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Far From the Dream:

Exploring the Gap in Educational
Opportunities for Black Americans

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Abstract

Substantial evidence demonstrates the inequity in educational opportunity that currently exists for Black students in U.S. schools. Combatting this inequity requires an understanding of what educational opportunity looks like in practice and insight into the various mechanisms that maintain and reproduce inequity. This dissertation explores the topic of educational opportunity through the lens of race with the aim of identifying the ways in which schools and policies can ensure all students receive the necessary support to be successful both in and out of school. In essence, this dissertation aims to capture what makes an education freeing and equitable.

To address the research aims, this dissertation employed a qualitatively driven, multi-method research design that consisted of four interrelated studies. The research approach and methods used for each of the four studies differed, but in combination, the studies sought to fulfill the overarching project aims. The multi-method design enabled a complex examination of racial inequity and educational opportunity from multiple perspectives and at four different levels: conceptual, policy, school, and individual.

The first study was a conversion mixed methods integrative review that focused on educational opportunity at the conceptual level. The study resulted in the development of an educational opportunity framework that has implications for both practice and theory. The framework can be adapted in different contexts to guide schools and researchers in evaluating or improving equity in educational opportunities.

Study II adopted an embedded mixed methods case study approach to examine the racial status quo within a majority-White high school (school level) and Black students' experiences within that school (individual level). The analysis resulted in the development of a figure depicting the cycle of inequity within the racial status quo and how this impacted students' experiences. The figure can be used as a model for schools to examine their own status quo, and improve practices and curriculum to ensure all students are provided equitable opportunities.

The third study used interpretative phenomenological analysis to more closely examine the same set of data as Study II by focusing on the qualitative data collected from the five Black girl participants (individual level). The study provides insight into school practices that result in feelings of entrapment, as well as more supportive structures and practices that give students a sense of freedom. Based on these results, suggestions are made for how schools can be more autonomy-supportive and inclusive. The suggestions do not just apply to Black girls, but could lead to a more freeing education for the broader student population.

The final study was a convergent mixed methods critical policy analysis that explored how racial/ethnic equity was promoted or inhibited in 61 educational policies that were introduced and enacted between 2020 and 2022. Though the majority of policies were found to promote equity, a critical evaluation of the policies revealed that those promoting equity presented more symbolic rather than meaningful action. In addition, they failed to address many of the structural issues that reproduce racial inequity. These findings necessitate education policies that move beyond race neutrality and explicitly target systemic racism.

The results of these studies taken together demonstrate the ways that racial inequity occurs through school practices and policies, and what this inequity means for Black students' school experiences. By centering Black students' experiences in a majority-White school, this dissertation points to the more subtle mechanisms that exist within schools that create inequity in accessing opportunities and having positive school experiences. Moreover, this dissertation examines educational opportunity at multiple levels enabling a more complex understanding of the interconnected factors that contribute to inequity. In sum, this dissertation contributes to both theory and practice by offering practical solutions to improving racial equity and presenting new frameworks for evaluating and conceptualizing educational opportunity.

Abstrakt

Forskning visar att svarta elever i USA:s skolor för närvarande inte har lika stora möjligheter till utbildning. För att motarbeta denna ojämlikhet krävs en förståelse för hur utbildningsmöjligheterna ser ut i praktiken och en insikt i de olika mekanismer som upprätthåller och reproducerar orättvisa. Denna avhandling utforskar temat utbildningsmöjligheter via ras som lins med målet att identifiera hur skolor och politik kan säkerställa att alla elever får det stöd som krävs för att lyckas både i och utanför skolan. I huvudsak syftar avhandlingen till att fånga upp vad som gör en utbildning emancipatorisk och rättvis.

I avhandlingen tillämpas en kvalitativt driven forskningsdesign med flera metoder i fyra sammanhängande studier. Forskningsansatsen och metoderna för de fyra studierna är olika men besvarar sammantaget de övergripande forskningsfrågorna. Designen med flera metoder möjliggör en komplex undersökning av ojämlikhet som baserar sig på ras och utbildningsmöjligheter ur flera olika perspektiv och på fyra olika nivåer: konceptuell, politisk, institutionell (skola) och individuell.

Den första studien är en studie där kvantitativa och kvalitativa metoder med ett mixed methods upplägg fokuserar på utbildningsmöjligheter på konceptuell nivå. Som resultat av studien har utvecklats ett ramverk för utbildningsmöjligheter med konsekvenser för både teori och praktik. Ramverket kan anpassas till olika sammanhang för att vägleda skolor och forskare när det gäller att utvärdera eller förbättra jämlika utbildningsmöjligheter.

I den andra studien används en fallstudie med mixed methods för att undersöka status quo gällande ras inom en gymnasieskola med vit majoritet (skolnivå) och fem svarta elevers erfarenheter av skolan (individnivå). Analysen resulterade i en cirkelmodell som synliggör ojämlikhet i fråga om status quo enligt ras och hur detta påverkar elevernas erfarenheter. Cirkelmodellen kan användas av skolor för att undersöka egen status quo och förbättra praxis och undervisningsinnehåll för att se till att alla elever får jämlika möjligheter.

I den tredje studien används tolkande fenomenologisk analys för att närmare undersöka samma uppsättning data som i den andra studien genom att fokusera på de kvalitativa data som samlades in från fem svarta flickor som deltog (individuell nivå). Studien ger en inblick i skolpraktiker som leder till en känsla av att vara fångad (entrapment), men också mer stödjande strukturer och praktiker som ger eleverna en känsla av frihet. Utifrån dessa resultat ges förslag på hur skolor kan vara mer autonomistödjande och inkluderande. Förslagen gäller inte bara svarta flickor, utan kan leda till en mer emancipatorisk utbildning för en bredare elevpopulation.

Den sista studien är en kritisk policyanalys där konvergent mixed methods används i syfte att undersöka hur rasmässig/etnisk jämlikhet främjades eller förhindrades i 61 utbildningspolitiska policyer som infördes och antogs mellan 2020 och 2022. Även om majoriteten av policyområdena visade sig främja jämlikhet, visade en kritisk utvärdering av områdena att de som främjade jämlikhet snarare var symboliska än meningsfulla. Dessutom misslyckades policyerna med att ta itu med många av de strukturella frågor som reproducerar rasrelaterad ojämlikhet. Dessa resultat kräver en utbildningspolitik som går bortom rasneutralitet och uttryckligen riktar sig mot systemisk rasism.

Resultaten av dessa studier visar sammantaget hur rasmässig ojämlikhet uppstår genom skolpraktik och skolpolicyer och vad denna ojämlikhet innebär för svarta elevers skolgång. Genom att fokusera på svarta elevers erfarenheter i en skola med vit majoritet pekar den här avhandlingen på de mer subtila mekanismer som finns i skolorna och som skapar ojämlikhet när det gäller att få tillgång till möjligheter och positiva skolupplevelser. Dessutom undersöker avhandlingen utbildnings-möjligheter på flera olika nivåer, vilket möjliggör en mer komplex förståelse av de sammankopplade faktorer som bidrar till ojämlikhet. Sammanfattningsvis bidrar denna avhandling till både teori och praktik genom att erbjuda praktiska lösningar för att förbättra jämlikheten mellan raser samtidigt som den presenterar nya ramar för att utvärdera och konceptualisera utbildningsmöjligheter.

Nyckelord: utbildningsmöjligheter, jämlikhet mellan raser, kritisk rasteori, design med flera metoder, kapacitetsstrategi, systemrättfärdigande teori, ideologi, färgblindhet, kulturellt relevant pedagogik, antirasism

Acknowledgements

A PhD was never in the cards for me. For most of my life, I was on the trajectory of becoming a teacher and I couldn't imagine a path outside of that. But, when I got the opportunity to potentially pursue this, I thought, *why not?* Despite my initial nonchalance, this process has been challenging and I could not have gotten through it alone.

I would first like to share my gratitude to my supervisors, Associate Professor Emmanuel Acquah and Professor Siv Björklund, whose guidance was critical to my success. Emmanuel, thank you for your encouragement, which led me down this path in the first place. I am grateful for all the support you have provided me over the years, both in research and beyond. You have advocated for me, guided me, and believed in me when I was feeling uncertain. Siv, I am so appreciative of the insight you have shared along the way. You have provided a different perspective on my work, and you have helped me recognize the value in what I have accomplished. Working with you both has been a joy.

To those who have reviewed my work, I greatly appreciate all the feedback you have provided. To University Lecturer Haiqin Liu, thank you for acting as opponent during my final seminar. Your thoughtful questions helped me strengthen my dissertation before submitting it for preliminary examination. To the preliminary examiners, Associate Professor Mervi Kaukko and Associate Professor Terri N. Watson, thank you both for reviewing my dissertation and providing invaluable insights. An additional thank you in advance to Associate Professor Watson who has kindly agreed to act as opponent during my public defense. I truly look forward to our discussion.

Next, I would like to thank the various organizations who have supported this research financially: Hogskolestiftelsen i Osterbotten, Svensk-Österbottniska samfundet, Otto A. Malm Foundation, Harry Elvings legat, Gustaf Packaléns mindefond, and Stiftelsen för Åbo Akademi. Thank you for believing in this work. Your support has enabled me to continuously work on this research for the past four years, to travel and present my research, and to visit different research institutions, both to learn from other researchers and to collect data.

In regards to the institutions I have been able to visit, thank you to Professor Venka Simovska for hosting me at the Danish School of Education at Aarhus University. The feedback I received from you and your colleagues during my visit helped me hone my research instruments, and you in particular helped me think differently about student wellbeing. In addition, I would like to thank Associate Professor Gordana Rabrenovic from the Brudnick Center on Violence and Conflict at Northeastern University. You made me feel welcome during my three months in Boston, connecting me

with the research community and introducing me to various opportunities where I could learn and grow. During my visit, I was also able to collect data for my dissertation, and so I am greatly indebted to the school district, students, educators, and administration that supported me in this endeavor. Similarly, thank you to the schools in Finland who worked with me in my attempt to collect data here. Inevitably, I did not obtain enough data to include in this dissertation, but I still learned a lot from those who participated.

Finally, I wish to thank my friends and family who have been constants in my life. You have brought me comfort throughout this journey. To my mom and dad, thank you for always believing in me and for guiding me to do things outside of my comfort zone. Thank you to my older brother Kyle and my sister-in-law Colleen for our long, weird, silly phone calls. These lighten my days. Kyle, thank you also for the discussions about research journals and peer review; these have helped me feel better when the process was getting to me. To my younger brother Aiden, thank you for (unintentionally) inspiring me to pursue research on equity, and thank you for being a constant bubbly joy (and pain, as brothers so often are) in my life. Last but not least, I am forever grateful to my partner Kim for being by my side these past four years. You celebrated me during the ups and comforted me during the downs. You put up with me and all my stress whilst working at home together during Covid, which is a feat in itself! You and your family have made me feel at home in Finland, and for that I am extremely grateful.

Vaasa 26.10.2022

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List of Original Publications

This dissertation consists of four original publications, which are referred to by their assigned Roman numerals (I-IV). These publications have been reproduced with permission from the copyright holders.

Study I:

Katz, H. T., & Acquah, E. O. (2021). The role of schools in providing educational opportunity: An integrative review. *Review of Education*, *9*(3), 1–42. https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3307

Study II:

Katz, H. T. (forthcoming). The toll of the racial status quo: A case study of Black students' experiences in a majority-White U.S. high school. In J. Keengwe (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Race, Culture, and Student Achievement.* IGI Global.

Study III:

Katz, H. T., & Acquah, E. O. (2022). Places of freedom or entrapment? Black adolescent girls' school experiences. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2022.2098401

Study IV:

Katz, H. T., & Acquah, E. O. (2022). *Tackling racial equity in U.S. Schools: A critical policy analysis of enacted state legislation (2020-2022)* [Manuscript submitted for publication]. Department of Education, Åbo Akademi University.

Author contribution: Heidi Katz is the first author of all four studies included in this dissertation. Heidi is responsible for developing the research instruments, collecting and analyzing data, and reporting the results. Emmanuel Acquah is second author of three of the articles, where he provided feedback for the data collection instruments, independently analyzed select data to establish trustworthiness, and supported the writing process.

List of Figures

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
...
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

Caged Bird by Maya Angelou

1. Introduction

In 1849, Horace Mann - often regarded as the "father of American education" - famously referred to education as the "great equalizer of the conditions of men – the balance-wheel of the social machinery" (Massachusetts Board of Education, p. 59). Mann believed in the importance of free, universal education; he was confident that the expansion of education could enrich society, prevent poverty, and "obliterate factitious distinctions" (p. 60). In other words, regardless of background or personal characteristics, a quality education could lead to equitable opportunity, social mobility, and the realization of the American Dream.

   Although many consider the American Dream to be tied to material wealth, James Truslow Adams, who officially coined the term in 1931, defined it as:

> That dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement … It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (p. 404)

To Adams, the dream is about the ability of individuals to develop to their fullest potential. For this conception of the dream to come to fruition, Mann would likely argue that individuals must have access to a high-quality education. Unfortunately, over 150 years after Mann shared his vision, education in the United States is not yet the great equalizer he had imagined it could be. Though all students in the United States have a right to attend public school for free, the quality of education students receive – both within and between schools - varies greatly. Similarly, the utopian society that Adams and many others before and after him spoke of - and continue to speak of - has remained a myth (Samuel, 2012).

   Social mobility is one way to measure the attainability of the dream and the success of education as the great equalizer. Research by economists demonstrates that absolute income mobility – "the fraction of children who earn more than their parents" - has declined since the 1940s (Chetty et al., 2017, p. 1), and millennials (born since 1980) are less upwardly mobile in terms of employment status compared to previous generations (Hout, 2019). Furthermore, the dream is based on the idea that mobility is available for everyone when in reality, policies and practices throughout the nation's history have excluded people from accessing the dream due to race, gender, ethnicity, religion, wealth, and other "non-normative" positionings (Chetty et al., 2015; Jillson, 2016; Samuel, 2012). In fact, the

meritocratic ideology that serves as a foundation for the American Dream, and is adhered to by many Americans (particularly those in power), in a sense enables inequality to persist (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Johnson, 2014; Reynolds & Xian, 2014). By endorsing meritocratic thinking, people are able to rationalize inequality, rather than recognize and address the systems and structures that privilege certain groups (Blasi & Jost, 2006; Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

Inequity in the United States is particularly great for people of color who for centuries have been limited in their opportunities to achieve the dream due to systemic racism. As current President Joe Biden noted in Executive Order 13985 (2021), "for too many, the American Dream remains out of reach. Entrenched disparities in our laws and public policies, and in our public and private institutions, have often denied … equal opportunity to individuals and communities" (p. 1). Considering this, the order specifically seeks to address systemic racism by advancing "equity across the Federal Government" and providing "everyone with the opportunity to reach their full potential" (Executive Order 13985, 2021, p. 1). Whilst President Biden acknowledges the fact that the dream has not yet come to fruition, the order shares in its ethos – the desire for every person living in the United States to have equal opportunity to flourish.

This dissertation stems from a similar desire: that all children, regardless of background, are provided equitable opportunities to achieve both in school and beyond. As an educator myself, I strongly believe in the power of education, but I am dismayed by the current inequity that exists within the American education system. Though there are many areas of inequity to be addressed (e.g., gender, indigenous, and wealth), the opportunity gap is particularly large for students racialized as Black, resulting in worse school outcomes and lower levels of social and economic mobility. Thus, this dissertation centers on the intersection between educational opportunity and race, with the hope of advancing equity for Black students.

1.1. Opportunity as Freedom

The specific aims of this dissertation cannot be understood without a proper presentation of the terms *opportunity* and *equity,* and how these ideas are applied to education. The concept of opportunity is quite complex, as it can be used to support a wide range of practices or ideologies that often conflict with one another. In the United States, the concept is closely tied to the dream and individual freedoms. Although I view both the dream and the belief that the U.S. is a meritocracy to be myths at present, I do agree with the underlying belief that an ideal world would offer this sense of equity. Thus, I approach opportunity through the lens of economist Amartya Sen's capability approach, a normative framework for evaluating and

conceptualizing well-being, freedom, and justice (Sen, 1992, 1999, 2009). Although this perspective of opportunity does not originate in the field of education, it is appropriate for this dissertation because it aligns with my own beliefs about educational opportunity, and it also mirrors the language and ideas used by Adams and Mann. Moreover, Sen views education as a type of *instrumental freedom* that contributes to a person's capability to live better and more freely (Sen, 1992; Spratt, 2017).

Within the approach, *capability* is considered to be "a kind of freedom: the substantive freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations (or, less formally put, the freedom to achieve various lifestyles)" (Sen, 1999, p. 75). *Functionings* are used to describe one's actual achievements, or what people are able to be and do (Nussbaum, 2003; Sen, 1992, 1999, 2009), and they can range from being able to read to being physically or mentally well (Spratt, 2017). The freedom to achieve various functionings is referred to as a capability set (Sen, 1999).

When evaluating well-being and justice, the capability approach takes into account human diversity as it relates to differences in one's objectives as well as one's ability to convert resources or opportunities into functionings (Sen, 1992; Spratt, 2017). In other words, one person may wish to be highly educated, whereas another individual may be more interested in being employed. At the same time, two people may wish to be highly educated, but due to "'internal capability'" and/or external conditions, only one may have the capability to convert resources into the desired functioning (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999). Addressing this inequality would involve the expansion of one's capability - or freedom to achieve - by removing the external barriers that impede one's progress or by providing additional support.

When considering human diversity, it is also important to recognize that even though two people may appear to have the same functionings, this does not mean they have the same capability set (Sen, 2009; Spratt, 2017). For instance, a person who chooses to fast may do so to gain a sense of fulfillment, whereas another person may involuntarily face starvation due to a lack of means (Sen, 2009). Despite having the same functionings, there are clear differences between the two people in terms of advantage and disadvantage. For this reason, the capability approach highlights the importance of not simply evaluating outcomes or possession of primary goods (resources), but looking at real opportunity (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007), taking into consideration whether one has the "capability to choose between different achievements" in order to live a life one has reason to value (Sen, 2009). The freedom to achieve is central to capability, regardless of whether a person takes advantage of the various opportunities (Spratt, 2017). Greater freedom is beneficial not only to the individual, but also for improving the ability one has to influence the world and contribute to the development of society (Sen, 1999). Hence, human

agency – the view that people are active participants in bringing about change - is considered a core aspect of the approach (Sen, 1999; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007).

1.1.1. Advancing Equity over Equality

The capability approach draws from Rawls's theory of justice as fairness (Sen, 2009), which is based on two principles:

1. Each person has an equal right to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties which is compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for all.

2. Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions. First, they must be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they must be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society. (Rawls, p. 5)

Though Sen is critical of both Rawls's focus on the distribution of primary goods (resources) as well as the lack of attention paid to differences in ability to secure freedoms regardless of the primary goods one possesses, Sen agrees that any pursuit of justice must build upon this idea of fairness (Sen, 2009).

In line with the second principle of justice, along with the capability approach's interest in enhancing opportunities and considering human diversity, I center this dissertation on the idea of advancing equity rather than equality. Equality is considered synonymous with sameness, meaning inequality denotes differences in outcomes (Burbules et al., 1982). In contrast, inequity relates to circumstances when - regardless of outcomes – the freedom to achieve is not fair. Thus, advancing equity does not mean providing the same thing to everyone, but it requires a proper assessment of all "relevant similarities and differences" to decide what is needed based on one's starting point and one's end goal (Burbules et al., 1982, p. 171). As Spratt (2017) explains, "the expansion of a person's capabilities or opportunities to choose, what for them is a life of value is seen in the Capability Approach as the appropriate variable by which to judge equ[ity]" (p. 52).

This approach to equity directly relates to how poverty is defined within the capability perspective: the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than income (Sen, 1999). As Sen (2009) points out, an individual may have a high income, but they may not have the capability to achieve their goals due to certain handicaps. Consequently, Sen views capability deprivation as the "real poverty," though he concedes that income poverty can make it difficult to convert resources into functionings (Sen, 2009).

1.1.2. A Freeing and Equitable Education

Being educated is both intrinsically and instrumentally freeing: it leads to the development of various functionings (e.g., learned skills) and enhances one's capabilities (opens up real opportunities outside of school), meaning it is also instrumental in bringing about societal change and development (Saito, 2003; Spratt, 2017; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). Lazenby (2016) refers to the former (intrinsic) as *opportunity for education*, and the latter (instrumental) as *opportunity through education*. Beyond having opportunity for or through education, it is necessary to consider whether that opportunity is equitable. This requires a proper evaluation of the education system as it relates to fairness, as well as whether it is in line with individual values, needs, and goals.

Educationists employing the capability approach are critical of Sen's assumption that education is universally good (Spratt, 2017; Unterhalter & Walker, 2007; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). They point out that ineffective education can place students at a disadvantage, and negative experiences in school can in many ways reduce one's capability to live a life one has reason to value (Spratt, 2017; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). Spratt (2017) refers to the educational experiences or factors that reduce one's capability as "unfreedoms," and these can arise through school culture, curriculum, forms of assessment, and not being valued or receiving equal respect (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). Having negative and even traumatizing experiences at school can follow someone throughout their life and influence their future choices (Spratt, 2017; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). According to Walker & Unterhalter (2007), "we thus need to engage the view that not everything counts as education if we wish at one and the same time to argue that education expands human freedoms, agency, and empowerment" (p. 14).

School evaluation often focuses on the outcomes, particularly academic outcomes, which can of course provide valuable information about whose capabilities are being developed (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). However, the overemphasis placed on improving academic outcomes can often lead to tunnel vision, where schools fail to recognize the lack of real opportunity, or they miss out on supporting students in developing other functionings that could inadvertently improve student learning. For instance, poor mental or physical health can make it challenging for students to engage with school and convert an opportunity into a valuable functioning (Spratt, 2017). As Spratt (2017) explains, "physical and emotional wellbeing can be seen as functionings that enhance children's capabilities to engage in education, and education in turn develops further functionings that enhance freedoms to flourish through a well lived life" (p. 123). Thus, opportunity for and through education requires that schools seek to enhance functionings, not just related to academics, but also overall well-

being. Furthermore, to effectively identify areas of disadvantage, exclusion, and barriers to achievement, proponents of the capability approach encourage looking beyond functionings and considering students' real opportunities or freedoms (Spratt, 2017; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007).

