davis, 2003; Kohn, 2006; Sointu et al., 2017). It has been suggested that when pupil-teacher relationships are positive, they can protect against disengagement often observed in secondary school pupils (Duffy & Elwood, 2013; Guvenc, 2015; Maclellan, 2014). Furthermore, it has been shown that pupils who exhibit disaffection and lack of engagement at school are likely to make less academic progress than their peers who do not display these characteristics (Dotterer & Lowe, 2011; Lohmann, 2010; Putwain et al., 2016). The benefit of positive relationships between pupils and teachers cannot be underestimated. Where such relationships exist, rates of pupil dropout have been shown to be reduced (Hopkins, 2007; Mullet, 2014; Yıldız & Alpkan, 2015; Zabloski & Milacci, 2012).

This study sought to explore the important overlap between the phenomena of alienation and pupil-teacher relationships by applying a critical realist lens of analysis to grounded theory methodology. Positive relationships between pupils and teachers are associated with the social, emotional and cognitive development of pupils (Barth et al., 2004; Darwich et al., 2012; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Kington, 2012), and so this study seeks to contribute to this field. It uses a critical realist grounded theory (CRGT) methodology to understand the

constructs that lead to effective pupil-teacher relationships and how to reduce pupil aliena-tion in secondary schools.

Literature review

As the research design for this study was a grounded theory methodology, literature was not consulted at the start of the research process, as is common in most research approaches (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that a researcher using grounded theory should not engage with a full literature review prior to completing data analysis; indeed, it is accepted that one of the defining concepts of the inductive process of grounded theory is to approach the research with an open mind, not seeing the data through a predetermined lens and coloured by earlier ideas (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz's summary of the 'disputed literature review' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 151) explores key historical insights to the various interpretations of how and when to conduct the literature review. The consensus is that delaying the review avoids preconceived ideas clouding the researcher's analysis of the data, but when, and sometimes whether, the literature review should be conducted is still highly contested. Classic grounded theory (Glaser, 1992), advancing a solely inductive approach, makes the assumption that theory is already residing in data. It is suggested that the theory is waiting to be discovered (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser's view on how a clas-sic grounded theory should approach literature is very clear. He states that a literature review should not be conducted in the substantive and related areas (Glaser, 1998).

This study used a CRGT methodology, built upon the tenets of the classic approach to grounded theory. As Glaser's view continues to be held by classic grounded theorists (Holton, 2007; Nathaniel, 2006) and it was important to maintain a degree of objectivity in the initial phase of data collection, literature was not consulted until emergent properties (Looker et al., 2021) were identified. As a result of this, no literature review is presented in this article. Instead, an in-depth analysis of the literature is presented as part of the discus-sion, detailing the extant knowledge surrounding pupil-teacher relationships and pupil alien-ation from school. For the avoidance of doubt, and to maintain clarity, it is important to share the definition of alienation that has been adopted for this research. There have been many attempts to define alienation in past. Of these attempts, Hascher and Hadjar's (2018) is the most comprehensive. Their systematic analysis of extant literature considers the multiple ideas that are accepted as being part of the concept; alienation is a set of negative values, is relative, is multidimensional and consists of cognitive and affective components (Hascher & Hadjar, 2018). They use these ideas to formulate the following definition of school alienation:

> a specific set of negative attitudes towards social and academic domains of schooling comprising cognitive and affective elements. While the cognitive dimension relates to student appraisals of the school environment, the affective dimension relates to their feelings. These negative attitudes develop and change over time in terms of a state and can solidify into a disposition.
>
> (Hascher & Hadjar, 2018, p. 179)

RESEARCH DESIGN

Critical realist grounded theory

One of the defining claims of critical realism, as a philosophy of meta-reality (Bhaskar, 1978), is the important distinction between knowing and being. Critical realism argues that the

FIGURE 1   Emergent nature of critical realist domains of reality

world of knowledge is transitive but the world of being is intransitive (Scott, 2010). Although a critical realist asserts a singular true reality, they are aware that this reality can manifest itself through a variety of emergent properties. Figure 1 shows how the emergence travels upwards through stratified layers of reality to observable actions (Bhaskar, 1978).

The boundaries of these three domains—*real*, *actual* and *empirical*—are demarcated by the limits of their ontological and epistemological claims. The *real* domain, focusing on ontology, is where the critical realist perspective of a singular true reality stems from. This domain is where structures and mechanisms occur; they are separate from the way they are experienced, that is to say, they are intransitive (Bhaskar, 1978 p56). The *actual* domain refers to events that may or may not be observable; these events are generated by the mechanisms and structures lying in the real strata. Through this generative property of emergence, actions and experiences are observed in the empirical domain; thus the *empirical* domain is entirely epistemological in nature.

This study adopted a critical realist grounded theory (CRGT) methodology. This unique approach takes participants' experiences, subjects them to a critical realist framework, where they are explored backwards, through the critical realist causative mechanisms to identify causative structures which can lead to observed phenomena (Looker et al., 2021). The CRGT used in this research is based upon the critical realist view that observable phenomena (in the *empirical* domain) emerge through a series of causative mechanisms in *real* and *actual* domains of reality (Bhaskar, 1978). This philosophical stance—that theory emerges from the data—resonates with Age's (2011) argument that importance should be placed on discovery and emergence (Age, 2011). Critical realism argues that research should have an emancipatory goal and that this should not be marginalised to make way for more pluralistic approaches (Wilson & Greenhill, 2004). Bhaskar (1978, 1986) describes this objective as the aim to move people from *demi-reality* (which includes exploitation, oppression, conflict and alienation) to the *cosmic envelope* (described as a state of being where these characteristics are not present) (Bhaskar, 2002).

CRGT, it is argued, should therefore be done when the intention of the research is not only to explore sociological aspects of inequality, but to discover actions that can address this (Bhaskar, 2016; Hoddy, 2019). Classic grounded theory's aim to generate a substantive theory requires it to give suggestions for how the initial concern can be addressed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Furthermore, it is stated that the intentions of this theory should be to predict and explain behaviour, or to equip practitioners with tools to help control situations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The purpose of this study was to generate a theory that facilitates teachers' ability to manage predicted classroom behaviours to reduce pupil alienation. This provided an emancipatory purpose for the research, which classic grounded theory is capable of handling. The intended outcome was a substantive theory, situated in the voices of alienated participants, which provided suggested resolutions to move those experiencing *demi-reality* into the *cosmic envelope* (Bhaskar, 2002).

One research question guided the study:

- What *real*[1] mechanism(s) exist which lead to pupils experiencing alienation from school?

Positionality statement

The research presented in this article was conducted from an outsider perspective (Moore, 2012). The personal philosophical perspective of the researcher is informed by the methodological and wider philosophical meanings aligned with education. This was in addition to the ontological and epistemological perspectives that drove the chosen methodology. Ontology, dealing with the nature of being or reality, and epistemology, dealing with the nature of knowledge, were given careful consideration before starting the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For the research design to be considered robust, the ontological and epistemological paradigm needed to suit the research aims and the researcher's personal beliefs about reality (Lincoln et al., 2018). The research was conducted through a critical realist lens, which can be summarised as holding a worldview that is ontologically positivist, yet epistemologically interpretivist. This philosophical worldview assumes there is one true reality independent of human interaction, but that this reality is coded and therefore limited by human interpretation and language. In terms of educational research, this means there is a belief that structures exist in reality that are not directly observable but cause directly observable events. The observable events, recalled by participants and manifested as deliberate misbehaviour and disengagement, are subject to human interpretation and can thus limit one's understanding of reality. The research design and accompanying philosophy accommodated such a perspective to allow for the identification of *real* structures and the mechanisms that can lead to observable phenomena.

Recruitment procedure

Recruitment procedures were carefully considered to ensure participants were recruited ethically. The first stage involved contacting schools and gaining entrée after ethical approval had been granted. Following this, staff were recruited by introducing the research at an afterschool meeting. Two pastoral leads volunteered to become participants and these were used to help identify potential pupil participants who met the inclusion criteria. Assemblies were led with whole year groups to introduce the research, which was supplemented by approaching the form groups that contained a high number of potential participants. The research was explained to pupils, and participant information sheets and consent forms left in their form rooms for pupils who were interested in the study to collect. Before pupils were able to become participants, signed, informed consent forms were collected from both pupils and their parents/carers.

Following this, members of staff who taught pupil participants were invited to complete Pianta's (2001) Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) using onlinesurveys.ac.uk. Upon completion of the questionnaire, there was a final question asking if teachers wanted to take part in an interview. Those who said they were interested were contacted. Throughout the entire recruitment process, participants were prioritised for interview based on analysis of previous interviews. For example, when a pupil participant mentioned a teacher or a pupil by name and the subject matter indicated a line of inquiry worth pursuing, the list of potential participants was consulted and those who had expressed an interest were prioritised for subsequent interviews. This process of theoretical sampling allowed the data collected and emerging theory to remain theoretically sensitive.

Sample

Participants were pupils and staff based at a secondary school in England. Of the 12 pupils included in the sample, ten were boys and two were girls. Each pupil was initially identified by

pastoral leads in the school as previously demonstrating a lack of engagement in school life. This usually meant the pupils had been placed on report, had their parents called into school to discuss their behaviour or had multiple incidents on the school behaviour log. This ensured the data were collected from sources that allow for generation of theory rather than creating a descriptive account (Breckenridge & Jones, 2009). The process of data collection was directed by the emerging theory, keeping it theoretically relevant (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Teachers were given the opportunity to complete the STRS for pupils who participated in the research in the form of an online survey. A total of 21 different teachers participated in the research, either by completing the STRS surveys, by consenting to interviews or both. Some teachers returned survey responses for more than one pupil. As each pupil participant had between 7 and 13 different teachers, a maximum of 13 STRS forms could have been received for each pupil. Return rate varied with between three and seven completed STRS forms received per pupil. Six members of staff consented to interviews. Of the teachers who participated, 4 were male and 17 were female. This was a representative sample of the staff body, which is dominated by female teachers.