When evaluating educational equity, it is imperative to consider the enhancement of human capabilities and the role of human diversity. When a certain group of students (e.g., Black, girls, and Spanish-speaking) are disadvantaged or do not receive equitable opportunity to enhance their capabilities, their sense of agency and well-being becomes diminished, and they may adapt their aspirations to fit into what they believe is probable - rather than preferable - for them (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). Therefore, schools can be inequitable places that enhance capabilities for some, whilst reducing them for others. Walker and Unterhalter (2007) note that what is often missing from the capability perspective is the connection between education and dominant norms, histories of marginalization, and conflicts related to power. By identifying and redressing social arrangements that privilege certain students, schools can better support students in converting capabilities into functionings (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007).

In sum, by changing the focus from improving outcomes to capabilities, schools can perhaps become the "great equalizer" that Mann once imagined them to be and the dream may become more attainable. Not only is enhancing capabilities beneficial to the individual student, but upon leaving school students will be better prepared to contribute to building an equitable society. However, this requires an education that moves beyond traditional approaches and ensures the learning is appropriate based on the diverse needs, cultures, values, and functionings of students. According to Nussbaum (2006), this type of transformative education would focus on cultivating three capabilities: 1) a student's capacity to think critically and engage in self-examination; 2) an understanding of the world (different cultures, religions, beliefs, histories, languages, etc.) that goes beyond oneself and one's nation; and 3) a student's narrative imagination, or the ability to empathize with others by participating in meaningful and creative learning activities (e.g., arts and literature). Central to all of this, an education for freedom "must begin with the mind of the child, and it must have the goal of increasing that mind's freedom in its social environment, rather than killing it off" (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 392).

1.2. Aim and Structure of the Dissertation

In this dissertation, I explore the concept of opportunity in U.S. education. As has been discussed, U.S. schools are wrongly perceived to be places where students are treated equally and achievement is solely based on merit. Although this is ideal, it is not yet the case: the ways in which schools are structured, including various policies and practices, make accessing

opportunities inequitable. Through standardized testing, competitive university entry, and high costs placed on private and higher education, students in the United States face significant pressure to perform well if they want to eventually be competitive in the labor market. Beyond this, there are group-specific barriers that disadvantage students and limit their capabilities. As a result, not all students are given a fair chance (meritocratic) to succeed. When students are deprived of developing basic capabilities within school, their life chances are inevitably affected, resulting in a cycle of inequity.

Considering this, the primary aim of this dissertation is to capture what makes an education freeing and equitable. I have chosen to explore the topic of educational opportunity through the lens of race, with a specific focus on Black students, because I believe that correcting the "unfreedoms" that disproportionately affect Black students can lead to improved equity in educational opportunity overall. I seek to understand the entanglement of opportunity and race at multiple levels (conceptual, school, policy, and student) in order to identify ways in which schools and policies can create learning environments that provide equitable opportunities and support the enhancement of student capabilities. I use the following research questions to guide this dissertation:

1. How can educational systems provide students with equitable opportunities to enhance their capability set?

    a. In what ways do school practices and policies in the United States promote and/or inhibit racial equity in educational opportunity?

    b. How do Black students in the United States experience school and make sense of (in)equity?

This dissertation consists of four studies, each with their own research questions, which taken together answer the aforementioned questions.

Overall, the studies comprising this dissertation contribute to both theory and practice. This dissertation moves beyond a superficial understanding of educational opportunity by exploring the complex mechanisms that lead to the reproduction of inequity at multiple levels. Though some of the implications are specific to the United States due to its unique structures, many of the results - related to improving within-school practices, understanding student experiences of inequity, and creating policy to promote equity - can apply to Europe and beyond.

One of the primary contributions of this research is the development of two frameworks that can be used by researchers, policymakers, and educators who are working to transform the current status quo in

education. Another point of significance is the inclusion of student voices to ensure the suggested improvements are in line with the needs and wants of those who would be most affected. Rather than measuring (in)equity through disparities in outcomes, this research draws on students' school experiences (positive and negative) to understand how opportunity and (in)equity manifest and affect students' everyday school lives. Their experiences demonstrate what achievement gaps cannot; they reveal disparities in school practices (inputs) that exist regardless of whether a student is academically successful.

In the remainder of this dissertation, I will draw connections between the research questions, the existing literature on educational opportunity and racial equity, and the four studies included in this research. I will begin in section 2 by defining the various terms related to race and how they apply to the U.S. context. I will then proceed by outlining the key factors that contribute to racial inequity and inequality of outcomes in U.S. schools (section 3). Following the presentation of relevant literature, I will present the research design (section 4) and an overview of the four studies (section 5). The dissertation will conclude with a discussion of the main findings, implications, and methodological considerations (strengths and limitations) in section 6.

2. Defining Race, Racism, and Anti-Racism

The meaning of race and racism varies across time and space. They are also largely misunderstood by the general public: race is often conflated with ethnicity or culture, and racism is often perceived to be a problem of individuals. In this section, I clarify what these concepts mean both in the past and present U.S. context (though many of the underlying ideas are relevant elsewhere). I highlight how race was once understood to be a scientific reality, but now it is widely accepted to be a social construct that has a real effect on people's opportunities. Similarly, I discuss how racism has transformed alongside race, from overt acts of hatred and bigotry, toward something much more insidious and systematic that requires explicitly anti-racist action to combat. I will also present how whiteness functions as property and how this specifically affects Black people.

The discussion of whiteness and anti-Black racism is not to present race as a binary, but throughout the nation's history anti-Black racism and the construction of racial categories have functioned to maintain White privilege and society's racial structure, meaning the two are closely interlinked (Applebaum, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2021). Through centuries of exclusion and subordination, Whites have systematically denied Black Americans equity in opportunity, which has resulted in some of the worst outcomes in school and life when compared to other racial groups. Though in some cases I draw direct connections to education, in section 3 I will provide a more thorough discussion on how racism is embedded in the education system.

2.1. Race as a Social Construct

> *Race is the child of racism, not the father.*
>
> (Coates, 2015, p. 7)

Race is a social category that has been constructed over time due to racist ideologies, such as the belief that White people are born with inherent superiority when compared to others, and that people can be easily distinguished through physical features, names, speech, dress, and culture (Barot & Bird, 2001; Bonilla-Silva, 2015a; Ladson-Billings, 1997). Though beliefs in a scientific reality of race have long been refuted, these old overtly racist ideologies - along with newer ideologies around race - contributed and continue to contribute to the establishment of a racial structure that maintains and reproduces privilege and inequity (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Gullestad, 2004; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2013). As such, race has been made socially real and affects the lived experiences of people

based on how they are racialized (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Considering this definition, it is important to note that two people who are ethnically different may be racialized as the same and, as a result, they may have similar experiences of racial discrimination (Rastas, 2005).

With that said, racial categories are unstable and the meaning attributed to one's race can vary depending on context and time (Applebaum, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Howard & Navarro, 2016). During the 18th and 19th centuries, Catholic Irish who immigrated to the United States were considered to be non-White, meaning they did not have access to privileges afforded to people racialized as White (Ignatiev, 2008). Over time, however, they distanced themselves from blackness and aligned themselves with whiteness, enabling them to transition from being victims to perpetrators of racial oppression (Ignatiev, 2008; Leonardo, 2009).

The phenomenon of "passing" provides another example of the fluid nature of race, where one's self-proclaimed racial identity my differ from the racial identity ascribed by others (Hobbs, 2014). Since the Antebellum era, there have been many cases of Black people who were able to pass as White due to their racial ambiguity (Davis, 1991; Lawrence, 2015; Rastas, 2005), and as a result, they gained access to certain benefits at the cost of isolation (Hobbs, 2014), "self-denial" and being made "complicit in [their] own oppression" (Harris, 1993, pp. 1711–1712). Though the need to disguise one's racial identity to gain access to certain spaces or opportunities is no longer as vital, it still stands that one's ability to blend into White spaces, or one's proximity to whiteness, yields benefits.

For instance, despite the historical and symbolic significance of Barack Obama's presidency, some argue that it was made possible due to Obama's ability to distance himself from blackness, adopt a post-racial stance (Bonilla-Silva, 2015a, 2019b; T. M. Davis, 2016), and "soothe race consciousness among whites" (Coates, 2012, p. 90). Davis (2016) remarked on a particular television campaign advertisement where then-Senator Obama was pictured with his White mother and White grandparents, alongside "rhetoric about 'heartland values':

> The ad was seemingly a deliberate attempt connect to white voters by showing that, despite his father's and his own self-professed racial identity, Mr Obama could claim whiteness, and as a result, embodied the characteristics (moral and otherwise) of a good leader. (339)

The aforementioned examples demonstrate that despite making strides toward more racial equity, whiteness continues to operate as a form of valuable property (Harris, 1993; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

2.2. Race as Property

Possession - the act necessary to lay the basis for rights in property - was defined to include only the cultural practices of whites. This definition laid the foundation for the idea that whiteness - that which whites alone possess - is valuable and is property.

(Harris, 1993, p. 1721)

Critical race scholar Cheryl Harris's (1993) seminal work, "Whiteness as property" is key to understanding how race, particularly whiteness, functions as a form of property. The piece highlights how the United States was built on property rights, and the interaction of race and property early on in the nation's history helped establish racial and economic hierarchies: Black people were treated as property through the exploitation of their labor, and Whites' occupation of Native American land substantiated the exclusivity of property rights (Harris, 1993; see also Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In contrast, "whiteness was the characteristic, the attribute, the property of free human beings" (Harris, 1993, p. 1721). In the article, Harris names four ways in which whiteness meets the functional criteria of property: rights of disposition, rights to use and enjoyment, reputation and status property, and the absolute right to exclude.

Through the rise of pseudoscience around race during the 18th and 19th centuries, biological racism and the one-drop rule[1] legitimized White supremacy, and as a result, courts were able to use this "objective fact" to protect White privilege and enforce exclusion through segregation (J. F. Davis, 1991; Harris, 1993). As Harris (1993) notes,

> Owning white identity as property affirmed the self-identity and liberty of whites and, conversely, denied the self-identity and liberty of Blacks. The attempts to lay claim to whiteness through "passing" painfully illustrate the effects of the law's recognition of whiteness ... Self-determination of identity was not a right for all people, but a privilege accorded on the basis of race. The effect of protecting whiteness at law was to devalue those who were not white by coercing them to deny their identity in order to survive. (pp. 1743-44)

Whiteness, positioned as the ultimate property, provided exclusive freedoms and rights to those who possessed it (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). At the same time, the devaluing of blackness forced many who could "pass" as White to deny their own identity, and become "trespassers" on White property (Harris, 1993; Lawrence, 2015).

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[1] The one-drop rule is the claim that anyone who possesses a single drop of "Black blood" should be identified as Black, even if physically they appear White (J. F. Davis, 1991; Harris, 1993). It is tied to the notion that race is scientifically real, and even one drop of "Black blood" would taint one's claim to purity, or whiteness (Harris, 1993).

Eventually, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) eradicated de jure school segregation and contributed to the collapse of the Jim Crow era[2]. Though the decision was certainly a positive move, legal scholar Derrick Bell (often regarded as the "Father of Critical Race Theory") was critical of the fact that racial progress is often only made when it aligns with White interests, a phenomenon he referred to as "interest convergence" (D. A. Bell, 1980; see also Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 38). In the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the decision benefited foreign policy, improving the image of U.S. democracy abroad (D. A. Bell, 1980; Zamudio et al., 2010).

Regardless of the deciding factors, in some ways the decision was insubstantial because policymakers failed to address the numerous material inequalities that still existed due to past oppression (Aggarwal, 2016; J. F. Davis, 1991; Harris, 1993). Consequently, the aftermath of *Brown v. Board of Education* led to the emergence of a more subtle form of White privilege and racism, one where segregation is still a major factor in maintaining and reproducing racial inequity (Garcia, 2020; Merolla & Jackson, 2019; Shapiro et al., 2013). Within the new status quo, institutions, policies, and practices continue to reinforce whiteness and position it as normal, human, and neutral, whereas non-White perspectives and ways of being and knowing are viewed as lesser or "other" (Allen, 2004; Moore & J. M. Bell, 2017; Stoll, 2014; Tevis et al., 2022; Zamudio et al., 2010).

In 21st-century classrooms, race as property relates to the value placed on student capital, White cultural capital being dominant (Carter, 2007; E. Y. Young, 2011). Whiteness, as a form of symbolic capital[3], conveys messages about one's abilities and ensures access to additional opportunities and resources (T. M. Davis, 2016; Lewis, 2003). Race as property also relates to the interconnectedness between school quality and economic capital (through property tax): the more affluent a community is, the better the school district (Francies & Kelley, 2021; Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Due to neighborhood segregation, school quality often converges with affluence and whiteness (Francies & Kelley,

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[2] The Jim Crow era emerged after the Civil War and lasted until the Civil Rights Movement. Jim Crow laws, including legalized segregation, were overtly racist (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; A. Morris, 2001). Through exclusionary practices and racial violence (e.g., lynching), Whites were able to maintain their privilege and deny Blacks equal opportunity in spite of the abolition of slavery (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; A. Morris, 2001). The 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* supreme court ruling that separate facilities were constitutional is one example of policy that was used to legitimize racism and uphold White supremacy (Harris, 1993).

[3] According to Bourdieu, symbolic capital acts as an instrument for legitimizing social and cultural domination and subordination (Grenfell, 2014; Southerton, 2011). Symbolic violence occurs through misrecognition due to the arbitrary, rather than inherent, value that is recognized in other forms of capital (Grenfell, 2014; Southerton, 2011). Thus, the legitimization of an educational system that presents itself as neutral despite privileging whiteness and misrecognizing inequitable practices is a form of symbolic violence (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Coles & Powell, 2020)

2021; Harris, 1993). Therefore, even though White privilege is no longer legally bound, the value placed on whiteness remains and is protected through color-blind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Harris, 1993; Yogeeswaran et al., 2018), making the American Dream more attainable to those who possess it.

2.3. Racism as a Systemic Problem

> *Racism is the ideology that justifies the dominance of one race over another.*
>
> (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24)

Critical race scholars agree that racism in the United States is normal (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1998), meaning it is not simply a problem of individuals committing overt acts of violence and discrimination; rather, racism is subtle and systemic (Bonilla-Silva, 2018, 2019b; Moore & J. M. Bell, 2017; E. Y. Young, 2011). Racism is interwoven into our institutions, social structure, laws, culture, and everyday life (Applebaum, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tevis et al., 2022). Though how racism is expressed has changed over time, racism has never dissipated but has simply adapted to changing socio-cultural contexts (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Vaught & Castagno, 2008).

Racism during the periods of slavery and Jim Crow was also embedded in the system, but overt expressions of bigotry were normalized, and the ideology (White supremacy/biological racism) used to rationalize the oppressive actions was not disguised. Today, few Whites claim to be racist and instead profess to "not see color" (Applebaum, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Husband, 2012; Stoll, 2014). Sociologist Bonilla-Silva (2018) refers to this new post-Civil Rights era racial ideology[4] as "color-blind racism." He (2015b) explains how ideology, rather than individual prejudice, is key to maintaining racial domination. Thus, Bonilla-Silva (2019a) asserts:

> It is perhaps time to "kill the racists" (the concept) as this notion precludes understanding of America's "race problem" as not a matter of a few rotten apples but a rotten apple tree. Focusing on "the racists" prevents us from analytically and politically tackling the collective practices, mechanisms, institutions, and behaviors that reproduce racial domination. (p. 17)

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[4] Bonilla-Silva defines ideology as "the broad mental and moral frameworks, or 'grids,' that social groups use to make sense of the world, to decide what is right or wrong, true or false, important or unimportant" (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, p. 62). According to Lewis (2004), an ideology gains hegemony when it becomes "common sense," and the status quo – which generally works to serve certain group interests - is legitimized (p. 632). Many researchers agree that ideologies are inherently political (Bonilla-Silva, 2019a; Doane, 2017; M. Zamudio et al., 2010).

Rather than focusing on individual "racists," addressing racial inequity requires an understanding of the structures that maintain and reproduce it, along with the ideology used to justify these structures.

2.3.1. Color-Blindness as the Dominant Racial Ideology

On the surface, color-blindness is an ideal way of viewing the world, but it has unfortunate consequences for those who are negatively affected by the racialized social system (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; López, 2003; Yogeeswaran et al., 2018). Whilst the old form of racism was detectable and openly accepted by many Whites, the new form is much more subtle and easy to disguise as non-racial (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Bonilla-Silva has identified four frames that are commonly used by Whites to rationalize racial inequity and are central to color-blind racism:

- *Abstract liberalism* sets the foundation for color-blind racism. Within this frame, people rationalize a wide range of racial issues by abstractly employing arguments that are generally associated with political or economic liberalism (e.g., meritocracy, individualism, and egalitarianism). More specifically, people using this frame claim that everyone has individual rights to make choices and that outcomes are based on merit. They also argue against any form of preference given to different groups. These ideas are espoused in the name of equal opportunity, without consideration for equitable opportunity.
- *Naturalization* is the idea that segregation or the desire to surround oneself with similar people (e.g., selecting racially similar friends/partners/work colleagues) is natural and a matter of personal preference. Those using the naturalization frame do not see segregation as racist since they claim everyone does it; thus, it is viewed almost as a biological drive.
- Through *cultural racism*, disparities are rationalized as a result of inferior cultural practices. For instance, when students of color are academically unsuccessful, educators will often blame their parents and associate it with stereotypes related to culture and values (Choi, 2008).
- The *minimization of race* occurs when people (mis)understand racism to be a problem of prejudiced individuals. People employing this frame minimize racialized incidences and/or systemic inequity because race is perceived as no longer affecting one's life chances.

The color-blind frames help justify disparities, maintain the racial status quo, and keep "the dream" alive by moving blame away from the system

and onto individuals (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Doane, 2017; Yogeeswaran et al., 2017; Zamudio et al., 2010). By promoting egalitarianism and meritocracy (abstract liberalism frame), color-blindness disallows discrimination in every sense, even though certain forms of discrimination – those which uplift the marginalized (e.g., affirmative action) – can create more equity (Burbules et al., 1982; Harris, 1993; Kendi, 2019).

The color-blind frames are flexible and can be adapted to rationalize somewhat conflicting events (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Doane, 2017). An example of this is how people rationalized the presidential elections of both Obama and Trump: for many, the Obama presidency symbolized a post-racial society (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Carter, 2009), yet the proceeding Trump presidency made people's racial beliefs swing in the opposite direction – seeing individual racists as the primary issue (Bonilla-Silva, 2019a). In both situations, color-blind ideology was used to explain either the decline or rise of overt racism, without recognition of the unchanging state of racial inequity.

In schools, color-blind ideology is used to rationalize disparities in outcomes, which enables inequitable practices and biased beliefs to persist (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Stoll, 2014; Yogeeswaran et al., 2018). Moreover, when color-blind ideology is promoted in classrooms, students are less likely to notice racial discrimination or identify something as racist, and as a result, they may not take action or seek support (Apfelbaum et al., 2010; Byrd, 2016). Thus, color-blind ideology has dangerous consequences: it prevents people from seeing and addressing issues of racism, and it relieves people from the responsibility of changing a racially inequitable system.

It may come as a surprise that system-justifying ideologies, such as color-blindness, are not merely used by dominant groups, but they are also used by those who are negatively affected by the system. System justification theory posits that people are generally motivated to perceive the status quo as fair and legitimate, despite the fact it may not support one's self-interest (Jost, 2020; Jost & Hunyady, 2005). Justifying the system offers social and psychological benefits to individuals, such as reducing uncertainty, guilt, and the distress that comes when one belongs to a group disadvantaged by the system (Bahamondes et al., 2019; Jost et al., 2008; Jost & Hunyady, 2005). Thus, system-justifying ideology serves both a hegemonic and palliative function (Jost, 2020; Jost et al., 2008).

Unfortunately, when people show support for a system that is inequitable it makes enacting real systemic change more difficult. A study conducted in New Zealand demonstrates that when color-blind ideology is used to justify the status quo, it can lead to a decrease in support for policies that could redress racial inequality (Yogeeswaran et al., 2018). Therefore, despite studies showing that color-blind ideology can in some ways reduce outgroup prejudice (Levin et al., 2012; Whitley & Webster, 2019; Yogeeswaran et al., 2017), when the core racism issue lies with the system,

moving past color-blindness is vital for creating more racial equity (Yogeeswaran et al., 2018).

2.3.2. Beyond Binaries in Racism Research

Similar to the phenomenon of "passing," some groups of color[5] (e.g., Asian Americans) are positioned as "model minorities" or "honorary Whites," which gives them access to certain opportunities and privileges typically afforded to Whites (Allen, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2015a; Carter, 2007; Chapman & Bhopal, 2019). In contrast, Black Americans (and other darker-skinned people) are usually placed on the lowest rung of the racial hierarchy, meaning they face some of the harshest forms of discrimination and stereotyping (Allen, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2015a; Chapman & Bhopal, 2019). Moreover, bigotry directed toward Asian and Latinx Americans is often tied to xenophobia and language (Gover et al., 2020; Vachuska, 2020), whereas anti-Black stereotypes are connected to dehumanization and perceptions of cultural, intellectual, and behavioral inferiority (Chapman & Bhopal, 2019; Coles & Powell, 2020; Diamond & Lewis, 2019; Epstein et al., 2017; Lawrence, 2015). At the same time, bigotry and stereotypes can differ depending on context and period in time. For example, overt racism targeting Asian Americans - who are generally conferred the model minority status - has increased due to Covid-19 fears and misinformation (Gover et al., 2020; Vachuska, 2020).

Given the complexity of racial stereotyping, it is not enough to simply "see color" because this leaves room for an essentialist understanding of people and race. Ladson-Billings (2013), a renowned educator and critical race scholar, defines essentialism as "a belief that all people perceived to be in a single group think, act, and believe the same things in the same ways" (p. 41). This kind of thinking can lead to harmful stereotyping, such as that listed above. In reality, differences within groups are larger than those between groups, despite the collective interests and solidarity that often exists amongst people with a common identity (Ladson-Billings, 2013).

Experiences of oppression and privilege can also differ depending on how one's racial identity intersects with a variety of other factors (e.g., class, religion, gender, sexuality, and language; Crenshaw, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 2013). For instance, a Black woman in academia may have experiences with workplace sexism that are both similar and dissimilar to a White working-class woman due to the ways in which class, gender, and

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[5] The phrase "people of color," and its derivatives (e.g., students of color, voters of color, and women of color), unites people who have experienced systemic racial oppression (Starr, 2022). This between-group solidarity is beneficial for enhancing political power, and as a result, promoting racial equity. Nonetheless, racism manifests differently between these groups, and as such, enacting change also requires considering the specific ways individual groups and individual people are uniquely affected.

race operate simultaneously. Similarly, a Black male doctor may have very different experiences than a Black female colleague, despite their shared race and title, due to the ways in which Black women and men are differently stereotyped and treated. Considering these examples, when researching racial inequity it is necessary to consider how larger structures specifically affect certain racialized groups, while also taking an intersectional approach to understanding how individuals within the same racialized group may differently perceive and experience racialized practices, spaces, and interactions.

2.4. Anti-Racism as Action

> *In essence the antiracist strives to change the norms and practices that allow racism to exist.*
>
> (Bonilla-Silva, 2018, p. 243)

When racism is viewed as a problem of individuals, people who claim to not be racist are relieved of the responsibility to address inequities, and this passivity enables systemic racism to persist. One of the core issues of modern-day racism is that policies and practices are presented as neutral and color-blind, when in reality they privilege Whites. As Bonilla-Silva (2018) points out, "liberals feel bad when a person of color is murdered by the police, [whereas] the antiracist agitates, organizes, and works with every ounce of her soul to eliminate the system that makes possible racialized policing in the first place" (p. 243). Thus, there is a clear difference between simply being "not racist" and working to be "anti-racist."

Being anti-racist is a continuous process that begins with recognizing racism to be a systemic problem that affects all actors "materially (receive benefits or disadvantages) and ideologically" (Bonilla-Silva, 2018, p. 15; see also Kendi, 2019; Stoll, 2014). Beyond having an awareness of systemic racism, being anti-racist requires action that explicitly targets and aims to dismantle racial inequity (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Kendi, 2019). As presented previously, the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision merely ended de jure school segregation, but de facto segregation continues because policies do not effectively enforce racial integration (Aggarwal, 2016). Critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1988) cautions,

> The civil rights community … must come to terms with the fact that antidiscrimination discourse is fundamentally ambiguous and can accommodate conservative as well as liberal views of race and equality. This dilemma suggests that the civil rights constituency cannot afford to view antidiscrimination doctrine as a permanent pronouncement of society's commitment to ending racial subordination. Rather, antidiscrimination law represents an ongoing ideological struggle in

which the occasional winners harness the moral, coercive, consensual power of law. (p. 1335)

To enact real, lasting change, policymakers must break free from color-blind language and instead write laws that are explicitly anti-racist (Ball, 2017; Dumas et al., 2016). Ball (2017) puts it simply: "In so far as policy is 'colour blind', it is discriminatory" (p. 182).

2.4.1. Anti-Racism in Education

In education anti-racism takes many forms, whether it is through policymaking, enacting structural changes, ensuring representation in the staff and content, or through approaches to teaching. Anti-racist educators move beyond color-blindness in their thinking and practice, instead taking a critical stance toward systems that perpetuate racial inequity. Culturally relevant pedagogy is one approach taken by educators to oppose and dismantle educational inequity, specifically as it relates to race (Howard, 2021). Within this approach, culture is understood to be something beyond the superficial (e.g., dress, holidays, and festivals): culture relates to communication styles, norms, and beliefs that are "integral to how people live" (Howard, 2021, p. 411). It is not merely influenced by one's racial or ethnic background, but it also includes class, gender, immigration, language, religion, and more (Howard, 2021).

Coined by Ladson-Billings in the 1990s, culturally relevant pedagogy emphasizes the need to empower diverse learners to succeed academically in the long term (not focused on standardized tests), develop cultural competence, and collectively challenge the status quo and discourses of power by developing a critical consciousness (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995a). This approach is not prescriptive, but culturally relevant educators tend to possess several commonalities: they view knowledge critically, feel themselves to be part of the community, believe in each student's ability to succeed, utilize and build off students' cultural capital, and foster equitable classroom social relations (Howard, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995b).

Educators also must engage in critical reflection, where they examine their own beliefs and attitudes toward race and culture (Howard, 2003, 2021). In addition, this form of critical reflection should be facilitated in the classroom in order for students to reflect on their own lives and power in society (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Howard, 2021). Culturally relevant and anti-racist educators acknowledge that, to many students, race is a core part of their identity; thus, being able to have conversations about race and racism promotes positive teacher-student relationships, supports students' ethnic-racial identity development (which is linked to academic achievement), and enables students to draw connections between the curriculum and self (Byrd, 2016).

3. Racial Inequity in Educational Opportunity

Today, children of all racial identities are legally equal, but they do not start from the same place. White privilege is passed down through the inheritance of wealth; this is demonstrated by the fact that even when a Black family earns the same as a White family, the Black family still has significantly less wealth (Shapiro, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2013). By tracing the same set of households from 1984-2009, Shapiro et al. (2013) found that years of homeownership, household income, unemployment, college education, and inheritance are the largest drivers of the wealth gap, which increased from $85,000 to $236,500 within those 25 years. Specifically, they found that every $1 increase in income yields $5.19 growth in White wealth compared to a mere $0.69 growth in wealth for Black households. Rates of homeownership are also 28.4% higher for White families than for Black ones due to lower incomes, segregation, less family financial assistance, and barriers to accessing credit.

In a separate study, Derenoncourt et al. (2022) tracked the racial wealth gap post-emancipation, observing a hockey stick pattern of decline. This means that the pattern of convergence was initially quite rapid, but over time the decline slowed, and over the past 70 years it has nearly stagnated. In recent years, the average wealth gap between Black and White Americans has been 17 cents to the dollar, and the median gap has been 10 cents to the dollar (Derenoncourt et al., 2022). The accumulation of generational wealth enables Whites to create and access opportunities, such as making investments, becoming homeowners, building their children's cultural and social capital, and moving to neighborhoods (that are mostly White) with better schools. The inequity that exists at the societal level inevitably contributes to a cycle of racial inequity in opportunities for and through education.

In the subsequent sub-sections, I will highlight the numerous inequities in educational opportunity that Black students and other students of color experience, before briefly presenting racial disparities in outcomes – both in school and life – that can result from these inequities. I believe that when discussing racial inequity, the framing is of the utmost importance. Far too often the emphasis is placed on Black-White disparities in outcomes, which perpetuates a false narrative that Black students are academically inferior, positions White student achievement as the benchmark for academic success (despite their underperformance by international standards; Wiggan, 2008), reinforces the belief in a meritocracy, and feeds into the stereotypes at the root of biological racism; it simplifies the problem to be that of individual deficiency, rather than systematic oppression. Furthermore, as I have depicted in Figure 1, research often fails to connect how a gap in one outcome can lead to further gaps in other outcomes

(Pearman et al., 2019; Spratt, 2017), making it increasingly harder to succeed. Therefore, the structure of this section – beginning with inequity and ending with outcomes - is very intentional and follows the flow of Figure 1. Though the focus is on the inequities in school, these can be connected to the gap in life opportunities highlighted at the beginning of this section, as well as in section 2. The research presented in this section demonstrates that disparities in outcomes are not simply a matter of individual differences but are due to numerous separate yet interwoven factors – or unfreedoms - that are built into the system, creating barriers for Black students to develop their capability set and convert their capabilities into functionings. Through this framing, inequity in the United States can be better understood as a gap in opportunities rather than outcomes (Heafner & Fitchett, 2015).

Figure 1

A Cycle of Inequity in Opportunity and Inequality in Outcomes
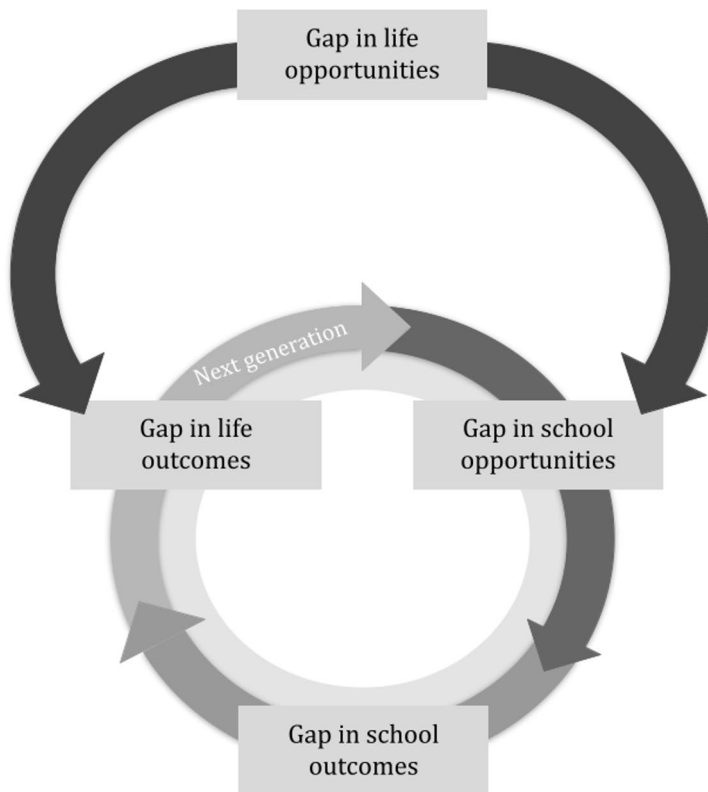
3.1. Racial Representation and White Hegemony

One of the core barriers to equity in education for students of color is the dominance of whiteness in educational practices, policies, and spaces. The lack of racial representation in teachers, school culture, and the curriculum makes it difficult for students of color to convert capabilities into functionings; consequently, it negatively affects students' well-being, identity formation, behavior, and academic outcomes.

3.1.1. Student-Teacher Racial Mismatch

As shown in Figure 2, the racial composition of public school teachers is not representative of the student population, with a disproportionately large number of teachers who are White (79%). Furthermore, the percentage of Black teachers has actually declined over time (7.6% during the 1999-2000 school year; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2021c). This is unfortunate given the importance of racial representation on a variety of student outcomes (Carter Andrews, Castro, et al., 2019; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Merolla & Jackson, 2019).

Research has shown that Black students perform better academically when assigned to a Black teacher (Egalite et al., 2015; Joshi et al., 2018; Redding, 2019; Yarnell & Bohrnstedt, 2018), and they are more likely to graduate high school and enroll in college if they have had at least one Black teacher (Gershenson et al., 2018). Through a systematic review of student-teacher racial/ethnic matching, Redding (2019) found evidence that Black student assignment to a Black teacher can improve attendance, reduce the chance of school drop-out, reduce the risk of exclusionary discipline, and increase the likelihood of that student being placed in a gifted or talented program. Research indicates that White teachers appear more susceptible to racial stereotypes than teachers of color, which inevitably can affect teachers' expectations and assessment of academic performance and behavior (Chapman, 2014; McGrady & Reynolds, 2013; Redding, 2019).

Lindsay and Hart's (2017) study on Black student disciplinary outcomes demonstrates the importance of representation to avoid misinterpreting student behavior: they found that Black student exposure to Black teachers reduced the number of subjective, defiance-related referrals. In contrast, an analysis of longitudinal data revealed that having an other-race teacher can increase the probability of being chronically absent and facing suspension, particularly for boys of color, which inevitably impacts student achievement (Holt & Gershenson, 2015). McGrady and Reynolds's (2019) analysis of data from the 2002 Education Longitudinal Study demonstrates the role White teacher bias plays in producing these outcomes. They found

Figure 2

Percentage Distribution of Students Enrolled in Public School and Public School Teachers by Race/Ethnicity, 2017
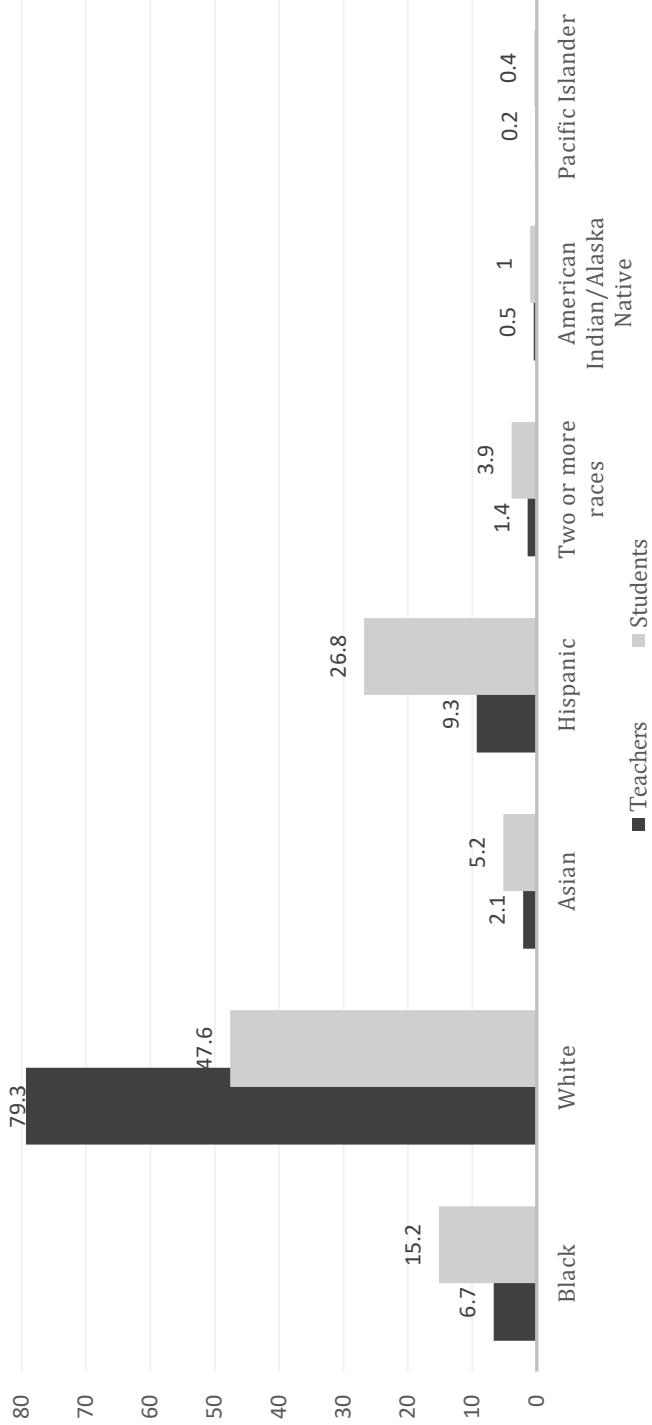
Note. Teacher data are from *Digest of education statistics 2020*, table 209.22 by U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Copyright 2021 by NCES. Student data are from *Digest of education statistics 2021*, table 203.50 by U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Copyright 2021 by NCES.

that White teachers generally gave Black students more negative evaluations related to academic ability and behavior compared to evaluations they gave their White and Asian students. Similarly, Tomeka Davis (2016) found that when White mothers are involved in school affairs, White teachers gave higher ratings to their part-White biracial students compared to monoracial students of color. This supports the idea that whiteness is a form of symbolic capital, proximity to which can affect White teachers' perspectives (T. M. Davis, 2016; Redding, 2019).

The positive effect of racial representation on student behavior and academic achievement may stem from the role model effect, where students of color are better able to identify with their teachers and gain confidence (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Yarnell & Bohrnstedt, 2018). Having a teacher of color can also make racially minoritized students feel safer because they can avoid experiencing stereotype threat (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Yarnell & Bohrnstedt, 2018), defined by Steele & Aronson (1995) as the fear of "confirming or being judged by a negative societal stereotype—a suspicion—about their group's intellectual ability and competence," which results in decreased performance and anxiety (p. 797). Finally, there is the importance of cultural relevance and representation within the classroom culture and curriculum, which teachers of color may be more able to understand and more prepared to provide (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Redding, 2019; Yarnell & Bohrnstedt, 2018). With that said, simply sharing a racial identity with one's teacher does not ensure positive student outcomes; rather, there must also be a shared cultural understanding in order for teachers to draw connections between the curriculum and students' identities (Redding, 2019).

3.1.2. Student-School Cultural Mismatch and Curricular Erasure

Issues of representation go beyond the racial composition of teachers and also involve the school and classroom culture, as well as the curriculum and classroom materials. White teachers are often unaware of their own racial and cultural positioning, and/or hold deficit beliefs about students of color (Chapman, 2014; Choi, 2008; Sleeter, 2017; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Furthermore, the historical exclusion of people of color from contributing to the development of U.S. public schools has resulted in a Eurocentric curriculum and school structure that privileges White ways of knowing and being (Christianakis, 2011; Moore & J. M. Bell, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2010). As Allen (2004) explains, "the typical curriculum is tied up in the production, valuation, and distribution of structural, or scientific, knowledge in ways that privilege whiteness" (p. 131).

When whiteness is presented as normative and neutral, students of color are placed at a disadvantage because they may lack the cultural capital required to be successful in a White dominated space (Christianakis, 2011;

Moore & J. M. Bell, 2017). In other words, the frames of reference and background knowledge students of color bring to school may be different than what is presented and expected in the classroom. For instance, Black students may be accustomed to speaking Black English Vernacular at home, whereas schools privilege the use of Standard American English (Bowman et al., 2018; Christianakis, 2011). Moreover, literacy in school is typically limited to reading and writing, without regard for other forms of literacy, such as rap-literacy (Christianakis, 2011; Zamudio et al., 2010). Therefore, White hegemony in school leads to a mismatch between school expectations and cultural capital acquired from one's home or community, resulting in additional barriers to learning for students of color (Leonardo, 2009; Morrison et al., 2008; Tevis et al., 2022; Zamudio et al., 2010).

Unfortunately, the experiences, cultures, and history of people of color are often excluded from the curriculum; when they are included, stories are frequently presented from the perspectives of the dominant culture, White violence is glossed over, or the stories are categorized as "other" rather than mainstream knowledge (Carter, 2007, p. 167; Picower, 2021; Shuster, 2018). Shuster (2018) delineates how the teaching of American slavery hinges on the experiences of White Americans:

> Politically, textbooks cover the run-up to the Civil War in terms of the major political compromises and conflicts between abolitionists and enslavers, but tend to leave out the perspective of enslaved people. Economically, we look at the power of King Cotton and the mechanics of the Triangular Trade—both deeply influenced by the perspective of enslavers—but these discussions don't remind learners about where the wealth came from and at what cost. Socially, we learn about differences between the lived experiences of white people in (for example) colonial times, or between planters and small farmers, but the experiences of the enslaved are portrayed as relatively undifferentiated. (18)

By omitting or distorting the experiences and perspectives of people of color, racial atrocities are seen as something that is in the past despite their lasting effects, and people of color are not recognized for the numerous ways they have shaped the development of the United States and have resisted moments of oppression (Picower, 2021; Shuster, 2018). The lack of recognition, whether in history or other classroom material, sends a message to students about whose stories and perspectives are valuable, which reinforces the normativity of whiteness (Bishop, 2012; Ciampa & Reisboard, 2021).

A case study of a professional development initiative for culturally relevant literacy instruction demonstrates the importance of utilizing mirror books - books that reflect the reader's identity and experiences (Bishop, 2012) – for identity development, engagement, and comprehension (Ciampa & Reisboard, 2021). Unfortunately, as the majority of teachers are White, the books they select are often reflective of

themselves, rather than of the diversity among students (Ciampa & Reisboard, 2021). Books that center people of color are extremely valuable to White students as well because they act as windows into other cultures, perspectives, and daily experiences (Bishop, 2012).

A report conducted in New York City shows the representation disparities that exist in commonly used curricula and booklists amongst 3-K (programs for children age three) and pre-kindergarten to eighth-grade classrooms (Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative, 2020). An examination of 1,205 books revealed that the majority (n = 1,003) were written by White authors, despite White students making up only 15% of the city's student population, and students were exposed to more books with cover characters that are animals than books featuring people of color. A deeper analysis of the kindergarten to fifth-grade curricula revealed that the majority of the curricula were culturally destructive - presenting deficit messages to students about people of color - rather than culturally responsive or aware.

Considering this finding, teachers who do select mirror books must have a firm understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy to ensure the texts are culturally affirming and meaningful. Teachers must also be prepared to engage students in critical conversations where they can connect the reading to their own lives and explicitly discuss issues of racism (Bishop, 2012; Ciampa & Reisboard, 2021; Howard, 2021; Tatum, 2014; Wanless & Crawford, 2016). Engaging in culturally relevant educational practices such as these can improve students' cultural competence, critical consciousness (awareness of inequities), sense of belonging, interest in school, racial identity development, and academic outcomes (Byrd, 2016; Morrison et al., 2008; Sturdivant & Alanis, 2021).

Despite the known benefits of culturally relevant pedagogy, many teachers are unaware or uncomfortable addressing topics of race, culture, and inequity, instead opting to take a color-blind approach (Alvarez & Milner, 2018; Choi, 2008; Matias & Zembylas, 2014; Stoll, 2014; Wanless & Crawford, 2016). Children are aware of race and express racial bias (exhibiting preference toward markers of whiteness) from a young age; thus, choosing to ignore race sends a message to students that their racial identity, and their lived experiences related to their identity, are not recognized or valued (Sturdivant & Alanis, 2021; Wanless & Crawford, 2016; Winkler, 2009). The lack of representation and cultural relevance that exists in both curriculum and school culture has negative implications for students' racial identity development and overall educational opportunities (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Sturdivant & Alanis, 2021; Wanless & Crawford, 2016).