Anonymity and confidentiality

Anonymity and confidentiality are important aspects of ethically sound research (Lincoln et al., 2018). The nature of the research question gave rise to the possibility that a participant might disclose a child protection issue that must be passed on. When confidentiality was explained to participants, both verbally and in the participant information sheet, it was made clear that if a child protection issue arose, confidentiality would be over-ridden and the child protection concern would be passed on to the designated safeguarding lead to protect individuals from harm. Before any data were collected, all participants were asked to confirm they understood that confidentiality would be broken in this circumstance only. Participants who were teachers were taken to understand the jargonistic terms used when explaining this, so were only asked to confirm they understood. Pupil participants, however, were given examples of what the term 'harm' meant in this situation. They were told that this meant if there was a safeguarding issue mentioned or disclosed which put the pupil at risk of mental or physical harm, it would be reported to the designated safeguarding officer.

Conducting research with multiple participants within one site increased the chance that readers of the research output could identify some of the participants' contributions through knowledge of those who took part. All participants were assigned a code and a pseudonym for data analysis and any reference to participants used generalised information only, such as their year group. Where direct quotes are given, pseudonyms are used to avoid identification of participants. As data collected had been coded and categorised in the aim to saturate it, the chances of identification were significantly reduced. Participants were informed that published outputs would not contain full transcripts of interviews, but could use direct, pseudonymised quotes reducing the possibility of identification.

Data collection

Unstructured, exploratory interviews with participants were held with prompts used to ensure the conversation remained theoretically relevant. The exploratory interview technique is favoured when wanting to generate hypotheses rather than collecting facts and numbers (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 5). This also accounted for grounded theory's requirement for the researcher to approach the research without 'a priori assumptions' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3).

After each interview, a memo was written to provide immediate reflection on the interview. Data analysis began after the first interview and continued throughout the data gathering process. This allowed for emerging lines of inquiry to be identified and pursued during subsequent interviews, as aspects of the theory began to emerge. This also led to some slight changes in the prompts used during interviews, as they progressed.

ANALYSIS

Open coding

The first stage of data analysis employed Looker et al.,'s (2021) critical realist approach to open coding. This process helped to avoid the epistemic fallacy where an assumption is made that ontological questions can be rephrased as epistemological ones (Bhaskar, 2008, p. 35). An additional critical realist category was applied when coding the data (Looker et al., 2021). This is in keeping with Glaser & Strauss' suggestion that data are coded with as many categories as possible (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The additional code identified which domain of reality the data related to and gave the first glimpse into the emergent mechanisms that drive the social process being explored. Table 1 shows the process used to identify the correct domain of reality.

Almost all codes generated through open coding were also coded with the *empirical* domain of reality. This is because the majority of incidents shared were recollections of experiences or observations. A minority of codes were also coded with the *actual* domain; this was when the participant offered their own analysis.

The open coding process followed that suggested by Looker et al. (2021) to ensure that the analysis followed the critical realist philosophy, allowing the data to be explored backwards, down the generative mechanism from the *empirical* towards the *actual* domain of reality. This is summarised in Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows how the empirical observations (coloured blue) generate conceptual categories and how, after being subjected to constant comparison, were further refined into emergent properties. The emergent property, shown in green, is approaching the *actual* domain. At this stage, the data was being coded to show a causative event that could have led to the observed phenomena. The white box explains how theoretical comparisons and comparisons with other emergent properties were used to explore the data. Conceptual categories in Figure 2 were generated by conceptual or theoretical codes only and labelled using *in vivo* language to avoid description (Glaser, 2001; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

TABLE 1 Critical realist domain open coding modus (adapted from Looker et al., 2021)

Critical realist domain of reality	Open coding modus
Empirical	• Participant recalls experiences or phenomena that they witnessed or were a part of. There is no analysis, solely recall. • Participant recalls an event they were not witness to. The participant is sharing their own understanding of what happened, without analysis. • Direct observation by researcher.
Actual	• The participant suggests reasons or analyses to explain the phenomena. • The participant is making inferential comments. This could be about an incident they directly observed, or an incident they have heard others talk about.
Real	• Will not be coded during open coding. The researcher's aim is to identify the causal mechanism or mechanisms in the substantive theory.

Moving from *empirical* towards *actual* domain

Theoretical sampling

Starting incident or empirical observation

Conceptual Category A ← *constant* → **Conceptual Category B**

generate *generate*

Starting incident or empirical observation *constant* *integration* *constant* **Starting incident or empirical observation**

comparison **Emergent Property** *comparison*

theoretical and constant *theoretical and constant* *theoretical and constant*

Other properties generated from participants' analyses and supporting literature

Colour key:

Emergent | Empirical observation | Conceptual category

F I G U R E 2 Open coding framework (adapted from Looker et al., 2021)

Constant comparison

Through constant comparison to incidents and their generated conceptual categories, the emergent properties began to be refined. During this stage, memos were also used to enable analytical and conceptual reflection on the process (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). By the end of this iterative process, a series of emergent properties were generated which were all grounded in data. Furthermore, because the process involved simultaneous critical real-ist coding, the codes and subsequent emergent properties were generated through a crit-ical realist lens. This helped to ensure that the emergent properties were now located, or approaching, the actual domain of reality.

Theoretical comparisons

For CRGT, theoretical comparisons helped to move ideas from the *empirical* to the *actual*. Experiences shared (*empirical*) were theoretically compared against each other to identify the events occurring within the *actual* domain, which are producing change. The generated emergent properties were likely to be events occurring in the *actual* domain. When emer-gent properties were identified, they were coded with the additional critical realist code to identify if they were *empirically* or *actually* bounded. When all *empirical* events were moved to the *actual* domain, the search for mechanisms which lie in the *real* began. As the coded data had now abstracted the meaning away from the participants' voices, it was assumed that the emergent properties referred to patterns and not individual actions. This meant the

real mechanisms were identified from the emergent properties (Looker et al., 2021). Critical realism asserts a singular true reality but understands that this reality emerges and is interpreted differently in the *empirical*. By making theoretical comparisons, the concepts gradually became more identifiable through constant comparison and were refined further or recategorised according to extant literature.

Abstraction

When all *empirical* events were moved to the *actual* domain, the process of searching for mechanisms which lie in the *real* domain began. This process began with using emergent properties, not the people or codes they derived from. This allowed for the identification of the mechanisms without having them attached to an individual. As data continued to be coded, the codes abstract the meaning away from the individual who said them. When the conceptual categories had been integrated into emergent properties, the mechanisms driving these were now so abstracted from the individuals they were initially coded from that they now represent patterns and not individual actions. Critical realism asserts a singular true reality but understands this reality emerges and is interpreted differently in the *empirical*. By comparing mechanisms, the concepts gradually become more identifiable through constant comparison, coding and categorising.

Retroductive coding

When open coding was completed, a series of emergent properties located in the *actual* domain remained. The next stage of analysis focused on the identification of *real* mechanisms. The process of searching for these *real* mechanisms involved retroductive coding. This process is a CRGT feature of delimiting the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) where conceptual categories and emergent properties are reduced (Looker et al., 2021). As this process continued, the emerging theory began to encompass many emergent properties as it became increasingly generalised. This stage was crucial to ensure that the substantive theory described the *empirical* by explaining or identifying the generative mechanism or mechanisms driving the social process in the *real*. Each step of retroductive coding allowed the analysis to travel back, along the generative mechanisms, to approach the *real* domain. The data were able to be interrogated whilst maintaining the epistemological and ontological stance of critical realism.

Retroduction

As an analytical process, retroduction (Belfrage & Hauf, 2016) calls for the researcher to ask 'what must be true for this to be the case?' (Oliver, 2012). Asking this question throughout the second stage of coding, allowed the exploration of causal mechanisms. This stage moved the lens of analysis away from abduction, where insights are inferred on data (Bruscaglioni, 2016) to retroduction, where possible causes are theorised, moving the data backwards through emergent properties of a critical reality.

Figure 3 shows how retroductive coding was used to generate a substantive theory to explain, to the best of the data's ability, how the phenomenon of alienation, observed in the *empirical*, was generated by causal mechanisms in the *real* (Scott, 2005).

Figure 3 shows how retroductive coding was used to generate the substantive theory. In the first stage of coding, emergent properties generated were compared against conceptual categories and incidents. During this stage, the emergent properties were compared
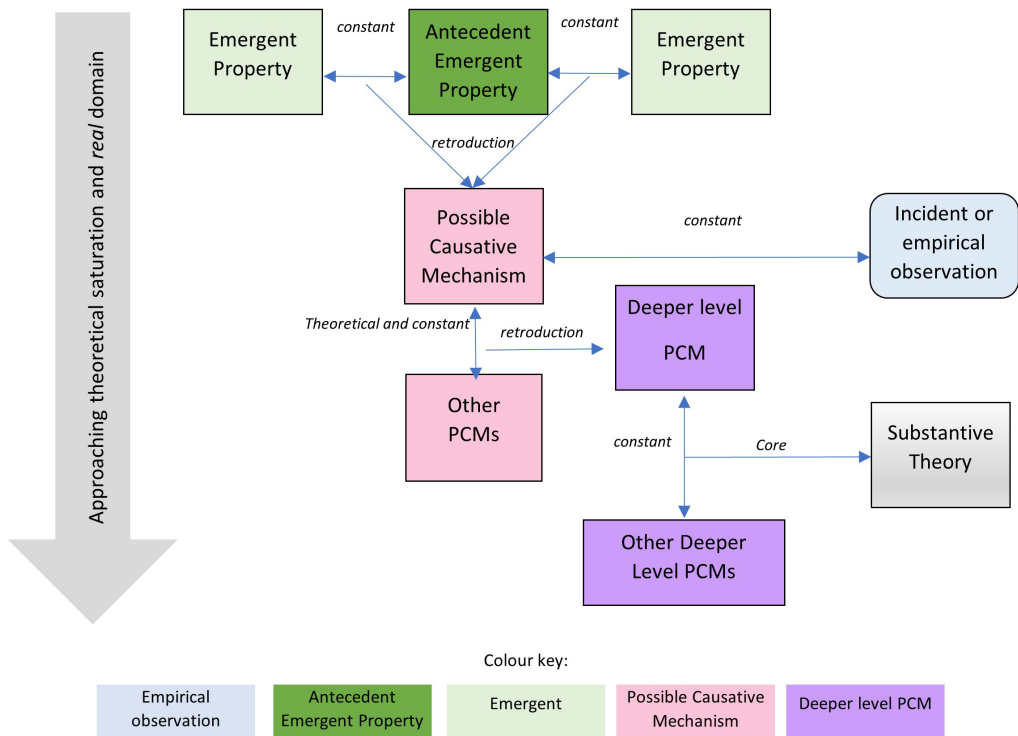
FIGURE 3   Retroductive coding (adapted from Looker et al., 2021)

against each other, allowing for the properties to be integrated to develop possible causative mechanisms. The emergent properties were reflected on and analysed to identify causative structures between them within a possible causative mechanism. Emergent properties were separated into antecedent emergent properties (AEPs) and emergent properties (EPs). AEPs were identified as the structures that form the component parts of the other emergent properties (Bhaskar, 1978); the EPs are the resulting aggregates of the antecedent structures (Bhaskar, 1978). This represented the depth and complexity of the possible causative mechanisms, showing how different *actual* structures can interact in different ways. The EPs and AEPs were initially identified through the frequency of observations. Those which were most frequently observed (comprised of multiple conceptual categories with multiple incidents coded to them) remained emergent properties whilst those with fewer empirical observations were assumed to be antecedent in nature as they were less likely to be observed.