3.2. Access to a Quality Education and School Exclusion

Enhancing capabilities first requires equitable access to a quality education. A quality education involves a rigorous curriculum, highly qualified teachers and staff, relevant and modern resources, a diverse range of course offerings, and general inclusion within mainstream classrooms (Orfield & Jarvie, 2020). Unfortunately, the quality of education students are exposed to varies both within and between schools due to structures that systemically segregate and exclude students of color (Orfield & Jarvie, 2020).

3.2.1. Between-School Segregation

As has been noted throughout this dissertation, racial segregation still exists throughout the United States. Despite the initial decline in Black-White racial segregation following desegregation efforts between 1954 and 1980 (particularly after the 1960s), levels of segregation have remained relatively stable since then, with some scholars claiming there has even been a slight increase (Logan et al., 2017; Reardon & Owens, 2014). Not only can this be attributed to a failure of policy and integration enforcement measures, but also to the phenomenon of White flight (Owens, 2020; Reardon & Owens, 2014), where Whites move away from racially integrated neighborhoods citing concerns over declining property values, crime, and school quality (Shapiro, 2004).

Given that about 85% of public school children attend their neighborhood public school, school composition largely reflects neighborhood segregation patterns (Owens, 2020). Owens points out that the relationship between school and neighborhood segregation is bidirectional because the composition of schools and their quality is factored into parents' choice of neighborhood. Consequently, neighborhood and school segregation function simultaneously, "shaping and reshaping one another" (Owens, 2020, p. 30).

The persistent patterns of segregation and resegregation can be seen in current school enrollment data, where students from every racial group attend schools with students that disproportionately match their own race (Owens, 2020). More specifically, in 2019 only 6% of White students were enrolled in public schools where less than 25% of the student population was White, and around 46% attended schools where White students made up at least 75% of the population (NCES, 2021h). In contrast, 59% of Black students attended a school with at least 75% students of color. Put differently, during the 2015-2016 school year the average Black student attended a school that was 47.4% Black, 26% White, and 19.1% Hispanic, whereas the average White student attended a school that was 69.8% White, 13.3% Hispanic, and 8.2% Black (Owens, 2020). When it comes to

private schools, 70.2% are more than 50% White, compared to merely 6.7% and 5.9% that are more than 50% Black and Hispanic, respectively (NCES, 2021f, 2021g). Moreover, only 6% of Black students were enrolled in a private school during autumn 2019, which is well below the percentage of students enrolled who are Pacific Islander (15%), White (12%), Asian, and two or more races (10%; NCES, 2022).

A key issue with racially segregated schools is that the segregation often correlates with economic resources. The most obvious example is when considering the aforementioned racial compositions for private schools, as they are typically exclusive and costly. According to NCES (2021a), in 2019 the poverty rate for private school students was 8.8% as opposed to 17% for public school students. This means that access to private schools is often limited to those who can afford it. A similar truth holds for U.S. public schools even though public K-12 education is free; because school funding relies heavily on property taxes, wealth matters in accessing a quality education. Due to persisting and intersecting racial and economic segregation, schools with a significant proportion of students of color often also have a large population of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Reardon, 2016; Reardon et al., 2019). This has consequences not only for the socioeconomic composition of the student population but also for the quantity and quality of resources.

According to a recent report, 31.3% of White eighth-grade students attended high-poverty schools in 2017, compared to 72.4% of Black eighth-graders (Garcia, 2020). Condron et al. (2013) point out that the compounded nature of racial and economic segregation "intensifies group stratification by creating resource-rich educational environments for white students and resource-poor educational environments for black students" (p. 132). Outside of the resources students bring to school, there are significant differences in school resources, and these differences correspond with segregation patterns. For instance, in 2019 EdBuild reported that school districts with majority-students-of-color get 23 billion dollars less funding than majority-White school districts. They also found that in 21 of the 35 states observed, White districts received more funding than districts with mostly students of color. Economic disparities between schools also exist when it comes to teacher pay: during 2011-2012, teachers in high schools with the largest percentage (top 20%) of Black and Latino students were paid nearly $2,000 less per year than teachers in schools with the smallest percentage (bottom 20%) of Black and Latino students in the same district (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights [OCR], 2014b).

Between-school differences - such as the aforementioned - lead to disparities in educational opportunities, such as access to modern resources, rigorous coursework, and quality teachers (Gonzales et al., 2015; Orfield & Ee, 2014; Orfield & Jarvie, 2020). Specifically, Palardy et al. (2015)

found that principals in high-poverty schools are more likely to report that learning is hindered by inadequate resources. They also noted that students within these schools are less likely to take advanced math courses, are more likely to feel unsafe, and teacher morale is lower. In terms of racial segregation, students in majority-Black schools reported higher levels of classroom disruption and lower levels of teacher quality, administrators reported high levels of disorder, and teachers rated their self-efficacy lower compared to what was reported in other schools (Palardy et al., 2015). Access to courses also varies between schools: during the 2011-2012 school year, 81% and 71% of Asian and White high schools offered the full range of math and science courses, compared to only 57% and 47% of Black and American Indian/Alaska Native schools, respectively (OCR, 2014a).

Scholars claim that teachers are perhaps one of the most significant contributors to student success (Chetty et al., 2014; Flaxman et al., 2013; Orfield & Jarvie, 2020), yet highly qualified and experienced public school teachers are disproportionately situated in middle-class White and Asian schools (Orfield & Ee, 2014; Owens, 2020). As shown in Figure 3, during the 2014-2015 school year Owens (2020) found that Black and Hispanic students attended schools with more uncertified teachers, less experienced teachers, and lower levels of teacher retention than their Asian and White peers. The disciplinary climate in Black and Hispanic schools was also

Figure 3

Percentage of Teachers With Select Characteristics at the Average Student's School by Student's Race/Ethnicity, 2015-2016
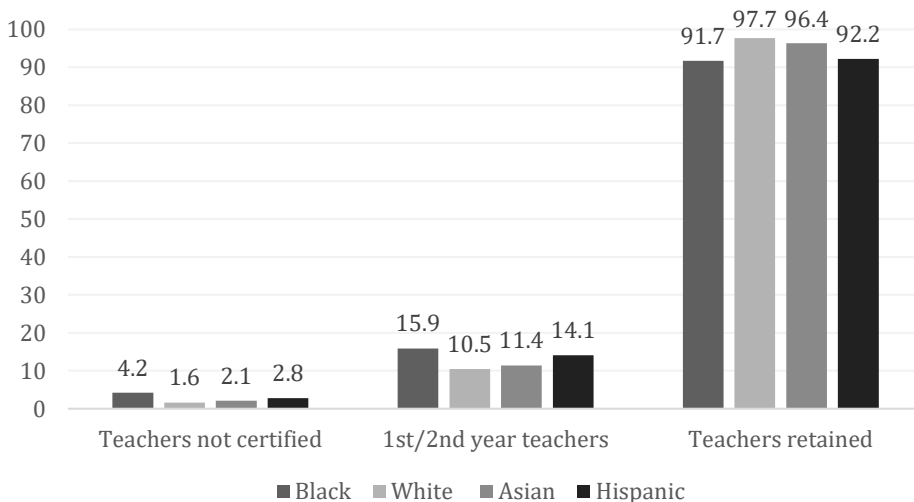
Note. Data are from "Unequal opportunity: School and neighborhood segregation in the USA," by Owens, 2020, *Race and Social Problems*. Copyright 2020 by Springer Nature.

Harsher (based on rates of suspension, expulsion, and chronic absenteeism).

Consequently, attending a majority-White school is often advantageous as they are usually better resourced and offer a higher quality education. Through an analysis of longitudinal data, Condron et al. (2013) observed that Black-White dissimilarity (true segregation) and Black student isolation contribute to achievement gaps. Moreover, they found that achievement gaps could be reduced through increased Black-White student exposure. In a separate report looking at poverty and racial segregation, Garcia (2020) found that Black students performed significantly better (20-point difference) in low-poverty, mostly White schools than in schools with high-poverty and mostly students of color. Unfortunately, only 3.1% of Black students (23.5% of White) attend the former type of school, whereas the majority of Black students 60% (8.4% of White) end up in the latter group.

Outside of achievement, attending a majority-Black school can also have a negative impact on behavioral outcomes, including homework completion and participation in college preparatory courses (Palardy et al., 2015). As for long-term outcomes, Chetty et al. (2015) identified segregation and school quality as two of five major predictors of upward income mobility. Considering the relationship between school quality, race, and segregation, it is unsurprising that Chetty et al. reported that areas with larger Black populations also have lower rates of upward mobility. Thus, inequity in access to a quality education can affect racially minoritized students both in the short and long term.

Despite the clear benefits majority-White schools can offer Black students, attending a majority-White school can also lead to negative outcomes for students of color due to experiences of discrimination and a lack of belonging or connection (Carter, 2016; Walsemann et al., 2011). Therefore, improving integration is important in so far as it helps reduce the disparities in opportunities and outcomes that stem from inequitable access to a quality education, but otherwise it is not a perfect solution to the inequity that exists between schools.

3.2.3. Within-School Segregation and Exclusion

Though between-school segregation contributes to inequity in educational opportunity, simply attending an integrated school does not guarantee that all students within that school will have equitable access to opportunities. In fact, according to Bohrnstedt et al.'s (2015) analysis of eighth-grade math achievement data from 2011-12, 16 of the 31-point gap between Black and White students could be attributed to differences within schools (5 points were attributed to between-school differences, and 10 were indeterminate). In addition to the various within-school challenges related

to racial representation discussed in section 3.1., racial segregation and isolation occur within schools – due to systems of tracking and disciplinary practices that are often biased – and contribute to racial inequity.

Research demonstrates that Black students are disproportionately placed in lower academic tracks (Mickelson, 2015) and there are significant disparities in access to courses that will prepare them for college and future careers (OCR, 2014a). For instance, in 2011 53% of students enrolled in seventh and eighth grade were White, compared to 16% who were Black (OCR, 2014a). However, 56% of students taking Algebra I and 60% of students passing were White, whereas Black students represented only 10% of students taking Algebra I and 9% of students passing it. Similarly, 50% of White students were enrolled in schools that offered gifted and talented programs, but they made up 60% of the students participating in these programs. In contrast, Black students represented 15% of the students in these schools, but merely 9% of the students enrolled. Figure 4 depicts similar disparities in access to rigorous high school courses.

Research identifies teacher evaluation as a key explanation for racial disparities in course access. In one study, Irizarry (2015) analyzed data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort to understand the relationship between teachers' perceptions, first graders'

Figure 4

Percentage Distribution of Students Enrolled in High School Compared to Course Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity, 2011-2012
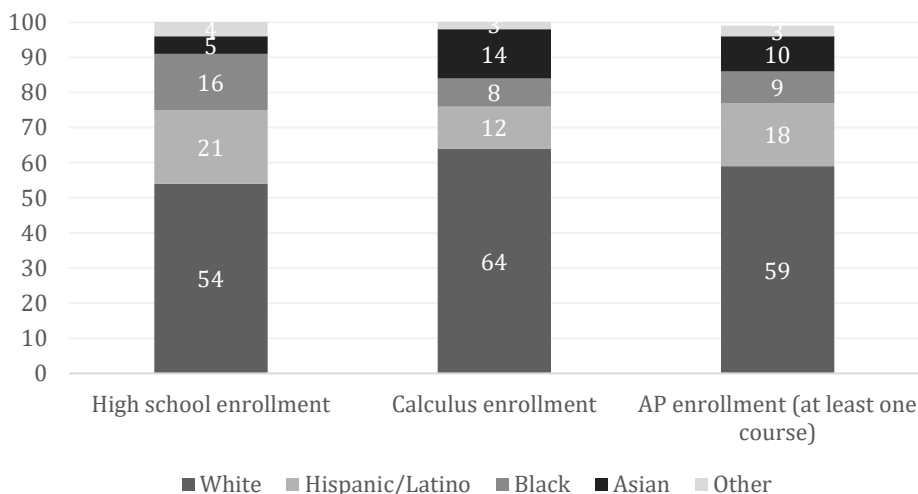
Note. Data compiled from *Civil rights data collection: Data snapshot (college and career readiness)* by U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. Copyright 2014 by United States Department of Education.

cognitive ability, and race. Irizarry found that White, Asian, and White Latino students received above-average ratings more frequently than other non-White and Black peers. However, the prediction trends were not consistent across performance groups: for low-achieving students, Irizarry noted a slight advantage for Asian, non-White Latino, and Black students over White students in terms of teacher ratings, but the opposite was true for high performers. Irizarry's findings demonstrate how, starting from a young age, Black high achievers are underestimated by their teachers, which could lead them down a less rigorous academic track.

Faulkner et al. (2014) observed the same data set, looking at how teacher evaluation impacted student placement into eighth-grade algebra. They found that high-performing Black students' odds of algebra placement were significantly lower than their White peers and that Black student placement was more strongly predicted by teacher evaluation than White student placement. Thus, despite objective performance data, subjective measures (teacher evaluation) result in inequitable access to rigorous courses between Black and White students. Though Faulkner et al. (2014) and Irizarry (2015) cannot with 100% certainty claim deficit thinking is to blame for disparities in access, national patterns indicate a clear barrier for racially minoritized groups that cannot simply be explained by differences in performance. Moreover, a separate qualitative study demonstrates how teachers' deficit beliefs persist and contribute to inequitable opportunities for Black students (Schoener & McKenzie, 2016). In the study, inequity in access to foreign language courses was rationalized through meritocratic and color-blind thinking even though many of the teachers and counselors demonstrated deficit thinking and the decision-making about course-taking was clearly not objective.

Subjective decision-making also impacts disciplinary measures that exclude and isolate students of color. During the 2017-2018 school year, Black students represented 15.1% of the K-12 student population, but were disciplined at disproportionate rates: they represented 31.4% and 38.2% of the population that received one or more in-school suspensions and one or more out-of-school suspensions, respectively (OCR, 2021). They also represented 38.8% of students expelled with educational services, 33.3% of students expelled without educational services, 28.7% of students referred to law enforcement, 31.6% of students arrested during school-related activities, and 42.9% of students transferred to alternative schools. As an example of the disparities, White students made up 47.3% of the population, but only 33.4% of the population who received expulsion with educational services, 34.4% of students who faced a school arrest, and 31.1% of students transferred to alternative schools. In the majority of disciplinary categories reported by the OCR, Black students were disciplined at greater rates than White, Asian, and Hispanic students, and

the rates were disproportionate to their share of the overall student population.

Those using the color-blind rationale may claim these disparities are natural and are simply a result of Black student misbehavior. However, the size of the gap and consistency across the board is more reasonably explained, once again, by differences in teacher evaluation in addition to the fact that schools are generally structured to benefit White students. As noted previously in section 3.1., White teachers in particular misunderstand and misinterpret Black student behavior, which can contribute to the greater rates of discipline Black students face. Beyond frequency, Black students are more often disciplined for subjective behavior (defiance as opposed to explicit violence), and they experience harsher punishment for the same infractions when compared to their White peers (Skiba et al., 2011).

Though research typically focuses on disciplinary measures placed on Black boys, Black girls also face harsher and more frequent discipline than girls of other racial groups (Annamma et al., 2019; Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Crenshaw et al., 2015; E. W. Morris & Perry, 2017). In fact, Morris and Perry (2017) found that Black girls are three times more likely than White girls to be referred for minor/moderate offenses that are more ambiguous and subjective, whereas Black boys are about two times more likely than White boys to be referred for the same level of offense. Researchers attribute this to gendered interpretations of Black girls' behavior: Black girls are stereotyped to be more adult-like, less feminine, hypersexual, and louder than White girls (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; E. W. Morris & Perry, 2017). Regardless of gender, Black students are differently disciplined, leading to greater rates of exclusion and isolation.

Experiences of exclusion within-school, both through tracking and discipline, can affect a variety of student outcomes. On a positive note, Walsemann and B. A. Bell (2010) found that for Black girls, within-school segregation could confer short-term protective benefits in regards to smoking or drinking, but they cautioned that in the long term the effects may not hold. Unfortunately, they also found that for Black boys, high levels of within-school segregation predicted lower educational aspirations (Walsemann & B. A. Bell, 2010). Bowman et al., 2018 explain how teachers' low expectations can influence students' self-worth as these beliefs are often internalized by students[6], and consequently, students of color end up underestimating their own capabilities. Thus, Black students are either steered away from advanced courses, or they may feel discouraged from taking them due to teachers' lower expectations. The lack of access or

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[6] This expectancy effect can be tied to the self-fulfilling prophecy, which has been found to be more powerful on marginalized groups compared to the general population (Jussim et al., 1996).

participation in advanced or diverse courses can have a ripple effect on life outcomes; the courses one takes can influence acceptance into highly ranked colleges or universities, which ultimately can impact one's opportunities in the labor market (Faulkner et al., 2014; Schoener & McKenzie, 2016; OCR, 2014a).

These outcomes can also be influenced by students' experiences of school discipline, given that rates of discipline have been tied to achievement (E. W. Morris & Perry, 2016; Pearman et al., 2019). Specifically, Morris and Perry (2016) found that students who were suspended scored lower on academic progress tests and that the effects of suspension followed the student even if they were not suspended again. They also observed a relationship between racial disparities and the racial achievement gap, noting that school suspensions accounted for one-fifth of the achievement differences between Black and White students (E. W. Morris & Perry, 2016). Considering the aforementioned research, the differential treatment that many Black experience in school inevitably excludes them from full participation in the educational setting, which can set them on a worse trajectory than their other-race counterparts.

3.3. Disparities in Outcomes

The various aforementioned factors – or unfreedoms - limit students of color from accessing equitable educational opportunities, consequently reducing their capability to lead a life they have reason to value. This is evidenced by the numerous racial gaps in outcomes, which I will briefly describe. These outcomes are both a result of existing racial inequities and a cause of future inequities for people of color and their children (as depicted in Figure 1). Thus, racial inequity in opportunity and racial inequality in outcomes feed into one another, creating a cycle that is challenging to break.

The achievement gap is one of the most direct outcomes from school inequity. As can be seen in Figure 5, Black students consistently score lower on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) than the national average as well as other racial/ethnic groups. Moreover, the Black-White achievement gap across NAEP subject areas remained relatively stable between 1992 and 2019, though for grade 4 math outcomes it reduced by 10 points (NCES, 2020b), and for grade 12 reading outcomes the gap increased by 8 points (NCES, 2020a).

Another direct school outcome is high school completion. The average adjusted cohort graduation rate (% of first-time ninth graders within a cohort to graduate in four years) in 2018-2019 was 86%, whereas Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students had the lowest rates among racial/ethnic groups (80% and 74%, respectively; NCES, 2021d). On a positive note, Black students status dropout rate (% of 16-24-year-olds not

Figure 5

Average Performance on National Assessment of Educational Progress by Race/Ethnicity, Grade, and Subject, 2019
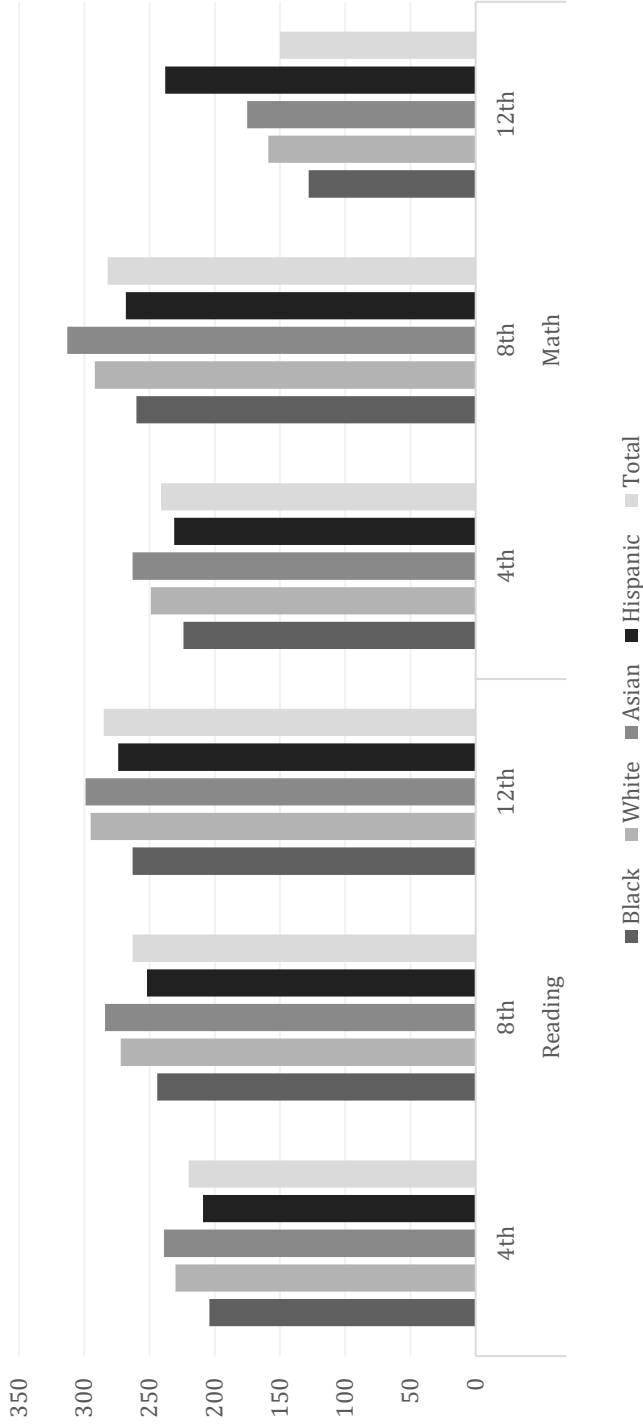
Note. Reading data are from *Digest of education statistics 2020*, table 221.10 by U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Copyright 2020 by NCES. Math data are from Digest of education statistics 2020, table 222.10 by U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Copyright 2020 by NCES.

enrolled in school and without a high school credential) was lower (4.2%) than it was for White (4.8%), Hispanic (7.4%), and students who are two or more races (6.5%; NCES, 2021i).