Data were then interrogated by asking 'what must be true for this to be the case?' (Oliver, 2012, p. 379). The data and theory were delimited (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) through this process of retroduction, taking care not to compose the story, but to allow it to emerge (Glaser, 2002). Glaser and Strauss's (1967) suggestion that this process leads to core theoretical categories was modified to make the process more suitable for a critical realist lens. The core theoretical categories were instead named possible causative mechanisms (PCMs). The process of travelling backwards through the generative mechanism of critical realism allowed the data to reveal a possible *real* mechanism, which had causative or generative properties.

Retroduction also incorporated the use of retroductive memos to limit researcher bias. These memos were important in adding rigour to the approach (Gasson, 2004) by maintaining objectivity; potential bias which could have been imposed was kept under constant review.

Constant comparison and theoretical saturation

The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) outlined earlier continued in the retroductive coding process by comparing the conceptual categories, emergent properties and PCMs. The findings from all data sources were compared against each other generating further emergent properties and amending PCMs.

Theoretical saturation, used as a criterion for deciding the point at which data collection is terminated (Saunders et al., 2018), is accepted as commonplace across a range of qualitative approaches. It is defined by classic grounded theory as the point where 'no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 61). The use of theoretical saturation as a decision to stop data collection is closely tied to the process of theoretical sampling; data collection, sampling and analysis work concurrently 'rather than treating them as separate stages in a linear process' (Baker & Edwards, 2012, p.18). In the study, data were collected and analysed to inform future data samples. When conceptual categories were approaching saturation, similar instances were seen 'over and over again' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 61) meaning data were coded to existing categories. This, combined with concurrent data analysis, led to the establishment of well-defined conceptual categories. These were linked and integrated with other categories and supported by detailed memos, allowing for the saturation of conceptual categories to be achieved. As the theory began to emerge, data which were still being coded were now able to be coded to PCMs.

PCMs which had been identified through retroductive coding were subjected to a final round of constant comparison and integration to identify deeper level PCMs. These were similar to higher level concepts, but rather than having been worked on the data, they had been retroduced (Looker et al., 2021) from the data. The core category had emerged through constant comparison and was related meaningfully to the deeper level PCMs (Holton, 2008). The data, which was now organised into deeper level PCMs and memos, represented the substantive theory; it was grounded in data and located in critical realism's *real* domain.

Theoretical comparisons continued to be made, which led to the deeper level PCMs undergoing continual reorganising as the theory was developed. Due to the retroductive process, the substantive theory has a generative property, allowing for suggestions to be made to address the observed alienation, fulfilling the emancipatory objective of CRGT.

FINDINGS

After several rounds of constant comparison and integration of concepts and categories, two deeper level possible causative mechanisms were identified: mutual respect and power. These represent the foundation of the grounded theory presented in the discussion.

Mutual respect

This deeper level PCM illustrates the complex nature of pupil-teacher relationships and how interactions between teachers and pupils can either foster or prevent the development of mutual respect. Built from the concepts of a sense of injustice, the perception of negative relationships, and feeling valued, mutual respect is shown to be an important part of the substantive theory.

A sense of injustice

Every pupil recollected at least one event where they either felt they had been treated unfairly or they witnessed others get treated unfairly. Pupils were able to speak at length when sharing experiences related to feeling a sense of injustice. They spoke using emotive language and with frustration in their voice as they relived their events. Pupil participants frequently disagreed with the severity of the punishment handed to them and teachers' assessments of incidents. Pupils were able to recount experiences where they felt the teacher made inaccurate assumptions of the situation:

> I have been sent out in a lesson when I wasn't the one who had done anything. I was maybe with a group of people that was doing the thing but sometimes my mates act up with me and they send me out rather than the main person who did it and I just think well, maybe explore the situation a bit more and you will see who did it, not me.
>
> (Christopher, Year 10 pupil)

In an attempt to rationalise to themselves why they felt they were unfairly treated, pupils described a feeling of bias against them. Pupils believe their teachers discriminate against them, resulting in them being identified, incorrectly, as culprits. The assumed bias was mainly described as resulting from a past reputation which pupils found hard to shake:

> I am not sure to be honest with you. Last year I did used to mess around a lot as well and that is probably why she didn't believe me, if you get what I mean. I did honestly used to mess around quite a lot last year. I don't this year but maybe it's because last year I used to mess around and maybe she just automatically assumes that I am doing something wrong.
>
> (Teddy, Year 8 pupil)

Those pupils who reported a feeling of discrimination against them also reported a heightened belief that a teacher should treat pupils fairly. It is not surprising that when pupils are treated unfairly, their sense of injustice was increased. However, this behaviour also seems to increase the sense of importance that pupils place on being treated fairly. Pupils who felt they were treated unfairly had an increased sense of alienation:

> It's unfair. I'm targeted and I haven't done anything wrong and I have tried to tell her that. She uses 'well it wasn't a question. It was a yes or no question and I don't want anything else' that's what she says.
>
> (Ashley, Year 10 pupil)

Teachers tended to agree with pupils that treating everyone fairly is an important dimension of relationships and a means to keep pupils engaged with learning in lessons. Interestingly, teachers wanted pupils to think of them as being fair, suggesting this is an important aspect for teachers as well as pupils.

When asked about pupils being unfairly targeted, the two pastoral leads were not able to rebuke this. Although, professionally, they said they felt compelled to take the opinion of the teacher over the opinion of the pupil, both pastoral leads were able to recollect at least one incident where it appeared the pupils' account of events were correct. This indicates that, although pupils are unlikely to be completely innocent every time they claim it, there are occasions when they are. This enables pupils to justify their enhanced feeling of discrimination, resulting in further feelings of injustice and alienation.

Despite this, pupils did not express that they wanted teachers to stop reprimanding; instead, they wanted sanctions they felt were reasonable.

Furthermore, pupils' feelings and anxieties of injustice were so strong, that they frequently expressed a need to correct a teacher when they incorrectly apportioned blame. Pupils did this, despite knowing that it could often exacerbate the problem, by appearing to answer the teacher back. Their sense of injustice was so strong that pupils felt they needed to try and exonerate themselves in spite of the potential additional consequences.

Perception of negative relationships

Pupils unanimously agreed that when negative relationships existed between themselves and teachers, feelings of discontentment towards the teacher were also present. There were no relationships which were expressed as negative without reports of feelings of annoyance, frustration or unhappiness. Although this is not unexpected, the relationship appears to be causative; negative feelings towards a teacher, irrelevant of the source, are a causal factor in a perception that relationships are not good. When talking about this, feelings of trust emerged as an important dimension. Pupils felt that trusting a teacher was important, was related to feelings of negativity and was a contributory factor to a perception that relationships are not good. Trust manifested in various ways, ranging from trust that teachers would not make pupils feel humiliated, trusting that teachers have pupils' best interests at heart and trust that the teacher will respond to incidents in a fair way. Such feelings of trust were found to be important to pupils on a personal level. They felt that teachers who they saw as untrustworthy treated pupils in a different way, further impacting on the ability to establish a positive relationship:

> She [the teacher] gets the impression that we are all the naughty ones, so she treats us different, completely different to all the other ones.
>
> (Reuben, Year 10 pupil)

It was clear that when there is a perception that relationships are not good, pupils are able to recount occasions and actions to support these feelings. These events simultaneously reinforce a perception that the bulk of the accountability for the negative relationship lies with the teacher. Furthermore, when asked whose responsibility it is to stop a negative cycle of pupil-teacher interactions, it was felt that it was the teacher's responsibility. Pupils knew they had a degree of responsibility but felt that as teachers were the adults in the relationship, it was up to them to make the first move. This feeling was echoed by teachers who felt the power of an apology from the teacher could help to repair relationships:

> Hers. Hers. To be more fair and not being as rude and just saying sorry. I still think she would carry on being like that if I said sorry. She's the adult so she should make the first move. I know we've both started this and I'm not always good but, I guess we both started it but she should be the first to stop having a go at me for the same things or smaller things that other people do.
>
> (Christopher, Year 10 pupil)

Feeling valued

All teachers expressed an opinion that interacting with pupils on a personal level is a contributory factor to positive relationships. The causative nature of this was explicit throughout

interviews with teachers and implicit throughout interviews with pupils. Teachers often cited asking pupils about their weekend or finding a common area of interest between them as a means to begin building a positive relationship. This was seen to be of particular importance when building relationships with pupils who present challenging behaviour.

One pastoral lead saw herself as having good relationships with pupils, even those who were particularly troublesome around the school. When pupils voluntarily spoke about her, they did so in a positive manner, indicating they felt valued by her and had good relationships with her because she interacted with them on a personal level.

Pupils also demonstrated a perception of feeling valued by recounting experiences where teachers' manner and demeanour conveyed an appreciation for them as people, not just part of a teacher's job.

This sentiment was echoed by teachers, who felt it is important that teachers are able to reflect on their actions, identify moments they regret and make amends:

> You know we are just all human beings in a big melting pot aren't we and I do think sometimes 'gosh I was a bit sharp there. I shouldn't have been so sharp, that wasn't very nice' so I would consciously make an effort to say to them 'I was a bit sharp. Sorry about that I should have been a little bit softer'.
>
> (Class teacher)

All teachers spoke about a consistent approach to behaviour management being pivotal to forming good relationships, and the majority of pupils mentioned or alluded to this without prompting. Pupil responses that were coded to feeling valued were almost always also coded to a dimension of being treated fairly, indicating that perceptions of value and fair treatment are linked. Pupils felt that when they were valued as individuals, they were treated fairly. Teachers expressed a feeling that being polite and consistent with their approach to all pupils was an important way to demonstrate they value their pupils. One teacher spoke about actively avoiding patronising the pupils she teaches whilst emphasising that she talks 'with' pupils, not 'at' them.

Teachers and pupils understood that positive relationships are not based solely on pupils feeling valued, but there was a consensus that without this dimension, good relationships would be difficult to form or sustain.

Power

This deeper level PCM reveals how the construct and perception of power is crucial to pupils' feelings of alienation at school. It is related to a feeling of a lack of mutual respect outlined earlier but is comprised of pupils' feelings of powerlessness and was found to be of significance to the most alienated pupils.

Powerlessness

Each pupil showed an awareness of their own bad behaviour. The degree of transparency varied, with some pupils describing their bad behaviour as a thing of the past, whilst others spoke openly about a negative attitude continuing to the present. This self-awareness was often spoken about in conjunction with pupils expressing their personal agency; although pupils were aware their behaviour was not always good, they still voiced a desire to perform academically well in those subjects. This relationship between the two emergent properties indicates pupils are not always able to control their social relationships during lessons to

the detriment of their learning. Pupils were experiencing powerlessness; they explained that they are trying to do well, or have tried to change their behaviour, but never expressed this as a completed action. That is to say, they are unable to state that their behaviour is now good:

> If you are trying to work the teacher is always nipping at you for little stuff and you can't actually do the work properly.
>
> <div align="right">(James, Year 10 pupil)</div>

The majority of pupils spoke about teachers holding a degree of power over them. They felt that this was in opposition to their desire to perform well, where teachers' displays of power were a contributory factor to pupils being unable to express their agency in lessons. The class teachers, however, did not echo this perception of teachers over-stepping their authority. This could be because the four class teachers who participated saw themselves as having positive relationships with pupils, including those presenting more challenging behaviour. The pastoral leads, whose job requires them to intervene with behaviour incidents across the school and are therefore exposed to the extremes of negative pupil-teacher relationships did agree with the pupils. They recalled occasions where they witnessed teachers abusing their power and believed this could have an impact on pupil enjoyment and engagement in learning. To a lesser degree, pupils identified not enjoying a subject as a reason preventing them performing well. When they did this, the focus tended to be on the subject itself. However, there was an intersection between perception of the teacher and enjoyment of the subject, indicating that teachers can enhance a feeling of dislike for a subject.

There was a general agreement among pupils that their past experiences with teachers continued to be relevant, even when pupils had made conscious efforts to improve their behaviour. Pupils demonstrated feelings of powerlessness; they were blamed for an action they had not done and believe this happened because of their past reputation:

> If you mess around one year for a whole year which I was, for a whole year like messing around and always getting into trouble. This year I feel like sometimes I have not done as bad I think I have done, but because I did it last year they just assume that it's me.
>
> <div align="right">(Teddy, Year 8 pupil)</div>

This feeling was confirmed by teachers, who were able to recognise that they would sometimes inadvertently and incorrectly assume the negative behaviour stemmed from one individual.

The most alienated pupils

A group of pupils were identified as experiencing a more pronounced degree of alienation than their alienated peers. The most alienated pupils accounted for 33% (n = 4) of the sample yet had a disproportionately greater number of conceptual categories related to powerlessness assigned to them. Although all participants are experiencing alienation to varying degrees, these data show that a smaller group of pupils are experiencing feelings of alienation more acutely. This is summarised in Table 2.

The most alienated pupils were more aware of their bad behaviour and responsibilities than their peers. Each pupil was able to identify at least one occasion when they were aware of their own bad behaviour, but the most alienated pupils were able to identify multiple occasions or volunteered self-awareness without prompting.

TABLE 2 Examining the number of times conceptual categories were coded to the most alienated pupils and remainder of sample

Conceptual category	Most alienated pupils (n = 4)	Remainder of sample (n = 8)
Awareness of own bad behaviour	28 (78%)	8 (22%)
Awareness of own responsibilities	24 (86%)	4 (14%)
Pupil purposely antagonising teacher	9 (60%)	6 (40%)
Awareness of how to change	6 (43%)	8 (57%)

Pupils who felt the most alienated often coupled their acknowledgement of their own bad behaviour with feelings of guilt and a desire to change. They express their experiences and feelings in complicated terms, suggesting they do not want to misbehave but are in a cycle where they are unable to stop themselves:

> Sometimes I push them [the teacher] and you know you are pushing them, I know I have pushed them once I get the punishments, then I realise I probably shouldn't have done that.
>
> (Jonathan, Year 8 pupil)

This cycle is further complicated by the recognition the most alienated are more likely to deliberately antagonise their teachers than those in the remainder of the sample. Furthermore, when sharing experiences where they have purposely antagonised their teachers, these pupils tend to describe these occasions with joy. The increased feelings of alienation felt by pupils in this group was replicated by an increased feeling of pleasure when they retaliate and deliberately frustrate their teachers:

> If I have a pen I will ask her to borrow a pen because she hates it. If you borrow equipment off her, it's like her pet hate lending out equipment because we are purposely lending equipment off her.
>
> (Leo, Year 10 pupil)

The desire to retaliate is often so strong in the most alienated pupils that they consciously irritate their teachers despite an awareness this could negatively affect their academic achievement in the subject. This awareness is further complicated by pupils in the group reporting a lack of awareness of how to change their behaviour compared to their awareness of their own bad behaviour and responsibilities. Pupils in this group are not able to vocalise practical suggestions to change their behaviour, despite being able to express an understanding of their conduct around school. The inability to provide practical steps to address their negative attitude to learning is further emphasised when comparing pupils in the most alienated group to those in the remainder of the sample. Pupils from the rest of the group were able to articulate changes they could make to their behaviour:

> I saw that it wasn't getting me anywhere and I realised that it was getting too close to stuff like GCSE's so I decided I'd better try and be good and try learn in lessons and try and get places…my Mum came in for a meeting and I realised that they were always trying to help me and I was just messing about and then I just sort of stopped and tried to be good then.
>
> (Henry, Year 8 pupil)

As a result, these pupils felt they were labelled in their teachers' minds and subsequently believed there was no way to escape the circular nature of negative relationships. As one Year 10 pupil put it 'your card is marked'.

DISCUSSION

During theoretical comparisons, social contracts emerged as significant. Specifically, the theory of contractualism (Kumar, 2010; Scanlon, 1975, 2003) was identified as the core category. The discussion begins with a summary of contractualism, to provide context and situate it as part of the social process being investigated before continuing to discuss the deeper level PCMs.

The core category: Contractualism

Social contracts were first described by Rousseau (1795), who says that although they 'may perhaps never have been formally promulgated, they are yet universally the same and are everywhere tacitly acknowledged and received' (p. 19). His suggestion that everyone is equal and free because everyone forfeits the same rights in a community, arguably led to the current understanding of tacit social agreements between members of a community. Contractualism as a moral theory relies on the principle that parties have a mutual understanding of what is right and wrong (Southwood, 2013). The account of contractualism used in the construction of this grounded theory is that proposed by Scanlon (1975, 2003). Scanlon's contractualism is indebted to Rawls' social contract theory (Kumar, 2010), but differs through the nature of how the contract is formed. Rawls advances universal principles which all must agree to (Rawls, 1980), and places those within the social contract behind a 'veil of ignorance', where all parties are unaware of key facts of each other's identity. Scanlon, on the other hand, suggests that it is an actor's desire to be able to justify their own actions to others which drives the social contract. For Scanlon, when one actor wrongs another through their actions, it can be deemed morally unjustifiable if the actions cannot be reasonably defended (Kumar, 2010; Scanlon, 1975, 2003). It draws on the social contract theory advanced by Rousseau (1795) where mutual respect forms part of a hypothetical agreement between members of a community (Kumar, 2010). Kumar clarifies that the hypothetical nature of the agreement does not make it any less real (2010). Instead, it should be viewed as an implication between actors that actions must be justifiable to each other in order to maintain the contract (Kumar, 2010).

There is a paucity of literature discussing how contractualism can be applied to educational environments. Of those which have been found, contractualism has been used to address home-school agreements (Gibson, 2013), the responsibilities of higher education environments (Rawolle et al., 2017) and how it has been used as an element of democratic pedagogy (Budde, 2021). The latter comes closest to the research discussed in this article but deals with more formalised contracts to establish a democratic approach to behaviour management. The importance of pupils and teachers creating behaviour rules together to emphasise pupils' self-determination, whilst important, is not the subject of how contractualism has been applied in the development of the theory advanced in this article. This article deals with an implicit social contract to help forge more positive pupil-teacher relationships.

Pupil-teacher relationships have been studied in depth (Barth et al., 2004; Darwich et al., 2012; Davis, 2003; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Kington, 2012; Sointu et al., 2017) but a link has not yet been made between the dyadic relationships between pupils and their

teachers, and the moral theory of contractualism. However, much of the discussion around pupil-teacher relationships discusses constructs that echo this key principle of contractualism. For example, Hajdukova et al. (2014) define positive pupil-teacher relationships as being 'characterised by mutual respect, caring and closeness' (p. 146). They found that teachers improving relationships with children with behaviour problems has a positive impact on pupils' academic and social development. This indicates that there is an interplay between success, social interactions and how one is treated by others. Furthermore, Payne's (2005) discussion of Covey's (1989) emotional deposits and withdrawals deals with how pupils can feel respected or disrespected through teacher actions. This is backed up by Pianta (1999) who suggests that the nature of classroom life is social and emotional. Kohn (2006) further suggests that when children fail academically, it is most commonly due to a feeling of unwelcomeness or detachment from others in their educational world and not due to a lack of intellectual ability. In school settings, the implicit contract between teachers and pupils is reciprocal and forged through the development of mutual respect and trust. The implicit nature of the contract means rules are not formally discussed, but instead evolve as the relationship continues to develop. Contractualism is concerned with implicit contracts between members of a social group, stating that moral convictions can be justified through common sense (Kumar, 2010). For the purposes of this research, the social group refers to pupils and teachers within a school.