The next set of outcomes relate to student success immediately after high school. In 2020, the immediate college enrolment rate (% of recent high school graduates entering college) for Black students was 53.6%, and it had actually dropped from 2010 when it was 66.1% (NCES, 2021j). In comparison, the national average was 64.5%, and the highest rate amongst racial/ethnic groups was 86.3% for Asian students. In terms of completion, Figure 6 shows the percentage of 25- to 29-year-olds in 2021 who had attained a bachelor's or higher degree, and a master's or higher degree. It is evident from this data that Black and Hispanic students obtain bachelor's and master's degrees at significantly lower rates than students who are Asian, White, and two or more races. Whether a student obtains a degree in higher education can have lifelong effects on job opportunities, wealth, and more.

Access to higher education is not only dependent on high school achievement, but cost poses a significant barrier to many students. In fact, Black graduates in 2016 had around $8,000 more in cumulative debt than White students, and Black students are generally more likely to graduate

Figure 6

Percentage of 25- to 29-Year-Olds With Higher Education Degrees by Race/Ethnicity, 2021

Note. Data from *Digest of education statistics 2021*, table 104.20 by U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Copyright 2021 by NCES.
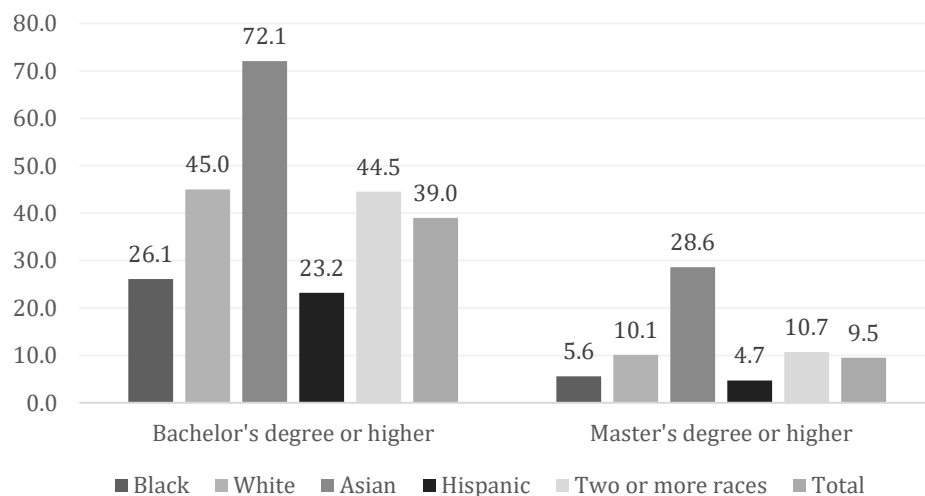
with debt (Schak et al., 2020). Moreover, the economic benefits yielded upon completing higher education are not necessarily worth it for many regardless of educational attainment (Shapiro et al., 2013). Unemployment rates in 2019 for Black and American Indian/Alaska Native people between the ages of 25 and 64 were higher than any other racial/ethnic group at each level of education (less than high school completion to bachelor's degree or higher; NCES, 2021e), and in 2016 Black 25- to 34-year-olds earned less than their other-race counterparts at nearly all education levels (see Figure 7). According to the latest data from NCES (2021k), the median annual earnings for Black 25- to 34-year-olds in 2020 was about $12,930 and $30,220 less than White and Asian earners, respectively. Significantly, at the master's or higher level, the gap between Black workers and White ($16,320 gap) and Asian ($31,440 gap) workers was even greater.

Considering these gaps, it is unsurprising that Black Americans and American Indians have lower rates of upward mobility than White Americans (Chetty et al., 2020), especially given the strong negative correlation between upward mobility and racial and economic segregation (Chetty et al., 2015). Though disparities in income, employment, and mobility are not direct results of school inequity, improving educational environments for students of color could contribute to changing the status quo and creating more equitable futures. Addressing these inequalities can also help reduce the racial wealth gap, which will enable future generations to have more equitable access to a quality education (Shapiro et al., 2013).

Though the aforementioned disparities are concrete examples of inequity, they do not paint the full picture; being academically successful and making a reasonable income does not guarantee one will flourish. This is particularly relevant given the capability approach's emphasis on leading a life one has reason to value, which is dependent on individual needs and wants. Thus, the disparities demonstrate the numerous barriers Black students have to overcome to enhance their capabilities, and convert their capabilities into functionings; but, outside of the concrete disparities, it is also important to recognize the numerous ways in which inequitable practices and policies affect students' overall experiences in school. Rather than being places that enhance students' freedom to live "the dream," schools often exclude and marginalize Black students. Through the centering of whiteness and maintenance of racial segregation and isolation, Black students remain at the periphery of the educational system and the various opportunities that come with it.

Figure 7

Median Annual Earnings of Full-Time 25- to 34-Year-Old Workers by Race/Ethnicity and Educational Attainment, 2016
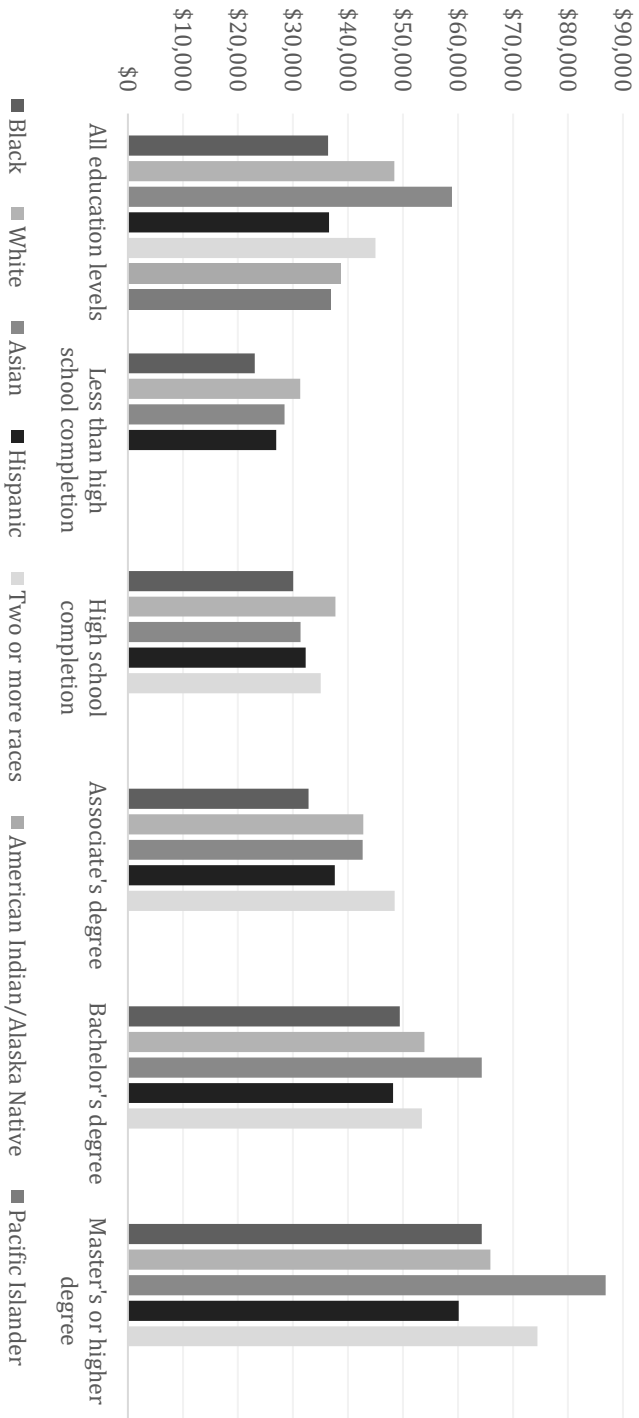
4. Research Design

This dissertation employs a multi-method research design to explore racial equity and educational opportunity from multiple perspectives and at different levels. Multi-method research projects involve a series of interrelated studies that seek to answer separate research questions, which, in combination, address an overarching research aim (Morse & Niehaus, 2016). The individual studies comprising a multi-method project may involve quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods (Morse & Niehaus, 2016). In this dissertation, all but Study III utilize mixed methods, and the overall research design is qualitatively driven (see Figure 8).

In Studies I and IV, qualitative data from peer-reviewed articles (Study I) and state legislation (Study IV) was coded and transformed, allowing for both interpretive and descriptive analyses (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The purpose of transforming the data was to expand upon and complement the qualitative analyses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). In Study II, primary data was collected from students through responses to a questionnaire (qualitative and quantitative items), a narrative prompt, and interview questions. In addition, teachers responded to a questionnaire (qualitative and quantitative items), several teachers participated in follow-up interviews, and school data (e.g., achievement, discipline, and demographics) and documents (school handbook and program of studies) were used to complement and triangulate the analyses. With both the students and teachers, data was collected sequentially, starting with the questionnaire, in order for the interview questions to develop from the participants' responses (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017, p. 110). Finally, Study III looked more closely at the qualitative student data collected for Study II, focusing solely on the unique experiences of Black adolescent girls.

The research approach used for each study also differed, enabling an examination of inequity at the conceptual, political, school, and individual level. The first study was an integrative review, which is an approach to reviewing, synthesizing, and critiquing literature using diverse methods, and can result in a new model, conceptual framework, theory, or taxonomy (Torraco, 2005; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). In this case, it led to the development of an educational opportunity framework that can inform both educators and researchers who are working toward improving school practices and student outcomes. For Study II, an embedded case study approach was employed, allowing for the examination of Black students and the school (teachers, documents, data, etc.) as two separate units of analysis (Yin, 2014). Study III used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), a double hermeneutic process where the researcher tries to

Figure 8

Qualitatively-Driven, Multi-Method, and Multilevel Research Design
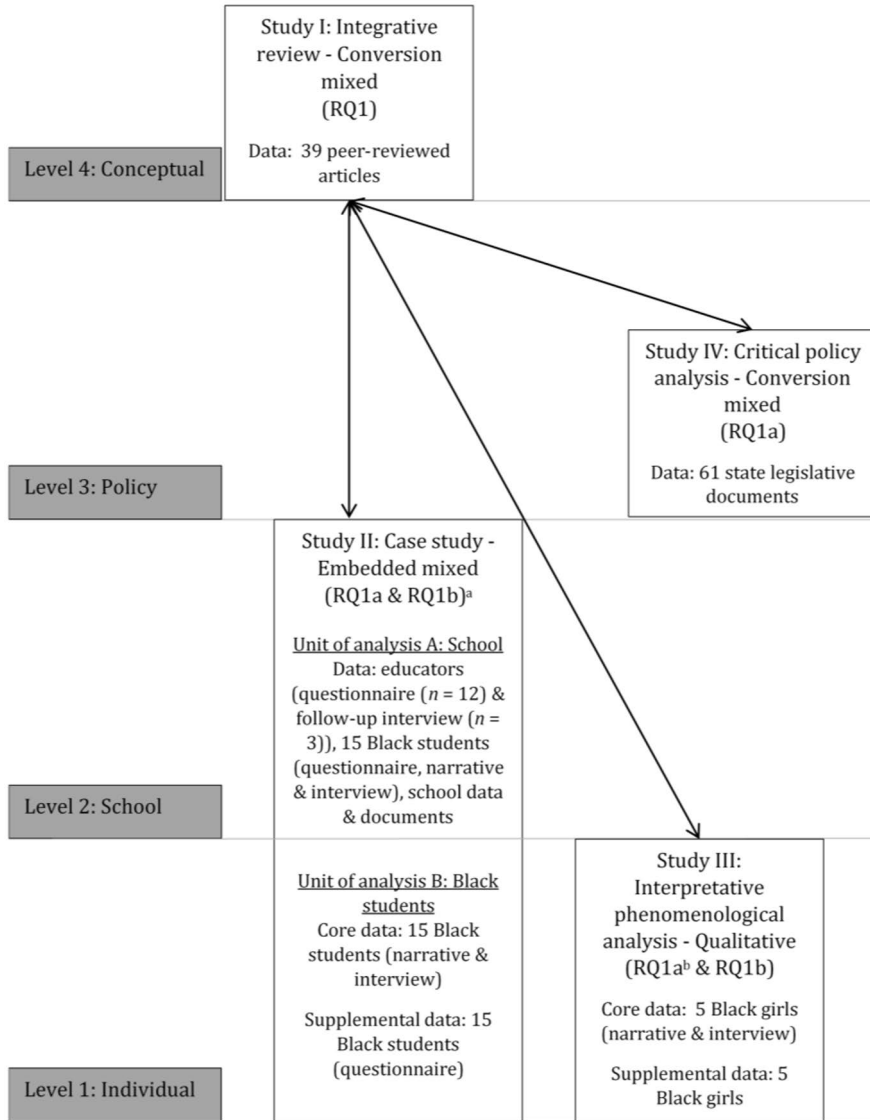
[a] RQ1a corresponds with unit of analysis A, and RQ1b corresponds with unit of analysis B.
[b] Although Study III is focused on the individual level, the results indirectly help answer RQ1a.

make sense of the participants' meaning-making of their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). IPA involves idiographic inquiry, focusing first on the particular before drawing connections to broader claims and the existing literature (Smith et al., 2009). The final study is a critical policy analysis informed by critical race theory. In critical policy analysis, the researcher recognizes that policy is not value-neutral and problematizes the ways in which policies facilitate inequity, privilege, and marginalization in schools (Diem et al., 2014; Molla, 2021).

In the subsequent sub-sections, I will describe the specific procedures for collecting and analyzing each set of data, along with underlying philosophical assumptions that guided these decisions. I will also discuss ethical considerations based on the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity's (Tutkimuseettinen Neuvottelukunta, 2019) research guidelines, as well as methods for quality control. Given that qualitative data drives this research, the primary concern was to establish trustworthiness using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, but when relevant, the more conventional validity and reliability criteria were used (Cohen et al., 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Another common practice in qualitative research is engaging in reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By recognizing that research is value-laden, the researcher must reflect on their role in collecting and interpreting the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Milner, 2007). Thus, I will conclude this section by positioning myself within the research process.

4.1. Procedures for Collecting and Analyzing Data

The choice of data collection and analysis procedures stems from the pragmatic assumption that research designs should apply "what works" to solve the problem at hand (Cohen et al., 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This is a common stance in mixed methods research, where researchers take a practical approach to understanding reality, which can be both subjective and objective depending on fitness of purpose (Cohen et al., 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research was also informed by critical race theory, which views storytelling and narrating personal experiences as valid forms of knowledge; this knowledge can be used to counter dominant ethnocentric epistemologies that are often presented as the objective, value-neutral truth (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Scholars note that the legitimated epistemologies in educational research have mostly been conceived by White men, meaning they do not reflect the diverse ways of knowing that stem from other groups' social histories (Diem et al., 2014; Scheurich & M. D. Young, 1997; M. D. Young, 2000). Therefore, this research prioritizes the experiences of Black students, using their stories to inform a broader understanding of equity and educational opportunity. The research design also incorporates

diverse perspectives (see Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017) through mixed methods in order to capture the complexity of educational opportunity and uncover the mechanisms that reproduce inequity.

4.1.1. Data Set 1: Peer-Reviewed Articles

The first set of data was used for Study I, an integrative review of 39 peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2019. The search and selection process, as well as the analysis, followed guidelines from Wolfswinkel et al. (2013) for conducting a rigorous review that involves grounded theory. The reviewed articles were found through a systematic search of databases and journals related to K-12 education research using terms associated with educational opportunity, school factors, students, and outcomes. The initial 528 documents yielded from the search were narrowed down using inclusion and exclusion criteria for evaluating relevance and quality. The selection process was completed using Covidence systematic review software (Veritas Health Innovation, n.d.), which tracked inter-rater reliability and disagreements between my co-author and myself.

After identifying the 39 articles, they were first analyzed using descriptive coding. This involved coding and then counting frequencies for article information related to dates of data collection and article publication, participant details, the school context, the methods of research, and whether there were individual factors (e.g., race, gender, and language) that created unfair sources of difference. Next, using NVivo 12.6 Pro, the articles were coded based on Lazenby's (2016) conception of opportunity *for* and *through* education. Again, the frequencies were counted. The purpose of this stage of analysis was to understand how authors conceptualized educational opportunity, and to capture what it means in practice to provide opportunity for and through education.

In the final stage, NVivo 12.6 Pro was used to support the development of an educational opportunity framework using grounded theory (see Wolfswinkel et al., 2013). The first step involved coding the article content deductively for school outcomes, which fell under four categories: cognitive, psychological, behavioral, and other. The four outcome categories were defined prior to coding, but the coding was flexible to enable unexpected variables to be coded. Following this, the articles underwent open coding for school inputs that resulted in the already identified outcomes. Next, higher-order input categories were identified using axial coding, and then selective coding was used to refine the categories. Constant comparative analysis was used during this analysis phase, allowing for an iterative process. The frequencies of the final input and outcome categories were counted. The final framework includes the input categories, input sub-categories, and the outcome categories.

I met with the second author throughout the process to discuss and rationalize various decisions together. Upon completion of the analysis, the second author independently coded nine of the articles to check for inter-coder reliability, and he reviewed the report to ensure it was transparent and the findings were confirmable and dependable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.1.2. Data Set 2: Norchester High School

The second set of data – used for Study II and Study III - was collected from Norchester High School (NHS), a majority-White public school with less than 2000 students and located in a Northeastern U.S. suburb. The data consisted of students, educators, school documents (handbook and program of studies), and school data (e.g., statistics on discipline, demographics, and achievement). Prior to data collection, I received approval from the Board of Research Ethics at Åbo Akademi University, the Norchester school district, and the two NHS principals.

Participation in data collection was completely voluntary and participants were informed that they could remove themselves from the study at any point without consequence. The NHS principals helped recruit student participants who met the criteria for participation. Students who were willing to participate were required to provide signed assent before participating as well as verbal assent before voice recording. Their parents/guardians also signed a consent form. As for educators, I was able to inform them of the study during a staff meeting, and reminders about participation were also distributed via e-mail by the NHS principals. The educator participants provided signed consent, and those who participated in a follow-up interview also signed a second consent form and gave verbal consent to being recorded. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for names of people and places, and any personally identifiable information was removed.

The 15 student participants identified as Black and/or African American and were in 11th and 12th grade. Their participation involved one-on-one sessions with me (maximum one hour), where they first responded to a questionnaire, followed by a narrative prompt, and concluding with an audio-recorded semi-structured interview. Given the small number of student participants, the questionnaire items were mostly used to inform the interview, but they also were used for triangulation in Study II.

The questionnaire included two recognized instruments for measuring well-being: the Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2010) and the Cantril Ladder (Bjørnskov, 2010). The Flourishing Scale uses eight items to measure social-psychological prosperity, which is based on humanist theories that recognize people as having basic psychological needs, such as relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Diener et al., 2010). The Cantril Ladder, which is used in the Gallup World Poll, asks respondents to place

themselves on a ladder numbered 0 to 10, where the top represents the best possible life and the bottom represents the worst possible life for them (Bjørnskov, 2010). In this case, the students were asked to place themselves on ladders representing five years prior, the present day, and where they think they will stand five years in the future. The questionnaire also included several original items: a scale looking at how frequently students feel or are exposed to certain things (e.g., discrimination from adults, acceptance by peers, and not belonging); an open-ended question about how students identify; and a section first asking students to list three to five words that describe their school experience, after which they were asked to choose the word that best described their experience and explain their choice. The development of these items came after a thorough review of the literature to see whether existing questionnaires could be used fulfill the research aims. When it was evident that appropriate questionnaire items – beyond what was already included - did not exist, I wrote the original items to address the research aims and to align with the overall design and open-ended approach. My supervisor, Emmanuel Acquah, and researchers from the Danish School of Education helped me refine these items.

Following the questionnaire, students shared a narrative based on a prompt they were provided before the session. The narrative prompt asked students to reflect on their school history in the form of a story. They were provided questions to consider, such as "In what ways has school made you consider your identity" and "In what ways has or hasn't your school supported you in your goals," but students were reminded that the structure was intentionally open in order for them to tell their own story. The narrative prompt was developed to allow the students to initially share their lived experiences and perspectives without being influenced by more direct questions and my own underlying interests as the interviewer.

The narrative fed directly into the semi-structured interview, which consisted of questions related to their questionnaire responses and narrative, as well as prepared questions looking at their overall school experience, systems of support in school, well-being, and race. As with the questionnaire, I developed the interview schedule and then revised the questions after receiving feedback from Emmanuel Acquah as well as researchers from the Danish School of Education. Several of the questions were adopted from interview items presented in Sanders's (1997) article entitled, "Overcoming obstacles: Achievement as a response to racism and discrimination," as well as McCardle et al.'s (2018) article, "Separate and unequal: An exploratory study examining college students' experiences of secondary education and perceptions of school integration."

The initial set of educator data was collected via an online questionnaire, the items of which were developed in the same manner as the original items in the student instruments. The 12 participants were first asked to mark their level of agreement with statements on race and its influence on

student opportunity in their classroom, school, and the United States. Next, they were asked to respond to nine open-ended questions about well-being, opportunity, race, and what schools can do to best support their students. The initial data collection took place in the fall of 2019 after which (early 2020) the United States underwent a period of racial reckoning due to growing awareness (through videos and images) of police brutality against Black people. Because of the racial climate that emerged, follow-up interviews were conducted with three educators in February 2021. The semi-structured interview schedule included more specific questions about race, the school culture surrounding race since 2020, and whether perceptions had changed due to current events.

The entire data set was used for Study II, an embedded case study seeking to understand the racial status quo in a majority-White high school and its impact on Black students' experiences and opportunities. The analysis was conducted in two phases using NVivo 12.6.1 Pro software and following steps outlined in Saldaña's (2013) coding manual. During the first phase, the entire set was analyzed using open coding as well as coding informed by the theoretical framework and research aims (see section 5.2.). This led to the development of categories that described the racial status quo based on patterns found across the codes. The second phase involved an additional analysis of the student data following the same steps but with the aim of capturing how their experiences were impacted by the status quo. Trustworthiness was established through triangulation of data, reflexivity, connecting the findings to theory and prior research, providing thick descriptions, and being transparent and systematic throughout the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yardley, 2000).

For Study III, only the qualitative data collected from Black girls (n = 5) were analyzed. The choice to conduct a closer analysis of Black girls' school experiences stemmed from the important role intersectionality plays in research on race, and the fact that Black girls remain under-researched in education (Crenshaw et al., 2015; J. L. Young, 2020). As students who experience oppression due to both race and gender, their lens of the world can provide unique insight into how to improve equity, student well-being, and educational opportunity (Collins, 2000; Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). For this reason, interpretative phenomenological analysis was the appropriate approach for capturing their lived experiences. Conducting an interpretative phenomenological analysis requires a small homogenous group of participants to gain insight into both the convergence and divergence of experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

For this study, each transcript was transcribed and analyzed individually using exploratory handwritten notes before being transferred to Microsoft Word 2016 where I reviewed the data and notes in order to develop emergent themes. After the initial individual analysis, connections were drawn across cases allowing for the development of superordinate themes.

To ensure the account was coherent, plausible, and credible, the second author reviewed the themes against the data and audited the entire process using guides for evaluating IPA research (Smith, 2011) and qualitative research in general (Yardley, 2000). Reflexivity and thick descriptions were also used to ensure transparency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Smith, 2011; Yardley, 2000).

4.1.3. Data Set 3: State Legislative Documents

Study IV was not part of the original research design but emerged as a result of the current socio-political tensions related to race and education in the United States. The data consisted of 61 education-related bills and resolutions from 33 U.S. states that were both introduced and passed between 2020 and 2022. The documents were identified through a systematic search (including a list of 26 search terms) across state legislature websites, media outlets, and online legislature databases. Documents were included if they targeted K-12 public education and addressed issues of race/ethnicity.

The analysis of documents was informed by critical race theory and involved several steps. In the first step, content analysis (see Bengtsson, 2016) was used to code each policy for whether it promoted or inhibited progress toward racial equity, to develop categories to define what area(s) of racial equity the policies addressed, and to develop categories for how policymakers sought to implement change in those areas. The qualitative data was then transformed in order to observe the number of policies promoting versus inhibiting progress, as well as the most common types of policies being enacted. Upon completing the initial coding, the policies underwent a second critical analysis that drew connections between the literature and the enacted policies. The second author audited the process and reviewed the coding scheme to ensure the findings were credible and confirmable (Bengtsson, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In writing the paper, we included thick descriptions to be as transparent as possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.2. Reflexivity

As the primary researcher and first author of the four studies, I was a consistent instrument throughout the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As such, it is necessary to be transparent about my own values, beliefs, background, identity, and experiences, and how these informed the research process, aims, and interpretation (Milner, 2007).

4.2.1. Informative Experiences

As someone who has experienced the U.S. education system as both a student and teacher, I have for a long time been concerned with the glaring inequity that exists. My perspective on inequity was first shaped through the lens of wealth due to my upbringing in a wealthy, White, academically competitive town. Though my family was not technically poor, the disparities in wealth between myself and my peers were painfully apparent. I recognized from a young age how wealth led to increased opportunities, such as being able to afford tutors and college tuition, which increased one's chances of attending a good higher education institution and leaving with little to no personal debt.

Beyond this, I also witnessed how educational opportunities within a school were not equitable. When my younger brother started school at the same elementary school I had attended, he was slowly excluded from the mainstream classroom until he eventually was pushed out of the school altogether. Though the school was touted as being one of the best in the country, my brother did not fit into their normative idea of a good student, and consequently, they failed to support his additional learning needs. My brother's negative school experiences motivated me to pursue a career in education in order to create more equity and to ensure other children do not face similar outcomes.

When I began my university studies in education, I soon realized that inequities in the U.S. education system were even more significant for Black students. One of my teaching practices took place in an inner-city charter school where the majority of students were Black or Latinx. Upon entering the school, students had to go through security scanners, and in classrooms the disciplinary practices were punitive. Many of the teachers were from Teach for America, meaning they had little classroom training and experience. I got to know one student who was an extremely motivated learner, but he never ate lunch at school because his family could not afford it. I was surprised to see how the most basic criteria (e.g., safety, trust, and health) for nurturing learning were missing. However, exposure to various literature and other media made me realize this case was not unique but was part of a larger system of school inequity.

After graduating from college in 2015, I lived in Cameroon for six months. It was one of the first times I really started to consider my own racialized identity as a White woman. My whiteness positioned me as an automatic outsider, as evidenced by the children who pointed at me and shouted "White man" as I passed by, sometimes even singing the "White man" song, and by the people in the market who always charged me more for goods. Images of then-U.S. President Barack Obama could be seen around town, so for some locals, learning I was from the United States engendered conversations about opportunity and "the dream." Growing up

I had subconsciously learned to be color-blind, and like many Whites, I had never deeply reflected on my own whiteness (see Lewis, 2004). My experiences in Cameroon helped me recognize myself as a racial actor, and forwarded my understanding of race as not merely a physical characteristic, but as something symbolic of power, privilege, and opportunity.

Shortly after leaving Cameroon, I moved to Finland to pursue my master's degree in education. I had learned about Finland's remarkable education system during my undergraduate studies and wanted to be able to witness it firsthand. One of my key observations was simply that students' basic needs are being met. Students do not have to learn on an empty stomach, and they get ample time between lessons to recharge outside. The fact that students are able to be autonomous, getting themselves to and from school, points to the level of safety they experience. Moreover, if a student is feeling unwell, their parents can take them to the hospital without having to consider what it will mean financially. Finally, wealth, race, and other personal characteristics do not factor into whether one has access to a high-quality school or higher education; education is free at all levels and the quality is consistent throughout the country. Despite the United States's claim of being the land of the free, I found the system in Finland offers people more freedom by reducing systemic obstacles and providing basic support for people to achieve their dreams (or "the dream").

However, my experience of being racialized as other in Cameroon gave me insight into what it means for race to be a salient factor in one's everyday life, leading me to wonder about how students of color feel in this very White country. As a White person in Finland, my immigrant status is not visually apparent, as it was in Cameroon, allowing me to superficially fit into the normative conception of Finnishness as whiteness (see Juva & Holm, 2017; Keskinen et al., 2018; Leinonen, 2012). In contrast, people of color are often assumed to be immigrants, even if they were born and raised here (Rastas, 2005, 2014). Thus, beyond the fact that the school system is generally equal, I wondered whether it was truly equitable for students of color.

I thought back to my childhood in a mostly White town. One of my close friends was the only Black student in our grade for all of elementary school. On the surface, my friend and I were given equal educational opportunities. However, as part of the racial majority, I never had to think about my racial identity, which Lewis (2004) argues is "part of the privilege associated with whiteness" (p. 641). In contrast, whenever something would go wrong for my friend, he would ask, "Is it because I am Black?" Though asked in a joking manner, there was a hint of sincerity behind the question. He was also the student who seemed to always be in trouble. As kids, we just considered him to be a troublemaker, but with what I know now through my brother's

experience in that same school, along with my research into racial inequity, I question that conclusion.

Considering the parallels and differences I observed between Finland and the United States when it comes to race and education, my initial plan was to conduct a comparative study between the two countries to better understand educational opportunity through Black students' experiences. However, due to Covid-19 and issues with collecting sufficient data, I had to focus on the U.S. sample. Even still, what I have learned through preliminary research in Finland has informed this dissertation, particularly when considering the implications of the results. It also informed my decision to conduct research within a majority-White school where racial othering is more apparent, enabling student participants to reflect on subtler mechanisms of school-level inequity.

4.2.2. Values

The aforementioned experiences and reflections are just some of the reasons I have chosen to conduct this research. The choice also deeply aligns with my value system: I strongly believe in the principle of fairness (equity over equality), and I view education as a human right, the quality of which should not be dictated by where one is born, the color of one's skin, one's gender identity, family wealth, home culture, etc. I recognize there are numerous system-level factors that make education in the United States unfair, such as the cost of education (private and higher), school funding being linked to zip-code, systems of segregation, and low-quality and inexperienced educators in schools with majority students of color. This type of inequity can easily be viewed in nationwide statistics, as I presented in section 3. At the same time, there are subtler forms of school-level inequity that cannot be represented simply through statistics, such as students' experiences of discrimination, feelings of otherness due to a lack of representation, and a general sense that things are not fair. Even the most academically successful student on paper can experience school as a marginalizing and oppressive place, and it is possible that their achievements would be even greater were it not for these negative factors. For this reason, I felt it necessary to foreground the qualitative data, paying particular attention to Black students' perspectives. I believe their knowledge is essential for finding ways to transform classrooms and schools to be places that equitably enhance student capabilities.

The focus on capabilities, rather than outcomes, aligns with a final belief of mine: schools should not enforce nor expect the exact same outcomes from each student. Needs, wants, and goals vary greatly, meaning schools should focus on developing the whole child, not just traditional academic skills. Again, this cannot be demonstrated through nationwide data because it typically depicts inequality of outcomes and it does not reflect the gap

that may exist between an individual's performance and their own potential. Therefore, I focus this research on the inputs (opportunities) from schools and how these directly affect student experience, which is why multiple methods were required.

4.2.3. Identity: The Researcher and the Researched

Apart from reflecting on how my experiences and values led to this project, it is also necessary to consider my identity in relation to the study participants (see Milner, 2007). Though my primary interest was in educational opportunity at large, I chose to look at it through the lens of race with a specific focus on Black students. Thus, the racial mismatch between myself and the target group must be considered. In this regard, I found the suggestions by Milner (2007) particularly useful for conducting research that maintains the integrity of the community under study, and involves constant reflection about one's racial positionality in relation to participants.

In a way, I feel that being a White woman benefited the research because I was able to listen to what students were saying without projecting my own racialized experience onto them. However, I say this with hesitation because I have mostly felt like an intruder in this research space. Unfortunately, in education research White voices and perspectives have historically been privileged, whereas people of color, including scholars, have often been misrepresented or delegitimized (Milner, 2007; Scheurich & M. D. Young, 1997). As a White educator, I recognize that I cannot fully understand what it means to be Black in the United States, meaning it is possible I missed something when interpreting the data. Thus, I have questioned whether I should be contributing to the conversation, and if so, how I can ensure the research is beneficial, not harmful, to the Black community.

Throughout the research process, I have taken various steps to conduct research that is respectful of the participants and the existing critical race research community. In collecting the data with students, a key goal was for students to feel comfortable and open to share things with me, despite my identity as a White adult female educator. I took time to build rapport, and to explain the research process and purpose in terms that would make sense to high school students. I intentionally began with the questionnaire as a warm-up to the process, and to offer an alternative method for the students to express themselves. I informed the students that I would ask follow-up questions, but if they did not want me to ask about a certain item then they could draw a star next to it. At the conclusion of the session, I provided my contact information in case they wanted to ask follow-up questions or withdraw themselves from the study. When interpreting and reporting the data, I worked to stay true to what the students said, and used

their language as much as possible. I also received feedback from one of my supervisors throughout the process to verify that the results were supported by the data, and to check whether there were any moments where the responses appeared to be affected by my identity.

I have also taken into account the research and advice of prominent scholars of color - women in particular - whose work largely informed my understanding of race, racism, inequity in school, and epistemology. The insights of White scholars have also been useful when considering my role in conducting research with students of color. The following are just some of the many scholars whose work has significantly contributed to my own research: Gloria Ladson-Billings, Dorinda Carter Andrews, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Cheryl Harris, Amanda Lewis, Subini Ancy Annamma, Stephen Ball, Patricia Hill Collins, Aminkeng Atabong Alemanji, Suvi Keskinen, Kimberlé Crenshaw, James Scheurich, Barbara Applebaum, David Gillborn, Anna Rastas, Gunilla Holm, and Christine Sleeter. These scholars come from different disciplines as well as a range of countries, enabling a broader perspective and more diverse understanding of the issues at hand.

In sum, when there is a clear power distance and mismatch in identity between the researcher and the researched, I believe it is imperative to engage in reflexivity, immerse oneself in literature that is representative of diverse voices, responsibly and accurately interpret and report the data, and take adequate steps to minimize the researcher's influence on participant responses. At the same time, having extensively contemplated these issues I have come to the conclusion that if we truly want equity, race should not dictate who can or cannot conduct this research. This just essentializes race, when in reality scholars of color do not all take the same approach to researching race. It also perpetuates the idea that whiteness is normal and issues of race only pertain to people of color. While it is undeniable that scholars of color offer indispensable insight into improving racial equity, they should not carry the sole burden of solving the numerous issues of racial inequity that exist in the U.S. education system. As the group that most benefits from the current status quo, White people must take responsibility and help transform the system.

5. Overview of Original Studies

In this section, I will provide an overview of each of the four studies comprising this dissertation. The summaries generally include a presentation of aims, methods, results, and implications (see section 4.1. for a more elaborate description of the study data and methods of analysis). In the subsequent section, I will draw connections between the results from each study and discuss the overall implications of this dissertation.

5.1. Study I

Katz, H. T., & Acquah, E. O. (2021). The role of schools in providing educational opportunity: An integrative review. *Review of Education*, *9*(3), 1–42. https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3307

The meaning of opportunity in education is ambiguous, yet providing students equitable opportunities remains a common goal amongst educators. This paper sought to bring clarity to the discussion by synthesizing the literature on educational opportunity in order to understand what equitable educational opportunities look like in practice. The main objectives were to explore how authors/researchers conceptualized educational opportunity, identify student outcomes that authors/researchers deemed relevant, and establish a conceptual framework of opportunity by determining what school inputs resulted in positive outcomes for students, regardless of individual factors.

The study used an integrative review approach (Wolfswinkel et al., 2013) to select and analyze 39 peer-reviewed articles that were published between 2010 and 2019. Through descriptive coding, it was revealed that case studies were the most commonly used research design ($n = 21$, 18%) and the majority of studies were conducted in the United States ($n = 21$, 54%). Students were generally the primary participants, but the studies also included teachers, parents, counselors, school leaders, and other school staff. An important descriptive finding was that the majority of articles ($n = 36$, 92%) identified individual factors that could create sources of difference, with socioeconomic status, race and/or ethnicity, and gender being discussed the most (found in 59%, 49%, and 44% of the articles, respectively).

The second phase of the analysis revealed that the majority ($n = 24$, 62%) of authors/researchers focused on both opportunity for and through education, 14 (36%) focused solely on opportunity for education, and only one (3%) focused just on opportunity through education. The excerpts coded as opportunity for education highlighted the importance of school access, finding strategies to include and appropriately support all learners,

and ensuring students have equitable exposure to the curriculum, an idea commonly referred to as *opportunity to learn*. When authors discussed opportunity through education they made reference to various benefits that arose from attending school, including higher education, a higher standard of living, more career options, and the ability to live a meaningful life. In order for schools to support opportunity through education, the authors pointed to skill development, cultivating a sense of belonging within the community and society, and providing students' guidance for their future.

Through a final round of analysis, the articles were found to mostly look at cognitive outcomes (n = 25, 64%), followed by psychological (n = 22, 56%), behavioral (n = 17, 44%), and then other (n = 6, 15%). A grounded theory analysis (Wolfswinkel et al., 2013) was then conducted to identify school inputs that resulted in positive outcomes. The analysis resulted in four input categories that represent educational opportunity in practice. The most commonly coded category was *inclusive culture and environment* (n = 32, 82%), which included six sub-categories: relationships (teacher, community, and peer), physical environment, representation, empowerment and academic focus, mainstream access, and justice. The second most frequently coded category was *responsive teaching and appropriate training* (n = 30, 77%), which consisted of three sub-categories: support, culturally relevant and differentiated, and experts and development. *Curriculum and instruction* (n = 25, 64%) came next with the sub-categories of access, variety, and rigor. Finally, *resources and opportunity to learn* (n = 23, 59%) included the sub-categories of human resources, courses, external resources, and material resources. A common thread running through all of the input categories was the human element; adult figures at school were found to be crucial for fostering positive student outcomes.

The results from this study led to the development of an educational opportunity framework. This framework centers around the concept of equity because it is not prescriptive, but must be adapted based on context and student needs and values. In other words, inputs and outcomes should not be the exact same for everyone. The framework supports the development of the whole child because outcomes beyond cognitive are considered relevant, and it also involves both opportunity for and through education. The framework can be used as a guide for schools and researchers who are evaluating or seeking to improve equity in educational opportunity.

5.2. Study II

Katz, H. T. (forthcoming). The toll of the racial status quo: A case study of Black students' experiences in a majority-White U.S. high school. In J. Keengwe (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Race, Culture, and Student Achievement.* IGI Global.

This study was informed by critical race theory and system justification theory. Critical race theory understands racism to be more than a matter of individual bad actors; rather, it is deeply ingrained in U.S. society (Gillborn, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Unfortunately, existing inequity often goes unaddressed because people adopt system-justifying ideologies, which are used to rationalize the status quo (Jost et al., 2004). System justification theory is the idea that people are motivated psychologically and socially to perceive the existing social system positively (Bahamondes et al., 2019; Jost et al., 2004; Jost & Hunyady, 2005). Though people are also generally motivated to view their own group favorably, members of disadvantaged groups will often justify an inequitable system because it alleviates the distress that comes with acknowledging one's oppressed status, and it is easier (psychologically, economically, and socially) to accept the system than to change it (Bahamondes et al., 2019; Jost et al., 2004). When it comes to justifying racial inequity, Bonilla-Silva (2018) claims that color-blindness has become the dominant racial ideology.

Considering this, the study sought to better understand the subtle ways race and racism operate within a majority-White high school. This study assumed an embedded case study design involving two units of analysis: the school and Black students. The aim was to first capture the racial status quo at Norchester High school, and then explore the ways in which Black students experienced the racial status quo. To address the first research aim and corresponding unit of analysis (the school), all of the data were coded, and then categories were developed based on patterns across codes (Saldaña, 2013). Subsequently, the student data were reexamined following a similar process to address the second research aim.

The first phase of analysis resulted in three main categories representing the racial status quo: 1) White normativity; 2) Racial unknowing; and 3) Racial inequity and discrimination. Not only were the students and staff at school mostly White, but White perspectives and knowledge were also normalized. Furthermore, there was a general lack of knowledge about racial terminology and a lack of awareness of systemic racism. In fact, the majority of educators and many of the students appeared to take a color-blind stance. Unfortunately, the racial unknowing and privileging of whiteness enabled racial inequity and discrimination to persist at Norchester High School. Thus, each of the categories fed into each other, resulting in a cycle of inequity at school.

In the second phase, students' experiences of the status quo were broken into two categories: perceptions and (re)actions. Students' perceptions of the status quo were found to lie along a spectrum from highly critical to accepting. The spectrum represents both the intensity of criticality toward the status quo, as well as how students conceptualized racism. For instance, some students were highly critical and highly aware of racism as a systemic issue, whereas others were more critical of individual racism but generally accepted the status quo at school. Regardless of where they were positioned on the perception spectrum, students reacted to the status quo in similar ways, and these reactions manifested in two forms: cognitive and behavioral. Cognitive reactions included normalizing the status quo, rationalizing instances of racism, and adopting a positive mindset. Behavioral reactions included being "good" in class, working hard to be successful, being passive, or standing up for oneself.

Though there were clear issues of discrimination and racial inequity at Norchester High, both students and educators adopted system-justifying ideologies to rationalize the status quo, enabling inequity to persist. The results demonstrate the importance of explicitly addressing race and racism in school in order to equip students with the language and knowledge necessary to combat racism in their everyday lives. The findings are represented in a figure that depicts the mechanisms that maintain and reproduce inequity in majority-White schools. This figure provides a model for schools, particularly majority-White schools, to examine their own racial status quo, including the dominant perspectives, knowledge around race, and issues of inequity. By understanding the mechanisms that can lead to a cycle of inequity, schools can improve their practices and curriculum to ensure students are provided equitable educational opportunities.

5.3. Study III

Katz, H. T., & Acquah, E. O. (2022). Places of freedom or entrapment? Black adolescent girls' school experiences. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2022.2098401

This research foregrounded five Black girls' school experiences, the purpose being to decenter whiteness in education research and to present school experiences that are unique to Black girls, a group that has historically been overlooked (Neal-Jackson, 2018; J. L. Young, 2020). By approaching the research through interpretative phenomenological analysis, this study was interested in understanding the convergence and divergence of the girls' experiences as students (Smith et al., 2009). Though discussions of race and racism occurred, this was not the sole focus. Rather, the focus was on understanding what experiences held meaning for the

students (both the positive and the negative), and, through their stories and knowledge, gain insight into ways schools can better support student well-being, improve school experiences, and ensure educational opportunities are equitable. Interpretative phenomenological analysis involves idiography, but it also allows for theoretical generalizability, meaning the findings can be used to inform real-life practice (Smith et al., 2009).

Five superordinate themes were identified through the analysis: 1) A lack of support; 2) Put in a box; 3) Recognizing division and othering; 4) Trying to fit in; and 5) Finding community and a sense of self. Though each student's experience and meaning-making was unique, there were also commonalities across cases. Some of these speak to experiences that are specific to Black girls, particularly moments of gendered-racism, whilst others relate to common experiences that can be found in the student population at large. Overall, the themes represent a tension in feelings that schools provoke: both a sense of freedom and entrapment.