Situating the deeper level PCM: Mutual respect

The grounded theory is divided into two parts. The first, mutual respect, is explored here with reference to the theory of contractualism, detailing how the emergent deeper level PCM of mutual respect is a key construct of contractualism. Figure 4 shows the deeper level PCM of mutual respect and the integrated PCMs that comprise this. It is shown alongside the greyed-out deeper level PCM of power to demonstrate how the two are related, before both are used to build the theory.

Respect is a term that is used widely but can be understood differently depending on the context. O'Grady (2015) states that respect between teachers and pupils is dependent on interactions between them, although Darwall (2004) considers respect in terms of esteem towards or derived from others. The language used suggests that respect is a social construct, with De Cremer (2002) stating it can be symbolic of one's position within a group. On the other hand, for contractualism, mutual respect is a product of human nature and humans' ability to think rationally. Contractualism, as a theory, prioritises mutual respect over other values (Wong, 2020). Its assertion that an action can be deemed wrong when it has violated principles which cannot be reasonably rejected (Scanlon, 1975) is important when discussing a breakdown of mutual respect between teachers and pupils. An assumption of contractualism is that, in a dyadic relationship, for a principle to be violated, both actors must assume the other has the mental capacity to reasonably assess the principles and be able to identify when one is violated. Thus, both actors hold mutual respect and value for each other. Although contractualism takes a more philosophical approach to respect than de Cremer's social constructivist view (2002), both describe a reciprocal dimension in relationships, suggesting that mutual respect develops over time. O'Grady (2015) suggests that mutual respect can be broken down into three main concepts; autonomy, accountability and reciprocity. In this sense, autonomy is linked directly with mutual respect. O'Grady's use of Higgs et al.'s (2003) definition of autonomy to mean 'the right of an individual to be free from the unwanted interference of others' (p. 244) has resonance with the term 'powerlessness'. Using Higgs et al.'s (2003) definition, an individual who lacks autonomy is unable to exert their free will due to interference from others. This indicates an overlap or link between the
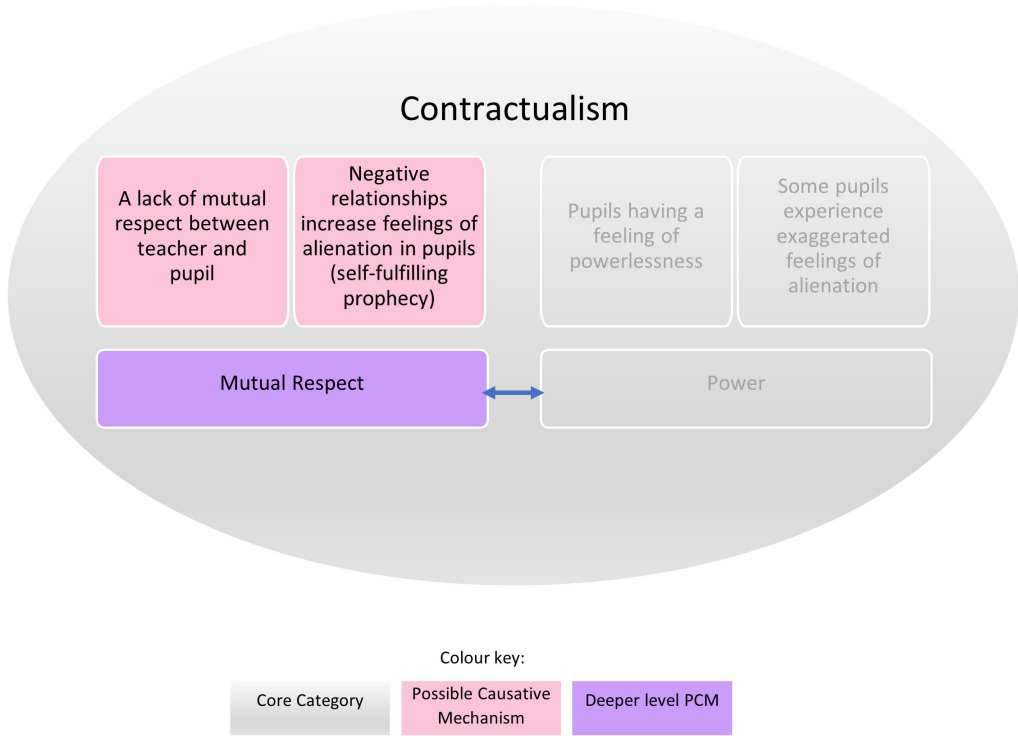
FIGURE 4   Deeper level PCM of mutual respect

possible causative mechanisms of mutual respect and powerlessness. However, this definition of autonomy is not completely illustrative of how the participants in the study described their experience of powerlessness.

Although participants did speak about being unable to enact their agency, they frequently also used terms which described an inability to control the situation. This indicates that although there might be some link between the two, there is not enough of an overlap to merge the possible causative mechanisms together. O'Grady's (2015) accountability concept of mutual respect refers to the need to understand that actions have consequences and when applied to a pupil-teacher relationship suggests that pupils and teachers both need to understand the consequences of their actions for themselves and each other. Again, accountability tessellates well with contractualism where an individual's actions can be deemed wrong if they violate an implicit understanding; they are held accountable for their actions. Findings from the alienated pupil participants in this study echo this, as pupils were able to separate liking a teacher from respecting them, placing professional behaviours as an implicit principle of respect. Pupils had increased levels of respect for those teachers who had the most professional behaviour and were able to identify situations when mutual respect could be rebuilt if lost. This suggests that for institutions where mutual respect between teachers and pupils is considered of a high importance and is embedded in practice, when a contract is considered to be broken by one of the parties, it is possible for the relationship to be repaired and the implicit contract reinstated.

The final concept of mutual respect O'Grady (2015) suggests is reciprocity; that when an individual pays respect to another as part of a dyadic relationship, there is an anticipation that this action is indicative of how that individual would like to be treated in return. Again, the concept of reciprocal action is a fundamental principle to contractualism, suggesting

it continues to be applicable to pupil-teacher relationships. Furthermore, the pupils in this study felt aware of the reciprocal dynamic of their relationships with teachers and spoke emotively when they felt mutual respect has been violated by their teachers.

A lack of mutual respect between teacher and pupil

There is much research identifying that positive pupil-teacher relationships can be characterised by mutual respect, caring and closeness (Hughes et al., 2005; Pianta, 1999; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). Furthermore, it has been shown that teachers overwhelmingly believe it is a crucial aspect of the job to develop and sustain positive relationships with their pupils (Looker & Kington, 2020), but there is limited literature suggesting how teachers can begin to develop a feeling of mutual respect. The findings suggest that pupils and teachers want to get along with each other with many citing getting along on a personal level important to developing positive professional relationships. Moos (1979) suggests that an important dimension of this might be associated with personality, which is consistent with the findings of this study. Both teachers and pupils suggested that certain types of personality help to form positive relationships; pupils saw good personality traits as important when expressing a fondness for their teachers, and they felt this was linked to their feelings of respect for teachers in positive relationships. Goodman (2009) expands on this through the description of 'respect-earned' (p. 12) by teachers, suggesting that respect is not due to teachers because of their position, but earned by acknowledging the dignity of their pupils. This forms part of the implicit pupil-teacher contract.

Contractualism discusses how respect is afforded to another person by displaying a value for them as a human being by giving their interests consideration (Kumar, 2010). Contractualism also refers to a principle of mutual respect as the need for each actor to fulfil their promissory obligations (Scanlon, 2003). This was an emergent property identified as a dimension of mutual respect where pupils expressed that they might respect a teacher due to their position ('respect-due'; Goodman, 2009, p. 12) but this is mediated by the perception of the quality of the teacher. In other words, pupils who felt a teacher was not good at their job saw that they had not fulfilled their promised obligations and thus mutual respect was eroded. O'Grady (2015) found that when a teacher scaffolded the learning of their pupils whilst relating interpersonally with them, they were more likely to elicit feelings of respect. This demonstration of the interplay between personality and effectivity of the teacher and the establishment of mutual respect is consistent with the findings previously discussed.

Teacher justice can be described as teachers' behaviours which are perceived to be fair (Goodboy, 2011; Mameli et al., 2020). These behaviours include consistent and respectful treatment towards pupils and a lack of favouritism (Mameli et al., 2020). This is in agreement with Rawls' (1958) account of justice. Rawls (1958) states that not only can justice be construed as fairness for all, but that fairness is fundamental to justice. Justice as fairness (Rawls, 1958) is described as an agreement between all participants within a practice, where all have the same restricted liberties and expectations of each other. Pupils who felt a sense of injustice perceived a degree of unfair treatment by their teacher. They felt their sanctions were disproportionately greater than their peers, so felt their liberties were restricted to a greater amount or had differing expectations placed upon them. Additionally, Jiang et al. (2018) found that the more students believed they were treated justly by their teachers, the more respected they felt, supporting Rawls' link between respect and a sense of justice. As a result, all references to justice or injustice are referring to the perceptions of fair or unfair teacher behaviours; pupils' experiences of justice are largely dependent on their perceptions of teachers' decisions and judgements (Jiang et al., 2018).

The importance of teachers treating pupils fairly has been widely established in educational research (Peter & Dalbert, 2010) with wider reaching implications indicating a link between varying levels of teacher justice and pupils' academic performance (Peter et al., 2012). This sense of justice, it is suggested, can have even further-reaching implications, such as encouraging the development of pupil-teacher relationships (Jiang et al., 2018) and ultimately helping to support the formation of a positive classroom environment and identity. The findings are in line with this intersection between justice and a sense of classroom identity; pupils who felt a strong sense of injustice experienced stronger feelings of alienation. Their perceptions of unjust actions by particular teachers could have contributed to a negative pupil-teacher relationship, through a breakdown of the social contract. Scanlon's constructs of social contracts require there to be mutual respect, held on the premise that individuals' actions are justifiable (1975, 1998, 2003). A perception of unfair treatment can be seen to be unjustifiable (Rawls, 1958, 1980) which can explain the resultant lack of classroom identity or alienation. Interestingly, pupils who felt like they were treated unfairly recalled occasions when they intentionally misbehaved to antagonise the teacher. According to contractualism, this unfair treatment is a signal to the pupils that the social contract has been breached, which can explain why pupils chose to break the contract further by intentionally misbehaving. For example, when the contract is maintained, fair and just teacher behaviour has been shown to be associated with a reduction in hostile student behaviour (Donat et al., 2012; Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005). This link between the identified dimensions of the implicit pupil-teacher social contract shows there is overlap between the two, which is reasonable to expect.