Feelings of entrapment could be seen in the attempts of the girls to stay true to themselves whilst also molding themselves to fit into mostly-White school spaces. In some instances, this led to silencing, where the girls avoided speaking up in order to fit into White notions of femininity and to distance themselves from the "loud Black girl" stereotype (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; E. W. Morris, 2007). The girls also felt trapped by labels, good and bad, because they created external pressures to behave a certain way in order to be accepted and avoid being misunderstood.

According to Deci and Ryan (2012), environments where external feedback is prevalent can lead to a loss of autonomy, and as a result, a reduction in well-being and motivation. To improve intrinsic motivation and well-being, schools must support students' autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2012). In this study, there were specific people and places in school where the girls found this type of support, resulting in feelings of freedom. A sense of freedom was also found in the multiple pathways the school offered, enabling students to choose courses of interest to them, and in some cases, earn qualifications.

Overall, this study demonstrates how social hierarchies, strict expectations, negative assumptions, a lack of representation, and the privileging of White behavior, femininity, and knowledge can harm Black adolescent girls and lead to inequity in opportunity. The study also points to the usefulness of using interpretative phenomenological analysis to research student experience and race. The findings from this research can be used by school leaders to find ways to be more autonomy-supportive and to promote inclusion rather than division. Practices that could improve equity in opportunity range from focusing on community and relationship building to ensuring the curriculum and staff are representative of the student population. The recommended changes would not only benefit Black girls, but could lead to a more freeing education for all.

5.4. Study IV

Katz, H. T., & Acquah, E. O. (2022). *Tackling racial equity in U.S. Schools: A critical policy analysis of enacted state legislation (2020-2022)* [Manuscript submitted for publication]. Department of Education, Åbo Akademi University.

In 2020 amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, people around the United States were exposed to videos depicting brutal acts of violence perpetrated on Black Americans, which resulted in a period of racial reckoning and unrest across the nation. This included debates about whether and how issues of race should be discussed in schools. Consequently, a substantial number of laws related to race/ethnicity and education were introduced. Considering the heightened state of racial affairs during this time, this critical policy analysis aimed to trace state legislation that was introduced and passed between 2020 and 2022 to understand the impact the socio-political divide was having on school policy.

Critical race and critical policy scholars recognize that education often serves to reproduce inequity and policies that are presented as neutral in reality work to reinforce the privilege and power of dominant groups (Diem et al., 2019; Gillborn, 2014). Thus, the purpose of this research was not to simply identify what was being enacted but to also examine how the enacted policies promoted or inhibited progress toward racial/ethnic equity in education.

A content analysis of the 61 state policies included in this study revealed that most (n = 44) were promoting progress toward racial/ethnic equity, and there were five areas of equity addressed: racial/ethnic knowledge, anti-racism and social justice, disparities, representation, and discrimination. As for how policies aimed to promote or inhibit progress, eight categories were identified: protection, tracking, planning and evaluation, curriculum, training, implementing programs, resources, and recruiting/appointing (teachers or commission/board).

Although most policies sought positive change, the results of the critical analysis were less optimistic. Many of the policies promoting progress in racial equity appeared to present more symbolic action, rather than meaningful change, and none of the policies addressed the structural issues (e.g., between-school segregation, biased tracking, and disparities in resources) that reproduce educational inequity. In contrast, the policies that clearly inhibited progress toward equity were regressive, suppressive, punitive, and often introduced as race-neutral despite presenting clear disadvantages for students of color. The results of this study denote the importance of grounding policies in research rather than fear, and necessitate policy that explicitly targets systemic racism.

6. Discussion

Racial inequity in educational opportunity is a systemic issue that deeply affects individuals; thus, this research required a complex design that allowed for an analysis across multiple levels. For this reason, I used a qualitatively-driven, multi-method research design to explore educational opportunity, equity, and race at the conceptual, political, school, and individual level. In this section, I will first synthesize the results across studies in order to address the research questions. I will then proceed to discuss the implications of the research, before reflecting on the strengths and limitations of the chosen methodology.

6.1. Main Findings

This study was guided by one major research question and two sub-questions. The major question asked how educational systems can provide students equitable opportunities to enhance their capability set. Study I helped me answer this question at a broad level, but I also knew that educational opportunity is not one-size-fits-all. Therefore, I chose to also examine the question indirectly through the lens of race and guided by the following sub-questions: a) In what ways do school practices and policies in the United States promote and/or inhibit racial equity in educational opportunity; and b) How do Black students in the United States experience school and make sense of (in)equity? Given that the sub-questions feed into the major research question, I will begin by presenting the study results that respond to these sub-questions. I will then present the results from Study I that are in direct response to the primary research question, as well as the indirect responses that stem from the three other studies.

6.1.1. (In)equity Through School Practices and Policies

The results from Studies II and IV directly answer RQ1a; Study II addresses school practices and Study IV relates to policy. Study III also indirectly helps answer the school practice component of the question. In Studies II and III, the same set of data was analyzed but through different lenses, enabling a nuanced understanding of inequitable practices within a majority-White school. In Study II, I analyzed data from educators, students, and school data and documents in order to capture the racial status quo. Though Study III targeted the individual rather than the school level, I have included it in this discussion because the results revealed certain practices that impacted Black girls' school experiences. For the purposes of answering this research question, Study III both reinforces the results of Study II, and provides additional insight into school practices through the lens of Black girls. I will

first address the results of Studies II and III that respond to issues of (in)equity in school practices, before discussing (in)equity through policy as it was reported in Study IV.

From the analysis of Study II, I observed a connection between White normativity, racial unknowing, and racial inequity and discrimination. As the status quo, this cycle was subtle and in many ways remained unquestioned despite evidence of inequity. Statistics from the Norchester district website revealed clear examples of racial inequity through disparities in outcomes, which matched nationwide data on within-school racial segregation and exclusion (OCR, 2014a, 2021): Black students at Norchester had disproportionately high rates of discipline and low rates of participation in advanced courses when compared to their other-race peers. The participants also spoke of direct racial discrimination, more subtle differential treatment from teachers, and issues around racialized symbols and dress. For example, one student was told she could not wear a bandana because it went against the dress code banning gang symbols, yet debates were still ongoing when it came to whether the confederate and blue line flags should be allowed in school, even though for many Black people these are symbols of violence.

As demonstrated through the racialization of symbols, the White normativity observed at Norchester not only reflected the racial composition of the school, but also the lack of representation found in the curriculum and culture. This aligns with previous research noting how a lack of racial diversity in people and perspectives can negatively affect students of color as well as White students (Bishop, 2012; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Redding, 2019; Yarnell & Bohrnstedt, 2018). The girls' perspectives (Study III) provide further insight into how school structures and practices reinforce whiteness and create divisions between students. For instance, tracking distinguishes students by supposed intelligence, but at Norchester it also appeared to divide students by race. Divisive practices - such as tracking and other forms of labeling - leads to a competitive and controlling environment, which increases external pressure and reduces feelings of autonomy, competence, and well-being (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Carter Andrews, Brown, et al., 2019; Deci & Ryan, 2012)

In Study II, the lack of representation fed into an overall sense of racial unknowing amongst students and educators. It appeared that many of the participants lacked racial terminology, and were also unaware of systemic racism. Rather, a core focus of their responses was on issues related to individual bigotry and a common perspective was to be color-blind. Thus, in both studies it is evident that the school positioned itself as race-neutral and issues of race were minimized or rationalized through system-justifying ideologies, such as color-blindness, egalitarianism, and meritocracy. Though well-intentioned, the educators' failure to recognize racial inequity only perpetuated the problem.

Moreover, Study II demonstrated how the failure of the school to integrate relevant discussions of race and racism led to racial illiteracy amongst both staff and students. Without the appropriate language and knowledge around race, the students and school were unequipped to combat the various issues of racial inequity and discrimination that did exist, and instead many accepted the racial status quo. These results align with research indicating that majority-White schools along with White teachers are ill-prepared to meet the needs of Black students due to culturally irrelevant curriculum and classroom material (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Chapman, 2014; Redding, 2019), an inability of White teachers to connect with Black students (Chapman, 2014; Redding, 2019), educator bias (Chapman, 2014; McGrady & Reynolds, 2013), and a failure to recognize White privilege and one's own racial positioning (Vaught & Castagno, 2008).

Even though the racial status quo at NHS generally did not promote progress toward racial equity, it was clear that some teachers took an anti-racist stance and others were trying to improve their own practices. For instance, a couple of the teachers were quite critical of color-blindness and spoke of efforts to incorporate diverse perspectives and hard topics into lessons. These teachers recognized the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy to ensure all students felt recognized and represented. The follow-up interviews with teachers also revealed that there were some ongoing changes within the school as a result of the racial climate in the United States. For some of the teachers, recent events had increased their racial awareness and knowledge (though they were still learning), making them realize that there were things within their own school that could be improved upon (e.g., a White Eurocentric curriculum and acknowledging other cultures). In addition, they mentioned that the school had offered professional development days with guest speakers dedicated to discussing topics of race, and that both a new student group and teacher group had formed to address racial issues within the school. Unfortunately, there was still resistance amongst some and it seemed that new issues were emerging, but this is to be expected when introducing ideas and practices that go against the school norms and common ideologies.

Changing the status quo takes time and requires more than slight adjustments in individual attitudes and beliefs. This is one of the reasons introducing new policies to explicitly promote racial equity could be particularly useful. In Study IV, there were policies enacted that addressed some of the areas of inequity noted in Studies II and III. For instance, policies sought to improve racial equity by increasing racial representation amongst teachers through recruitment efforts, providing training to improve staff's racial literacy and cultural competence, protecting students from dress- and hair-related discrimination by revising the definitions of race, collecting data to identify disparities, and implementing changes to

the curriculum to include diverse knowledge and history. In several cases, the policies explicitly referenced research to support their aims. Unfortunately, some of the policies lacked specificity in language or the required action was merely temporary making the efforts more symbolic than meaningful and practical.

On the other hand, there were policies that could lead to the reproduction of negative school practices, such as those found in Studies II and III. Rather than being grounded in research, the majority of policies inhibiting progress were written in direct response to disinformation in the media surrounding critical race theory and unfounded fears that it was being taught in classrooms. Many of these policies were written using race-neutral language, but this merely served to disguise the fact that they were written in the interests of Whites. These policies placed restrictions on racial/ethnic knowledge taught in school and enabled a color-blind rather than culturally relevant approach to teaching. Policies such as these make it difficult for educators to have open conversations about race and racism in classrooms, which will only perpetuate inequitable school practices, such as those presented in Studies II and III.

A final note relates to the absence of certain policies in Study IV that could lead to systemic change related to racial equity. As was presented in section 3, between-school differences disproportionately affect students of color, and in particular, Black students. The persistence of neighborhood racial segregation is linked to economic segregation, and this ultimately results in between-school segregation and inequity in access to a quality school. Improving racial equity requires either improvements in schools with mostly students of color, changes to the school funding system so that it is not linked to neighborhood socioeconomic status, or intentional integration efforts. Unfortunately, none of the policies advocated for these types of changes.

6.1.2. (In)equity as Evidenced by Students' Experiences

Data collected from Black students were used in both Study II and Study III and help answer RQ1b. Their stories and perspectives shed light on the direct and indirect effects inequitable practices and policies can have on students' school experiences and sense of well-being in majority-White schools. At the same time, the students also shared positive experiences from school that gave them a sense of freedom, and these experiences give insight into how schools can effectively enhance student capabilities (see section 6.1.3).

In both studies, there were clear differences between how individual students experienced, perceived, and reacted to school practices and the racial status quo. Some of the students spoke of instances of racial discrimination, but were generally satisfied with their school experiences

and perceived most issues as non-racial. Others were more critical of the racialized social structure and privileging of whiteness. The latter recognized racism as a systemic issue, whereas the former viewed it as a problem of individuals. Despite students' levels of criticality, there were clear strategies they all invoked to find success and acceptance.

For many of the students, being part of a sports team or club helped them find belonging in school. Several of the girls spoke of a club they joined where they felt like a family. They found the club to be a safe place because they felt connected to their club advisor and the club consisted of mostly, if not all, students of color. Across the board, the students' abilities to form genuine connections with adults and peers improved their school experience.

The opposite was also true. Some of the students felt like outsiders because of the lack of racial diversity in various spaces. For others, there were individual teachers and students who directly othered them, making them feel out of place, misunderstood, and trapped. When they spoke up about experiences of bigotry or unfair treatment, they felt the school did not understand them, nor did it take action to correct things.

Whether students were critical of racial inequity or not, they all developed cognitive and behavioral strategies to navigate moments of discomfort and succeed in school. Cognitive strategies included having a positive mindset and normalizing the status quo. Strategies, such as these, have been found to be useful in alleviating the distress that comes in moments of oppression, both because justifying the status quo appeases the dominant group and it is much harder to change the status quo than to accept it (Bahamondes et al., 2019). As for behavioral strategies, students worked to be the "good" student in class, they actively stuck up for themselves, and they sought out support. For many, it was a balancing act between being true to oneself and behaving a certain way to be accepted.

The ramifications of negative (racialized) experiences took an emotional toll on many of the students. Labels, stereotypes, hierarchies, and an inequitable system made school feel like a place of entrapment. For the Black girl participants, feeling as if they were on the bottom of the social ladder gave them a unique lens through which to view inequity. Most were critical of the racial inequity that exists in society and education; they were generally aware of disparities between schools and were also conscious of the explicit divisions within schools, as demonstrated through the frequent comparisons they made whether related to wealth, race, immigrant status, or gender. They also were highly skilled in navigating the system due to their criticality toward gendered-racism. In this way, they were distinguished from the boys, some of whom had found easy success and acceptance by joining a sports team. This relates to research showing how boys are more successful in integrating socially than girls due to participation in sports and their ability to downplay stereotypes and racial

discrimination (Holland, 2012). Though, as previously noted, the girls also found acceptance in the club they joined, they remained segregated because the club consisted of mostly girls of color. Thus, these findings point to the importance of using an intersectional approach to understanding inequity and how it differently affects students' experiences.

Overall, this research reveals the ways Black students make sense of inequity as well as how people and practices affect student experiences, which is something often overlooked in discussions on educational opportunity. Even when schools are well-resourced and teachers are highly qualified and experienced, students' experiences and well-being can vary significantly. For students to be able to achieve success and enhance their capabilities, it is important that they feel "good" in school. The students' stories reflect moments when they experienced both social and academic belonging due to positive and empowering relationships, being part of a community, and finding value and relevance in their school work. Unfortunately for many, these experiences were few and far between, but they do provide a glimpse into what a truly freeing education could mean for students.

6.1.3. Toward Equity in Educational Opportunity

Study I sought to directly answer the primary research question, but all of the studies indirectly contributed to a greater understanding of what it means to provide students with equitable educational opportunities. I will first present the main findings of Study I, followed by a more general discussion of how the four studies, in combination, further the conversation on equity and educational opportunity.

The educational opportunity framework developed in Study I provides the most direct response to RQ1. The framework illustrates how the first step to obtaining equitable educational opportunity is through access. Access refers to both one's ability to attend a high-quality school, and then once in school, the ability to access the opportunities the school has to offer. In the framework, these are referred to as school inputs, and they include four main categories: inclusive culture and environment, responsive teaching and appropriate training, resources and opportunity to learn, and curriculum and instruction. The effective implementation of inputs, either alone or in combination, should lead to positive student outcomes in one or more of the following categories: behavioral, cognitive, psychological, and other. As a whole, the framework represents both opportunity for and through education. In other words, it provides a guideline for schools both in and out of the United States to enhance student capabilities and develop a range of functionings.

The framework was developed through a synthesis of research on educational opportunity, enabling a connection to be drawn between inputs

and positive outcomes. The purpose was to identify inputs that could successfully enhance student outcomes, regardless of individual factors (circumstances, social constructs, or characteristics). This does not mean that individual differences should not be accounted for, but that these input categories can be adapted in order to be relevant in different contexts and to meet diverse student needs. It also does not mean that outcomes must be the exact same, simply that students have the freedom to achieve regardless of whether they take advantage of that opportunity (Sen, 2009; Spratt, 2017). This stems from the assumption that evaluating whether educational opportunities are truly equitable requires an assessment of the real freedom students are given to achieve rather than a mere assessment of outcomes (or functionings; Sen, 2009; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). According to Nussbaum (2006), it is of particular importance that children have the capability to think critically, creatively, and reflexively, not only for the development of the individual mind but also to cultivate civic participation.

The analyses of student data in Study II and Study III focuses on this approach to equity. Rather than looking at outcomes, I centered these studies on students' experiences and their meaning-making of these experiences, particularly as it relates to experiencing inequity. Though the students' stories give deep insight into negative experiences related to racial inequity in school (addressed in sections 6.1.1. and 6.1.2.), they also touch upon inequitable experiences that can be found in the broader student community. Many students, regardless of race, feel out of place in school; this research demonstrates how these feelings are enhanced by systems that inhibit access to certain learning spaces and opportunities, fail to facilitate positive relationships, disregard students' experiences (within curriculum and school life), and promote competition (through labels, grouping, grades, tracking, etc.) rather than collective growth (see Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). In contrast, the students in these studies experienced educational opportunity when they felt part of a community, had the freedom to choose their studies based on individual interests, were able to focus on learning rather than getting a grade, and felt recognized, respected, listened to, and understood. These results correspond with the input categories identified in Study I, both in regards to the inputs Norchester High School offered and those that were missing.

According to the framework, schools can create an inclusive culture and environment through the promotion of positive relationships, providing access to mainstream classrooms, empowering students to take charge of their academic choices, ensuring the curriculum and people are representative of the student population, taking a justice-oriented approach, and establishing a physical environment that is safe and conducive to learning. By providing adequate support, instructing in a way that is culturally relevant and differentiated, employing experts in various

fields, and providing professional development, the schools can fulfill the input category of responsive teaching and appropriate training. As for resources and opportunity to learn, schools must ensure they have a sufficient number of high-quality staff, diverse learning materials, and courses on offer. They should also build connections between students and the broader community (external resources). Finally, when considering curriculum and instruction, students must be able to access (or comprehend) the curriculum by having appropriate support, they should have the option to participate in a variety of opportunities (courses and experiences) to develop skills relevant in life, and all students should be exposed to a rigorous curriculum in order to be challenged within their zone of proximal development and to be fully prepared for college and future careers.

In many ways, ensuring the aforementioned inputs get implemented in schools requires new state policies. Though some schools may take it upon themselves to improve certain areas, others may require additional external support or a regulatory push. It can be difficult for schools to know where to start; thus, policies such as those identified as positive in Study IV could help bridge the gap. Some of the reviewed policies align with responsive teaching and appropriate training because they require professional development related to diversity and inclusion. Others relate to inclusive learning and environment because they establish programs for planning and supporting the recruitment and retention of teachers of color, which applies to the representation aspect of the input category. Regardless of the area that is addressed, what is evident from Study IV is that new policy should reflect current research for it to effectively improve equity in educational opportunity. Moreover, it must use explicit and specific language, as opposed to language that is race (and gender, ethnicity, ability, etc.) neutral, if real change is to occur.

6.2. Implications and Suggestions

This research has implications for school practice and policy, society, and future research. The implications are particularly timely given the current socio-political divide in the United States surrounding race and whether and/or how certain topics should be taught in classrooms. Though I will highlight the implications specific to the U.S. education system, the theoretical implications and many of the practical solutions presented can be applied or adapted in Europe and beyond.

The primary implication of this research is that it provides a functional understanding of what providing equitable educational opportunities can look like in practice. The educational opportunity framework can be used by educators and researchers to assess and enhance school practices to ensure they are effective and fair. When schools focus more on creating

equity in opportunity rather than equality of outcomes, they create space for students with diverse needs, wants, and values to flourish. This is central to the capability approach, which emphasizes capability enhancement as a means to equip students with the freedom to achieve, regardless of whether that achievement is realized (Sen, 2009; Spratt, 2017; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). Beyond enhancing capabilities, schools must take into consideration the diversity of the student population, and provide students with appropriate support to convert capabilities into functionings. The consequences of employing the capability approach to improve educational practices and policy is not merely beneficial for individual students and groups but it also benefits the community and society at large. When people have real freedom to achieve and proper support to convert capabilities into functionings, they are better able to contribute positively to the development of society (Nussbaum, 2006; Sen, 1999; Spratt, 2017).

Ultimately, I believe that schools must find creative solutions to changing the overall structure for them to be more autonomy-supportive rather than controlling. Schools should be places that promote freedom of the body and mind (Nussbaum, 2006), but when practices are inequitable, hierarchies are created, and barriers such as cost are put in place, schools become stifling and oppressive. This research points to the fact that many U.S. public school environments facilitate competition between students, limit students' freedom to follow their interests, and police non-normative (dominant) behaviors. Furthermore, schools maintain and privilege White (as well as cisgender, male, able-bodied, heterosexual) forms of knowledge and ways of being. Unfortunately, these are normalized, rationalized, and presented as neutral, which makes it difficult to change the status quo. Equity in school requires that schools move away from color-blindness and toward explicitly anti-racist practices and culturally relevant pedagogy.

Similarly, policymakers must seek to reduce neutral language, and instead directly target certain groups for real change to occur. Taking a one-size-fits-all approach to education and policy ends up failing groups that are marginalized. An equitable approach to policymaking demands consideration of human diversity. Policies that are explicit in nature can reduce barriers (or unfreedoms) that disproportionately affect certain groups, and as a result, increase the real freedom people have to find success in life.

There are several practical recommendations that can be applied to U.S. schools and educational policy in order to break the cycle of racial inequity that is highlighted in Study II. The first relates to the lack of representation within the curriculum amongst educators, which as discussed, can lead to worse outcomes for students of color. Recruiting more teachers of color should begin with early interventions. This is particularly important in schools where students have little to no exposure to teachers of color. Without seeing people who look like them in the education field, students

of color may not view teaching as a viable career path. Thus, starting from a young age, schools should provide students with ample opportunities to meet teachers of color, either through career days or other methods of community outreach. In addition, universities can actively recruit students of color to the education field, and policymakers can create incentive programs to guide students of color to the profession.