Participants shared similar experiences, particularly those who were the most alienated. There was a consensus that once a pupil had been labelled as one who misbehaves in the teacher's eyes, this association remained with the pupil throughout their time at secondary school. These findings are consistent with the literature, which identifies that boys in particular feel a negative reputation is difficult to shed (Hajdukova et al., 2014) and leads to unfair and unequal treatment (Hamill & Boyd, 2002). Hajdukova et al. (2014) also identified that boys who felt like they had built up a negative reputation believed their side of the story was not listened to, leading to a breakdown in trust and feeling unvalued. These findings are consistent with those from this study, where male participants felt they were being picked on and not listened to when they protested their innocence. These factors are significant in developing a sense of discontentment and alienation. The pupils in Hajdukova et al.'s study (2014) spoke about feeling anger when they witnessed their peers receiving lighter punishments for similar misdemeanours. Although the participants in Hajdukova et al.'s study were attending a special school for boys with severe social and behavioural problems, their findings still resonate with those discussed in this study. The participants were not at immediate risk of being removed from school due to their poor behaviour, but they were all at various stages of behaviour management systems, which can ultimately lead to removal from school. There are similarities in the way participants report their feelings of injustice with those from Hadjukova et al.'s study (2014); a feeling they are ignored, a sense they will receive more severe punishments than their peers and an intense feeling of anger when they are treated unfairly.

These findings are replicated in the wider research, where pupils with social and behavioural difficulties believe their teachers are a significant factor in their disruption (Hamill & Boyd, 2002; Miller et al., 2002; Rasooli et al., 2019). Rasooli et al.'s study (2019) identified that pupils tend to judge fairness using one of three conceptualisations of justice: distributive justice, procedural justice and interactional justice. They found that each of the three concepts are related to fairness, with pupils demonstrating inaction and dissent as a response to their perception of unfair incidents. As previously discussed, alienated pupils often describe their sense of injustice by comparing similar incidents and determining they

were unfairly punished, or that some of their peers received a lighter reprimand if they are not labelled as disruptive. Additionally, participants in Year 10 tended to have a greater sense of injustice than those in Year 8, contributing to discourse by suggesting that indicators of future alienation might be present in the lower years of school.

Negative relationships increase feelings of alienation in pupils (self-fulfilling prophecy)

The pupils who participated in the study had already been, or were at risk of being, subject to a negative self-fulfilling prophecy. It was found that negative relationships can lead to increased feelings of alienation among pupils, but that these alienated feelings can also prevent the formation of positive relationships. Since Rosenthal and Jacobson's Pygmalion experiment (1968), which suggested that pupils are more likely to perform highly when their teachers have high expectations of them, there has been a wealth of literature exploring this phenomenon (Alpert, 1975; Murdock-Perriera & Sedlacek, 2018; Rubie-Davies, 2006, 2010).

The Pygmalion effect and self-fulfilling prophecy have become synonymous in literature (Murdock-Perriera & Sedlacek, 2018) with the main body of the work generally centred on teachers' expectations of pupils' academic performance. The literature suggests that pupils know if they are considered to be achievers or not by their teachers (Weinstein, 1993; Weinstein et al., 1987). Furthermore, pupils appear to be able to infer teachers' expectations through subtle verbal and non-verbal cues (Babad, 1998). This has been found more recently, where Rubie-Davies (2006, 2010) found that teacher expectations may influence students' self-perceptions. Rubie-Davies suggests this is particularly the case when teacher expectations were low. Her study (2006) measured pupil perceptions of teacher's opinions and how these changed throughout the course of a year. She identified a decline in pupil perception of teacher opinion from those in classes taught by teachers with low expectations over the course of the year. This is contrasted with little or no change in pupil perception of teacher opinion from those in classes taught by teachers with high expectations.

The Pygmalion effect—the phenomenon where prospects are converted into reality (Termes López, 2015)—appears to have real world consequences in the classroom. Despite much of the literature relying on knowledge of the teachers' expectations and investigating their potential mediative influences on academic performance, this body of research is still relevant to the findings. Pupils were found to report that when they believed a teacher did not like, respect or value them, this would have a mediating influence on their own behaviour, which would, in turn reinforce the teacher's belief. The mechanism driving the behaviour and accounts shared in the findings seems to mirror the mechanism driving teacher expectations and academic performance. The self-fulfilling prophecy can be seen here. It was originally described as a false statement incorrectly believed to be true. The proclamation of the false statement can itself invoke a new behaviour, which subsequently renders the initial false statement to be seen to be true (Merton, 1948). It goes some way to explaining the findings outlined earlier. Pupils spoke frequently about having blame falsely apportioned to them by some teachers, indicating that this was either an initial catalyst or has since become a catalyst in the breakdown of the relationship.

Applying Merton's definition of the self-fulfilling prophecy (1948) can explain this finding. If the false statement was that the pupil had misbehaved, this could invoke a response from the pupil, which, in turn, could be interpreted as misconduct. The teacher's initial thoughts are seen to be correct, so the false statement is now regarded as true, thus initiating the start of a self-fulfilling prophecy. This also ties in well with Scanlon's contractualism (2003); the dyadic relationship between a teacher and pupil requires a degree of reciprocal respect

and value. An incident like those described by the pupils (and confirmed to be occurring by pastoral leads within the school) could signal a breach of the implicit pupil-teacher contract. It appears this is internalised by pupils as a display of lack of mutual respect, leading to feeling unvalued, which can manifest itself as poor behaviour.

O'Grady (2015) adds another dimension which appears to be of importance; there are incidents which were not intended to be disrespectful, but which pupils interpret as showing a lack of mutual respect. The suggestion is that the expectation of respect (like that outlined in contractualism [Scanlon, 1975, 2003]) can itself be seen as a catalyst for disrespect in the classroom. Implicit social contracts require all parties to believe that mutual respect and value for each other is a prerequisite (Rousseau, 1795; Scanlon, 1975, 2003); therefore, for positive pupil-teacher relationships mutual respect is an implicit expectation. The expectancy of respect appears to be held in high regard by pupils, with O'Grady (2015) suggesting that pupils articulate respect for their teachers in relation to their educational values and not just actions. Those teachers who pupils perceive as having positive educational values foster feelings of respect whereas those who do not appear to are liable to misinterpretation of actions as an act of hostility.

Although there is not enough data to draw a firm conclusion regarding this, it calls for further research to be carried out examining the link between the Pygmalion effect and student alienation, and what causes some pupils to enter a negative, cyclical, self-fulfilling prophecy whereas others do not.

Situating the deeper level PCM: Power

The second construct of the grounded theory, power, is explored here, again with reference to the theory of contractualism. It shows how power is also an important construct of contractualism.

Using the same format as earlier, Figure 5 shows the deeper level PCM of power and the integrated PCMs that comprise this. It is shown alongside the greyed-out deeper level PCM of mutual respect to demonstrate how the two are related, before they are used to build the theory.

It has been shown that pupils' perceptions of increased teacher power are associated with negative pupil-teacher relationships and an emotional distance between pupil and teacher (Zhang et al., 2019). Although Zhang et al.'s study is conducted on Chinese schoolchildren, who experience a very different educational culture than in the UK, their findings support Magee and Smith's (2013) proposition that an increasing power differential in dyadic relationships increases social distance. Furthermore, a link has been identified suggesting that if pupils are afforded more power through the means of dialogical interaction between teacher and pupil instead of didactic teaching, academic success increases (Wang, 2010). Participants' perceptions can be generalised by a feeling that, in negative pupil-teacher relationships, the teacher exerted their power more overtly through actions that conveyed a sense of distrust. Participants felt their teachers prevented them from doing certain things due to a belief held by teachers that it would result in misbehaviour by the pupil. This can then, in turn, lead to a disengagement from school (Brown et al., 2003) and further contribute to the self-fulfilling prophecy identified earlier.

Participants described a delicate power dynamic between pupils and teachers, with pupils aware of the existence of a power differential, which could have an impact on the quality of relationships. This social process has been found to be the case in literature, where it has been shown that careful navigation of the power differential can foster the development of mutual respect (O'Grady, 2015). The link between power and mutual respect is not surprising; the implicit social contracts rest upon the assumption that each actor owes one another
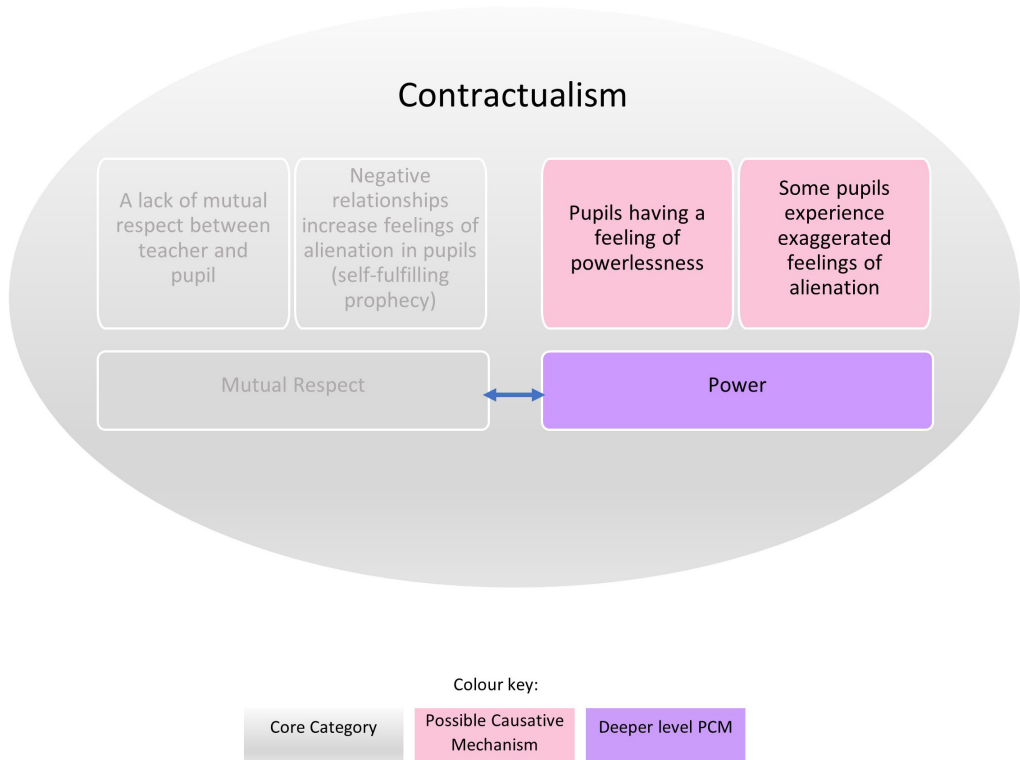
FIGURE 5 Deeper level PCM of power

moral norms (Scanlon, 2003). This is to say that for a meaningful relationship to exist, both pupils and teachers owe each other the respect each feels they themselves are owed. Thus, when the teacher grasps power, which is not due to them (in the pupils' eyes), pupils feel powerless, and the implicit social contract is broken. The power differential adds complexity to this social contract; both pupils and teachers know that teachers hold the bulk of the power in these relationships. However, it is important to note that pupil participants experience relationships with teachers where they do not feel powerless and are afforded mutual respect. This indicates that when the contract is maintained through mutual respect, positive relationships can thrive despite a power differential. Furthermore, participants are aware when they have misbehaved, and they expect to be reprimanded as a result, findings echoed by Schulz and Rubel (2011). This suggests that when pupils have broken the contract, they appeared to accept it; yet they felt that the response by the teacher was often disproportionate, again echoed in Schulz and Rubel's work (2011). The teacher participants who were interviewed[2] had a consensus that teachers should be able to apologise if they overstep and abuse their power; indeed, they recalled incidents when they had done this. The simple act of an apology would demonstrate value and respect for the pupil, humanising them (Kumar, 2010; Scanlon, 2003) and thus help in rebuilding the relationship by reinstating the broken implicit contract.

Powerlessness

Seeman's (1959, 1975) and Mau's (1992) constructs of alienation describe the state of disconnect as being categorised into powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness and

social estrangement. The findings demonstrate that only powerlessness arose from interviews with pupils and teachers, indicating a sense of homogeneity in the experiences of the participants. Meaninglessness, referring to a lack of relevancy (Schultz, 2011), arose on two occasions where the participants identified they did not feel they would need the subject in future and so found its study meaningless. This was, however, overshadowed by a feeling that teachers, and pupils' relationships with teachers, had a greater impact on whether pupils enjoyed the subject. Research related to meaninglessness has been found to be associated with school non-completers (Bridgeland, 2010; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Schulz & Rubel, 2011). None of the participants in this study were non-completers, which perhaps explains why the construct of meaninglessness did not appear frequently. Another reason could be that when participants did not find a subject enjoyable, this was intersected with a feeling that it was the specific teachers who enhanced the feeling of dislike, indicating a social and emotional influence on enjoyment. This, according to Pianta (1999), is inseparable from learning.

Normlessness, referring to the belief held by students that socially disapproved behaviour is required to achieve well (Schultz, 2011) alongside social estrangement, referring to students' inability or unwillingness to integrate into the school (Brown et al., 2003; Schultz, 2011) were not found to be present.

An understanding of the term 'powerlessness' seems to have reached a consensus within the academic community. Powerlessness can be understood as a pupil's inability to exert change or their own agency (Brown & Rodríguez, 2009). One of the challenges of grounded theory is approaching the research with 'a priori' assumptions. Due to exposure to the research field, some literature had been read prior to analysis of the data, and therefore familiarity with the term 'powerlessness' already existed. However, the term emerged from the participants without being elicited. During interviews, the word was consciously avoided yet participants, both pupils and teachers, described incidents of a power imbalance.

Pupils who participated in the study expressed a desire to perform well academically but felt that teachers who tried to display power over them contributed to an expectation that they would not achieve to their best standard. This is consistent with Schulz's description of powerlessness, where it is said to materialise when a student has low expectations of achieving goals they place value on (2011). In her paper examining how school counselling programmes can reduce alienation, Schultz (2011) found that when pupils are advocated for by a school counsellor, this voice can reach staff and go some way to reducing a prejudice held by teachers regarding alienated pupils' academic trajectory. Participants felt that past experiences with teachers were not forgotten and that teachers held some prejudicial attitudes towards pupils based on prior incidents. These experiences of powerlessness, suggestive of pupils' inability to enact their own agency due to perceived oppressive factors, are consistent with the conceptualisation of power outlined by Foucault. Foucault states that 'At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom' (Foucault, 1982, p. 794). In this case, the pupil and teacher enter into a struggle, which is beneficial to neither; the confrontation results in a paralysis of both sides into a permanent provocation (Foucault, 1982).

Additionally, Schultz (2011) argues that prejudice held by teachers can have an influence on pupils' academic achievements, supporting a link between the deeper level PCMs of powerlessness and mutual respect. This also supports the proposal of a contractualist mechanism in operation; if pupils perceive their teachers to be prejudiced, this could have implications on the social contract. Prejudice, as an unjustified attitude to an individual based on their membership to a social group, applies to the participants of this study. The pupils have been identified by the school as presenting difficult to manage behaviour, and so are members of this social group. When the pupils stated that they felt teachers sometimes hold prejudiced attitudes towards them, this was in relation to their prior bad behaviour. The

perception of prejudice can be interpreted by pupils that their teachers are not treating them equally, and thus their judgements are also not equal. This is considered to be a breach of the social contract (Scanlon, 1975) which, if not repaired, can initiate the development of negative pupil-teacher relationships.

Many of the findings related to powerlessness discussed earlier almost entirely echo findings from Schultz and Rubel's (2011) study of five alienated boys who failed to complete high school. Schulz and Rubel (2011) found that their participants' engagement in school was impacted by the type and quality of relationships with adults, much like those in this study. They also found that each of their participants were able to speak about adults who they genuinely liked, and who they felt seemed concerned for their school progress. Participants in this study also spoke highly of at least one adult with whom they had a good relationship and who they felt were invested in them. They also spoke emotively about incidents where they felt injustice and teachers with whom they had negative relationships. This, again, echoes the participants of Schulz and Rubel (2011), where alienated pupils spoke of an intense dislike of some teachers. Furthermore, those in Schultz and Rubel's study felt that school adults treated them differently due to stereotyping or racial prejudice. Although this was not found in the present study as all participants were white British, there is a similarity in the language used, implying that prejudice, whatever its origins, can lead to feelings of powerlessness and alienation. Participants' language conveyed a feeling that teachers made unfair assumptions regarding classroom misbehaviour at their expense, echoing the feelings discussed by Schulz and Rubel (2011), where participants said they felt persecuted and misrepresented by some school adults. This perception of unfair treatment appears to be a 'transversal struggle' (Foucault, 1982, p. 780) of power, meaning it has relevance in more than one setting. Again, it intersects with contractualism, where fair and equal treatment signals mutual respect, which is a prerequisite for a functioning social contract (Kumar, 2010; Scanlon, 1998, 2003).

The substantive theory: The implicit pupil-teacher social contract

The substantive theory advances the concept of an implicit pupil-teacher social contract as the basic social process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), built upon the concepts of mutual respect and power. This implicit social contract states that as pupils and teachers develop a professional relationship, there is a mutual and implied understanding of social behaviours from each actor. The social contract, resting upon values of power and mutual respect, is summarised in Figure 6. The vertical arrow represents the emergent mechanism of critical realism, with *empirical* events emerging from the *real* substantive theory.

Pupils and teachers exist as part of a single community in their schools, and as such have tacit or implicit social contracts (Rousseau, 1795). The social contracts rely on mutual respect (Kumar, 2010; Scanlon, 1975, 2003) between teachers and pupils and if this is not present, the pupils feel unable to enact their own agency. Negative pupil-teacher relationships can arise in secondary school pupils when they believe a teacher breached the implicit pupil-teacher social contract. These pupils are then at risk of marginalisation during lessons and of entering a cycle of negative interactions that are difficult to navigate and escape from. Pupils express a need to feel valued and respected, and when these needs are not met, pupils can enter a *demi-reality* (Bhaskar, 1978, 1986) leading to disengagement from school life.

This can present itself in two ways; a lack of mutual respect is evident between teacher and pupil, and negative relationships are present, leading to an increased sense of pupil alienation. These areas are interlinked and have a range of emergent properties, which are observable and overlap the categories. When experiencing demi-reality, pupils are aware
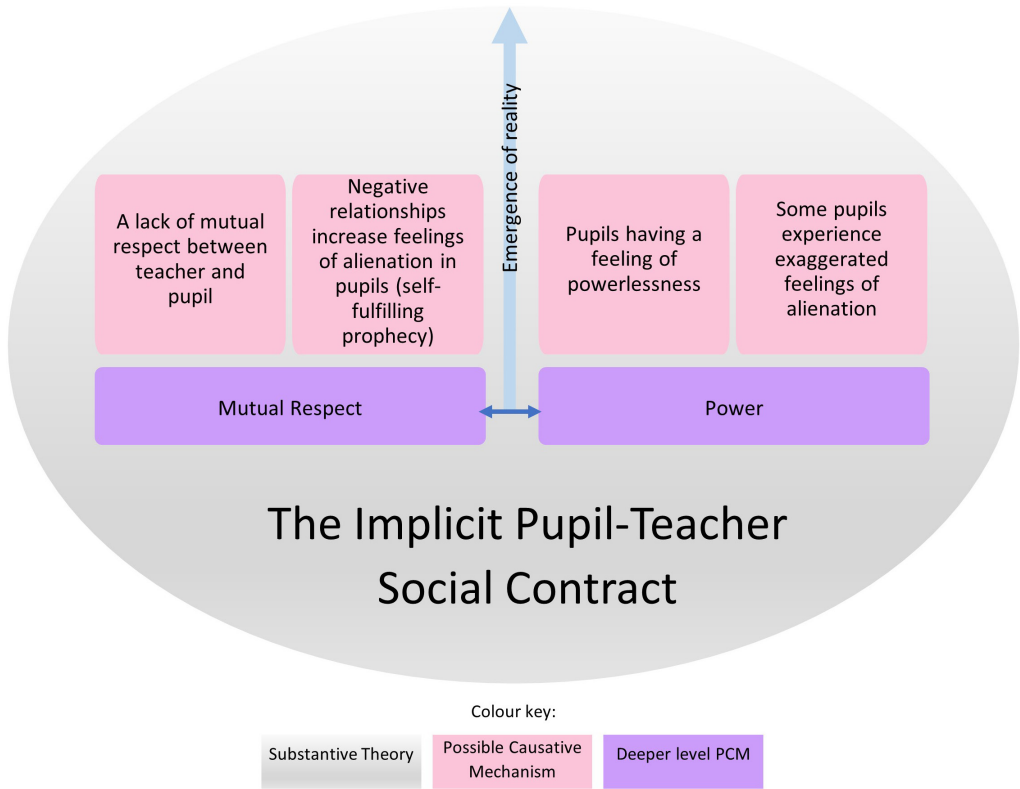
FIGURE 6 The substantive theory —the implicit pupil-teacher social contract

that their relationships with some teachers are negative, and they are unhappy as a result. Pupils are often aware of actions they could take to begin to change their relationships and to increase a sense of achievement, but they are either unable to or choose not to do this. When the implicit pupil-teacher social contract has been breached between a teacher and a pupil, this is not replicated with the relationships the pupil has with all teachers. Such students can, and do, form positive relationships with at least some of their teachers. When they have this, students perceive any negative relationship as worse than it is in reality through comparisons with their positive relationships. Teachers who have positive relationships with pupils are also easily able to identify where negative relationships exist. They are often able to compare with their own relationships, either with the same pupil or with similar pupils, and can identify some factors that caused the breach of the social contract. In such instances, these teachers tend to place the onus on their colleagues to change the status of the relationship, or repair the contract, and not on the pupils.

When pupils feel mutual respect is absent, they are more likely to disengage from their academic work. Although this is sometimes seen across all subjects at school, it is initially observed with the subjects taught by teachers where the social contract has broken down and negative relationships are developing. Pupils maintain a desire to perform to the best of their academic ability, have an awareness that their disengagement is likely to prevent this and yet feel unable to make the necessary changes to overcome such obstacles. The demi-reality that these pupils are experiencing is such that they are unable to make the necessary changes.

This feeling of powerlessness dominates pupils' interactions with teachers. Pupils who are alienated from their learning experience a sense of injustice, where they believe teach-

ers are treating them unfairly. This perception has arisen from a breach of the pupil-teacher social contract and is sometimes, but not always, corroborated by other teachers. This suggests that the unfair treatment can be observed by outsiders. Pupils and teachers believe that fairness and consistency is an important aspect to developing and maintaining positive relationships; when this is breached, relationships rapidly sour. Teachers are more likely to assume that disruption involves alienated pupils, as they have previously been found responsible for this. Alienated pupils are more likely to respond negatively to allegations as they feel they have been treated without the respect commanded by the implicit contract.

When pupils experience powerlessness, they maintain a strong sense of agency and their desire to do well is not diminished by this. They continue to want to succeed academically, although their enjoyment of the subject is often compromised. Furthermore, pupils are aware of their own bad behaviour and are willing to accept responsibility for misdemeanours, heightening a sense of injustice when disruptions are incorrectly attributed to them.

Kumar (2010) argues that part of a functional social contract requires individuals to have their personal interest to be taken into account by others:

> For any situation, the relevant principle will spell out how other individuals are entitled, or may legitimately expect, to have their reasons figure in one's practical thinking, and how one is entitled to have one's own reasons figure in their practical thinking.
>
> (Kumar, 2010, p. 492)

By not having their interests or 'reasons' accounted for, these pupils do not feel a degree of respect for their values, and so the implicit contract is broken (Scanlon, 2003).

CONCLUSION

The implicit pupil-teacher social contact is a substantive theory, grounded in data and situated within literature. Figure 7 shows how this resides in the critical realist domains of reality, demonstrating that the substantive theory is a *real* mechanism and shows the generative mechanisms driving the social process.

The real domain is where the substantive theory lies; it is a mechanistic structure, which generates actual events. The actual domain shows the events that have been generated by the substantive theory. The events are not necessarily all observable but are generated by the mechanisms of the pupil-teacher social contract. The empirical domain shows the observable experiences of the pupils. These experiences can be observed by outsiders, or to pupils themselves who can then verbalise and share their experiences. This model contributes to the gap in literature examining pupil-teacher relationships and alienation of pupils, by providing a mechanism detailing the social process of how pupil behaviours and actions can emerge from a breach in the implicit contract.

The mechanisms of 'mutual respect' and 'power' were found to be *real* (Bhaskar, 1978) mechanisms, which resulted in a variety of *empirical* behaviours observed during data collection. Relationships between pupils and teachers were found to be complicated and resting upon an implicit social contract. The contract is rooted in mutual respect and rests upon elements of trust and value, which each actor places on the other. The power differential in the relationship means that when a pupil believes the teacher has violated the terms of the contract, the consequences are greater than when the teacher believes the pupil has breached it.
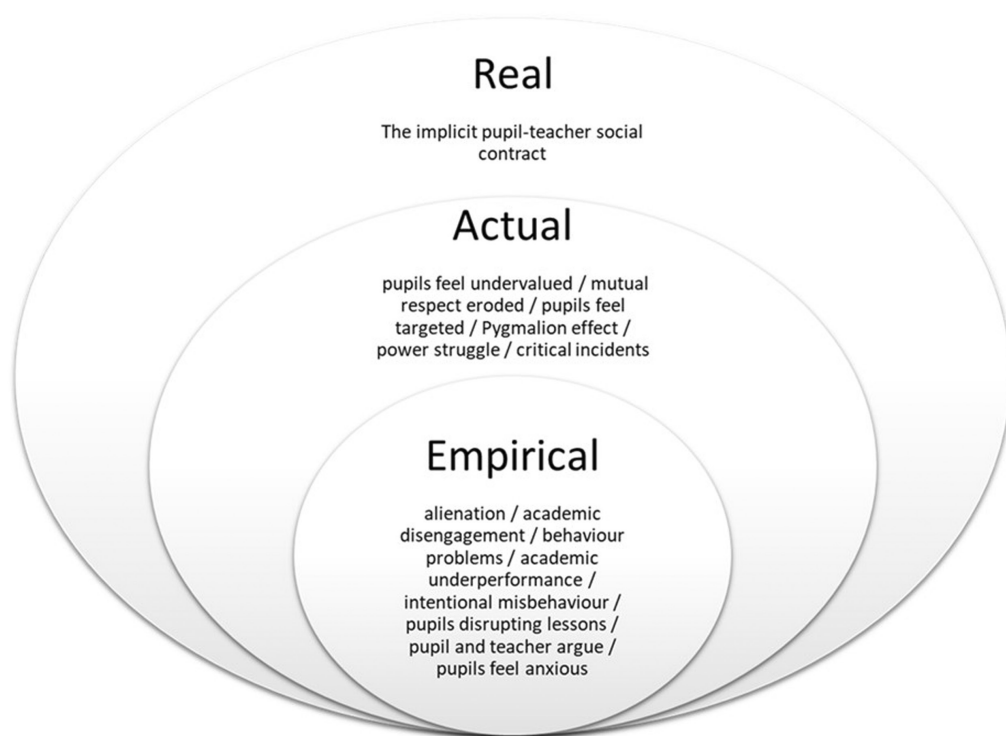
FIGURE 7   The implicit pupil-teacher social contract situated in the critical realist philosophy

Key implications

This study has discovered a substantive theory, presented as the implicit pupil-teacher social contract, grounded in the data from pupil and teacher participants. Although mutual respect has previously been accepted as an important aspect of pupil-teacher relationships, it was not until this study where its significance relating to the implicit social contract has been identified. The substantive theory proposes that positive relationships are characterised by the respect pupils and teachers hold for one another. It states that in positive relationships, pupils and teachers will only act in a way which they believe can be justified to each other. When the relationships are negative, this level of respect is absent, and so pupils are more likely to feel greater degrees of alienation. The balance of power was found to be of equal importance to maintaining the social contract as mutual respect. When pupils feel powerless, they maintain a high degree of academic agency yet experience circumstances where they feel unable to enact this.

The theory has the potential for wide-reaching professional implications. By understanding the pupil perspective on pupil-teacher relationships, leadership teams in schools would be able to plan professional development for staff and write a behaviour policy that empowers students in an attempt to reduce alienation and increase pupil attainment.

Beyond this, multi academy trusts and educational policy makers who are interested in driving forward an inclusion agenda, by enabling as many pupils as possible to remain engaged in their learning could benefit from this research. Understanding the implicit contract and potential implications negative relationships can have on a pupil's academic trajectory, multi-organisational or national initiatives could be put in place, which can reduce pupil alienation from schools.

There are also implications for the field of initial teacher education. Trainee teachers, by definition, are new to the profession and face a steep learning curve, frequently citing behaviour management as a fear and ongoing area for development (Bromfield, 2006). The findings can help trainee teachers to quickly establish positive pupil-teacher relationships, enhancing the experience of both pupils and teachers. This would also apply when trainee teachers enter the profession as early career teachers and can be used to inform a professional development opportunity for all early career teachers.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST
There are no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Data is available upon request to the author.

ETHICAL APPROVAL
Ethical approval was granted by the ethics board at the University of Worcester before gathering data. All participants were provided with a participant information sheet and gave consent. Where pupils were interviewed, consent was gained from the participant and the participant's guardian.

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ENDNOTES
[1] *Real* refers to the critical realist domain (Bhaskar, 1978) of reality.

[2] All teacher participants who were interviewed believed they had positive relationships with pupils.

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