Another practical change relates to the lack of awareness White educators have around racial inequity and the lack of knowledge on how to instill conversations of race into classrooms. Providing training in culturally relevant pedagogy and anti-racism can help improve current educators' teaching practices as well as adjust their beliefs about their students of color. Similar training should be provided to other school staff in order to improve practices (e.g., disciplinary actions and advanced course placement) that negatively affect students of color. At the same time, what today's socio-political tensions teach us is that racial ideologies are deeply rooted and can be difficult to change. Thus, schools can also bring in outside experts who are better equipped to discuss topics of race with students. This guarantees that, regardless of teachers' racial knowledge, students build racial literacy and are better able to combat racism in their own lives, as well as feel empowered to create a more equitable society.

Breaking the cycle of inequity can also begin with the teachers of tomorrow. When entering the field of education, pre-service teachers do not yet have established methods of teaching and they may be more open to reflecting on and correcting their racial ideologies. Through explicit modeling, university teachers can prepare pre-service teachers to adopt culturally relevant and anti-racist pedagogy into their own practice (Acquah et al., 2020). They can also facilitate open conversations about race, power, and privilege in order to help pre-service teachers feel more comfortable and natural when engaging in these, at times, difficult conversations. When these teachers eventually enter schools they can transfer their learning and begin transforming the status quo. These new teachers can create more equitable classrooms by having high expectations for all their students, acknowledging diverse perspectives and values, ensuring the knowledge espoused reflects multiple perspectives, and actively engaging with - rather than avoiding - topics of race and racial inequity (Howard, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995).

With that said, students must be protected regardless of whether the teachers and school staff are anti-racist. Creating laws that protect students against bigotry and promote diverse knowledge can go a long way. For instance, in Study IV I identified several policies that changed the meaning of race to include different hairstyles and dress, which ultimately would protect students from bullying and ensure school practices did not discriminate against them. Other policies can push states to track patterns of discrimination in schools (e.g., disparities in discipline and access to

courses), and when significant racial disparities exist, the state can intervene to locate the causes and provide training if necessary.

Study IV also provided examples of policies related to curriculum and instruction that could help advance students' racial or ethnic knowledge. Curricular changes can ensure students are exposed to non-dominant perspectives and relevant and accurate historical knowledge. This can also be addressed through the inclusion of certain learning materials that are properly assessed for their adherence to anti-racist and culturally relevant instruction. Moreover, resources can be specifically allocated so that schools acquire mirror books for students of color.

Policy should not only directly target school practices, but also the system as a whole. Inequity trickles down from the status quo of the nation, first affecting policy, then schools, and finally individual experiences. The ideologies that are passed down create a cycle of inequity as people create new policies to sustain them, making it ever more difficult to fix. Thus, improvements to the educational system's financial structure, segregation, and resource allocation are necessary if a permanent change is to occur. In this regard, Finland acts as a model for system-level equality given that schools generally are equal in terms of resources and teacher quality. However, when applied to the United States, changes cannot look the exact same because addressing the vast disparities that already exist requires equity that positively discriminates; in other words, providing more to the most disadvantaged to level the playing field.

I have several suggestions for policies that could redress the current inequity between schools: 1) redistribute resources and reallocate funding; 2) incentivize high-quality and experienced teachers to work in high-poverty schools with predominantly students of color; 3) enable school choice and provide bussing; 4) create programs that allow for between-school collaboration where students can participate in courses (either in person or online) offered at a different school; 5) create programs connecting universities, and the teacher training programs at those universities, to high-poverty schools with majority students of color in order to provide additional support. To expand upon the third point, promoting school choice may only act as a temporary solution until the standards of education are raised across the board. It also requires that parents are informed about their choices to make the best decision for their child(ren). In the fifth point, the suggested programs can also be ones that recruit students of color to the teaching field to expose students of color to diverse teachers. Moreover, the programs can offer the schools workshops and additional training to elevate teaching practices.

Finally, this research has implications for future research. For one, advancing the work conducted here would require that the frameworks that were developed in Studies I and II are tested to see whether they have practical relevance, or if there is a need for modification. Furthermore,

inequity in education is complex and affects groups differently. In this dissertation, I followed the path of racial inequity, specifically focusing on inequity for Black students in the United States, and Black girls in particular. However, inequity can manifest differently for other racial groups, other marginalized populations, and in other contexts. As was demonstrated in this research, inequity for various groups trickles down from the system level into policy, schools, and individual experiences. Thus, capturing it requires a multifaceted and intersectional approach. To further the concept of educational opportunity, future research should explore educational opportunity and inequity through different standpoints and in different countries. Educational inequity, racial oppression, and White supremacy are not uniquely American, but can be observed on the global scale (Gillborn, 2005; Rastas, 2019; Starr, 2022). Though education systems, social structures, and policies around the world vary significantly, Black students in majority-White schools and countries likely experience similar challenges. Therefore, research can be conducted with Black and other marginalized students elsewhere to understand how inequity is experienced and to identify barriers to accessing educational opportunity that are both similar and different to those that exist in the United States.

6.3. Methodological Considerations

Approaching this research through a multi-method design was important for depicting the complexity of racial inequity in educational opportunity, but it presented many challenges and some potential limitations. One of the major challenges was to capture what educational opportunity looks like in practice at a broader level whilst also considering how inequity functions differently across groups. Educational opportunity is an extremely broad concept, and racial inequity in school is difficult to pinpoint due to the interconnectedness between other system-level inequities. In this regard, it is difficult to decide what aspect of equity to focus on because, in a way, the various factors cannot be separated. For instance, school segregation stems from neighborhood segregation, which can be tied to both socioeconomic and racial factors, including a history of discriminatory housing practices, redlining, and White flight. This is an example of just one of the many system-level factors that reproduce inequity in education; thus, it is impossible to capture each factor and its interrelated components in a single dissertation.

For this reason, I felt it was most important to center Black students' experiences as they are one of the groups most negatively affected by inequitable practices. In this regard, I would like to point out the usefulness of using interpretative phenomenological analysis as well as narrative prompts to study race and student experience. These methods have rarely been used to explore race in education, and to my understanding, have not

been used together as they were in Study III, but they allowed for a deeper understanding of the meaning-making of the selected participants.

With that said, the small number of participants from Norchester High School posed challenges in analyzing the quantitative data collected from educators and students and used for Study II. Were more participants involved, I could have used the data to understand the patterns in educator beliefs and student perspectives across the school. However, due to the small numbers, I was only able to use the results for triangulation purposes. The small number of participants was due to the fact that there were few Black students at the school, and educators seemed unwilling to participate. In a sense, the lack of participation amongst educators points to a general apathy or disinterest in issues of race, which is symbolic of White privilege.

I also believe that collecting data from other racial groups to gain an understanding of the racial status quo would have been helpful. The choice to only focus on Black students was based on the understanding that racism and the stereotypes that go along with it do not manifest in the same way for each group. In addition, I felt it important for Black students' experiences to stand alone rather than focusing on between-group comparisons. However, in retrospect, I believe I could have still foregrounded Black students' experiences whilst including the perspectives of other racial groups. This would have provided a fuller picture of the racial status quo.

In terms of transferability, the qualitative nature of the design means it is not possible to generalize the results to the entire U.S. population. Given the extensive statistical research that exists to support my claims, I am able to make suggestions and conjectures for how inequity can be addressed, but I cannot conclusively claim that I have found the solution. This would require a practical application of the results, the involvement of a larger population, and long-term observations. For instance, a participant-centered, transformative design could have offered schools more concrete solutions and would have enabled students and educators to be involved in the decision-making. In addition, the frameworks developed in Studies I and II could have been tested to understand their effectiveness in evaluating opportunity and inequity, and their ability to guide real change. As for the study at the level of policy, the research could have instead focused on assessing the effects of a single policy on school practices. This could have provided insight into whether the policy, when implemented, was effective in producing significant change, or if it were more perfunctory. Nevertheless, the results of this dissertation allow for theoretical generalizability, meaning educators can draw connections between the results to their own classrooms/schools and make practical changes to their teaching/educational environment based on their relevance. Similarly, policymakers can draw connections to their state

populations and write legislation for improving equity that is grounded in research.

6.4. Conclusion

I began this dissertation with a discussion of the American Dream. Though not always explicitly stated, the concept of the dream has been a constant presence throughout. Within this dissertation, I present what real equity in educational opportunity looks like, which if implemented effectively could improve students' chances of achieving the dream. Unfortunately, the United States is still a long way from turning the myth into reality, but this dissertation provides insight into how we can get there by transforming education. In particular, the frameworks developed in Studies I and II offer both practical solutions as well as a theoretical basis from which to conduct further research. In sum, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of equity in educational opportunity.

The broad aim of this dissertation was to explore what it means to provide students with equitable educational opportunities in the United States. At a more specific level, I sought to understand opportunity through the lens of race, with a particular focus on Black students. I moved beyond the existing evidence of nationwide racial inequity that focuses on inequality of outcomes by instead emphasizing school inputs and how these impact Black students' experiences. I also included a critical examination of recently enacted school policies that, when combined with the results of the other studies, demonstrates how inequitable policies lead to inequitable school practices which lead to inequitable school experiences. This ultimately results in inequality of outcomes, though I do not believe equality of outcomes should be the goal. Rather, enhancing capabilities should be the goal as this enables students to live a life they personally value, not a life that is valued by society or the dominant group. This requires providing appropriate support for students to convert capabilities into a range of functionings beyond academic outcomes. Creating a more freeing and transformative education that supports the development of the whole child will not only help individuals flourish, but will also lead to a more equitable, sustainable, productive, healthy, and capable society.

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Original Publications

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Review of Education ◾**BERA**

The role of schools in providing educational opportunity: An integrative review

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Abstract

The concept of educational opportunity is ubiquitous
yet ambiguous; it is frequently discussed within the
education world, yet there is no commonly shared un-
derstanding of what it means or how to measure it. To
address this void, we conducted an integrative review
of the literature on school inputs and student out-
comes from 2010 to 2019. A total of 39 articles were
included in this review, and analysed using a mixed
methods approach. A descriptive analysis showed the
studies used a range of research designs, including
case study ($n = 7$), comparative ($n = 6$), correlational
and longitudinal ($n = 5$), exploratory ($n = 4$), cross-
sectional ($n = 3$), and phenomenological ($n = 2$).
Furthermore, studies were conducted within a variety
of primary through secondary school contexts (e.g.,
public, charter and vocational). A deductive analysis
revealed that more than half of the studies looked
at cognitive outcomes ($n = 25$), followed by psycho-
logical ($n = 22$), behavioural ($n = 17$), and then other
($n = 6$). Finally, grounded theory was used to ana-
lyse specific school factors (inputs) that influence the
aforementioned outcomes positively. We identified
four input categories through which educational op-
portunity generally manifests: Inclusive Culture and
Environment, Responsive Teaching and Appropriate
Training, Resources and Opportunity to Learn, and
Curriculum and Instruction. Based on the results, we

developed a conceptual framework of educational opportunity that connects school inputs to positive student outcomes. The framework can be used by researchers and educators to inform discussions and assessments of educational opportunity.

KEYWORDS
educational opportunity, equitable opportunity, integrative review, school access

Context and implications

Rationale for this study
Schools worldwide aim to provide equitable opportunities that result in positive student outcomes. However, there is widespread disagreement between both educators and educational researchers as to what educational opportunity means and looks like in practice.
Why the new findings matter
This study seeks to bring clarity to the topic through an integrative review that synthesises the research on school inputs that lead to positive student outcomes.
Implications for educators, educational researchers and policy makers
This review resulted in the development of a conceptual framework of educational opportunity. The framework is not prescriptive, but can be adapted based on the needs, goals and values of the school and students. This framework has implications for teachers, school leaders, policy makers and educational researchers who can use it as a tool to assess educational opportunity and inform educational practices. Most importantly, the framework can be used to help improve equity in educational opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

Schools worldwide aspire to provide equitable opportunities to all their students. Nevertheless, how schools should provide educational opportunity (EO) is unclear due to a lack of common understanding of how EO manifests in practice. For example, some schools emphasise tracking as a way to separate students based on skills and abilities, but others believe each student should receive the exact same instruction. The inconsistency between and within schools lies not only in what they provide, but also with the outcomes schools wish for their students. Although most would agree that academic success is a key indicator of EO, many also highlight the importance of other student outcomes, such as well-being, motivation and communication skills.

Researchers have also differed in their approach to exploring EO empirically. In its current state, 'educational opportunity' acts as a buzz phrase; EO is frequently used in empirical research, yet it is never clearly defined, enabling it to support a wide range of contradictory and context dependent material. Despite the widespread disagreement about EO, Lazenby (2016) believes we should at least try to make sense of the concept. In this review we make such an attempt, but first we must draw a distinction between three levels through which researchers tend to observe EO: system, individual and school.

At the system level, researchers focus on conditions largely outside of the school's control that may influence student outcomes, including a school's socioeconomic composition (Mickelson et al., 2013; Pearman, 2019), neighbourhood context (Johnson, 2010; Pearman, 2019), segregation (Johnson, 2010; Pearman, 2019), external differentiation/tracking (de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010), and diversity of student body (Bowman, 2010; Mickelson et al., 2013; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Stemming from these system-level factors are circumstances, characteristics and social constructs at the individual level that can correlate with differences in outcomes. These include race, religion, ethnicity, gender, parental influence, socioeconomic status (SES), and so on. At the school level, researchers have highlighted single school characteristics or structures that lead to specific student outcomes, such as school exclusion (Welsh & Little, 2018), culturally responsive education (Aronson & Laughter, 2016) and internal differentiation/tracking (de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010).

In this review, we attempt to make sense of EO at the school level, but rather than identifying a single school factor—as was done in previous research—the focus here is on the school as a whole. Thus, the aim is to synthesise the empirical research on EO, explore what outcomes are valued by researchers and how they frame their discussions about opportunity, and establish a clear understanding of what it means to provide equitable EO by developing a conceptual framework. The developed framework depicts school-level factors (hereafter identified as inputs) that are associated with positive outcomes and that reflect concrete examples of EO in practice. By consolidating the empirical research into a single framework, we hope to represent a wide range of values and perspectives on the topic.

Equitable educational opportunity

Schools are a common thread running through everyone's life, and they endeavour to help children succeed both in school and as adults. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 'the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity' (United Nations, 1989, p. 1). Article 28 specifically addressed a child's right to access an education, equal opportunity, and preservation of human dignity (United Nations, 1989). Thus, it is important to analyse how schools are supporting the child's right to an education that prepares them to live an independent life. This entails identifying opportunities provided by schools that contribute to a range of positive outcomes, based on the values and needs of both society and the individual.

In this paper we follow Burbules et al.'s (1982) recommendation to use 'equitable'—as opposed to 'equal'—because equal can be defined as 'same' or 'fair', words that have completely different meanings (Burbules et al., 1982). Equitable, on the other hand, can mean 'equal and fair in light of relevant similarities and differences' (p. 171). This is in line with Aristotle's principle of distributive justice, to 'treat equals equally and unequals unequally', (Burbules et al., 1982, p. 171). Concerning education, this means providing opportunities to students based on their individual needs and goals, not providing the same EO to each student. Due to individual differences between students, a school that merely values traditional academic knowledge, or that expects the exact same outcomes from each student, may not support all students equitably. For instance, students may not have the skills to access the curriculum so schools must make accommodations. This understanding of equity aligns with the description of equality of opportunity from UIS et al. (2018): 'everyone should have the same opportunity to thrive, regardless of variations in the circumstances into which they are born' (p. 17).

Similarly, Lazenby (2016) argued that the 'discussion of equality of opportunity in education must be sensitive to the different values that one hopes to realise' (p. 72). Specifically, Lazenby (2016) distinguished between two ways of connecting education and opportunity:

opportunity *through* education and opportunity *for* education. The former understands education as a vehicle for accessing opportunity outside of school where 'equality of opportunity in education will be achieved in so far as the educational system serves to realize the more general conception of equality of opportunity' (Lazenby, 2016, p. 70). Examples of opportunities through education include higher education, work, economic gains, forming a family and finding one's passion. The latter entails examining the distribution of goods within schools and obtaining education for its intrinsic value, meaning one has access to positive learning experiences and effective teachers for learning's sake (Lazenby, 2016).

Finally, Westen (1985) defined opportunity as 'a chance of an agent, X, to choose to attain a goal, Y, without the hindrance of an obstacle, Z' (p. 849). Westen's theorization of opportunity helped shape the aims of this article. However, in the statement, opportunity is presented as something someone receives, without mention of who or what is providing that opportunity. For the purposes of this review, we reformulate the statement as a question that includes the school as a contributor of the opportunity: how can schools provide students (agent) equitable opportunities (input) to achieve certain outcomes (goal), regardless of individual factors (obstacle)? To answer this question, we explore the following research questions:

- How is educational opportunity conceptualised within empirical research?
- What are considered student outcomes within empirical research?
- Which school inputs lead to positive student outcomes?

In this review, inputs are defined as controllable school factors (structures, relationships, processes, characteristics, etc.) that contribute to certain student outcomes. Conversely, student outcomes are viewed as the result or goal of school inputs. Inputs that lead to positive outcomes for students regardless of individual factors are therefore perceived as equitable educational opportunities in practice.

METHOD

This review was conducted using an integrative approach, meaning we sought to synthesise empirical research on EO in order to develop a new framework and perspective on the topic (Cooper, 1982; Torraco, 2005; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). The integrative review method involves a critique, review and synthesis of past literature enabling a creative representation (e.g., taxonomy, new model, conceptual framework, etc.) of new knowledge or understandings (Torraco, 2005). Integrative reviews are distinct from other review methods as they enable the use of diverse methodologies, allow for theory development, and the knowledge generated can be directly applied to practice and policy (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). There is no standard approach to analysis in integrative reviews but Whittemore and Knafl (2005) note that mixed method and qualitative approaches (specifically constant comparison) are suitable as they allow for iterative comparisons across data sources. Therefore, this review also follows guidelines from Wolfswinkel et al. (2013) for rigorously reviewing literature using grounded theory. Their suggestions were mainly considered during the analysis phase; however, they also align with much of the search and selection processes (e.g., defining criteria and search terms, determining appropriate sources, searching, screening and refining, etc.).

Search and screening process

We selected electronic databases for our search based on their pertinence to education research: EBSCO (Academic Search Premier, ERIC, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, and

Teacher Reference Center) and Web of Science. In the search, we excluded journals related to topics such as health or medicine, biology and engineering, and we included journals related to education, psychology, sociology and children. The search terms used were related to Westen's (1985) recommendation regarding statements about opportunity, but we excluded 'obstacles' and added 'inputs' (Table 1). The search concepts were separated by the Boolean operator, AND.

Our initial search yielded 528 documents (404 after the removal of duplicates), which then underwent two screenings by the two authors using our inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 2). The inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed to assess quality and relevance when selecting articles, as well as to ensure articles would contribute to developing an EO framework by answering the research questions. In order to ensure relevancy to modern-day schooling, we chose to include peer-reviewed articles that were published at the earliest during January 2010 and where the data were collected at least partly after 2000. Although many integrative reviews include a variety of published material, we did not include other publication types because our focus was on empirical research where authors of the reviewed articles discuss EO in relation to their own research aims. The criterion for articles to be written in English was for practical reasons based on our own language limitations. Finally, we excluded articles that lacked statistical significance because non-statistically significant results connote that the strength of the relationship, or magnitude of difference observed in a sample, would likely not be observed in the general population the sample represents.

For the screening process, we used Covidence software (Veritas Health Innovation, n.d.) to keep track of our disagreements and check for inter-rater reliability. During these screenings, we double-checked the publication criteria, and we re-evaluated the population and content criteria, making adjustments when appropriate. These criteria narrowed the focus of the article to ensure our findings could apply to the general schooling population. For the first screening, we met four times to analyse the titles and abstracts together in order to ensure we were assessing inclusion and exclusion criteria consistently. During the first screening, we observed the tendency for articles to fall within two categories: the system level and the school level. We tagged these in order to exclude all articles at the system level. Articles at the system level focused on topics, such as educational policy (Ghadai, 2016; Ogbiji & Ogbiji, 2016), educational funding or costs (Ha & Yan, 2018; Ogbiji & Ogbiji, 2016), school choice (Byun et al., 2012), and comparing school types (Chapman & Donnor, 2015; Kamwendo, 2010). Often these articles were context-specific, provided basic descriptive information, or were missing explicit outcomes or school input. We felt these articles did not present a clear picture of what occurs within schools, and consequently they could not contribute to building our framework. During the first screening, we excluded 247 articles, 35 of which were tagged as *system*.

T A B L E 1   Search terms

Concept	Terms
1. Educational opportunity	(educational opportunity OR opportunity to learn OR equity in education OR access to education OR opportunity in education)
2. School factors (inputs)	(school factors OR school characteristics OR institutional factors OR institutional characteristics OR school environment OR structural factors OR structural characteristics OR school policy OR education policy OR school system OR educational system)
3. Student (agent)	(student OR pupil)
4. Outcomes (goal)	(outcomes OR achievement OR success OR well-being OR wellbeing OR motivation OR engagement OR behavior)

TABLE 2   Inclusion and exclusion criteria

	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Publication	1. January 2010 through January 2019 2. Peer-reviewed article 3. Written in English 4. Data were collected primarily (may have begun several years prior) from 2000 onward	1. Systematic reviews, book chapters, position papers, dissertations and conference proceedings 2. Findings are insignificant
Population	5. Primary through secondary school	3. Inputs that only affect students with disabilities/ in special education, gifted, or identified behavioural/ emotional concerns; L2 students; University/College students[a]
Content	6. Controllable school factors (e.g., climate, teachers, curriculum) are connected to student outcomes 7. Outcomes are clearly defined (e.g., cognitive, psychological, behavioural, social) 8. Authors use the term 'opportunity' or 'equity' in relation to students or school processes	4. Focuses on out-of-school factors (home environment, family traits, individual traits, etc.)[b] 5. Focuses on physical health outcomes 6. System-level or comparison of school types 7. Outcomes vary between certain groups (gender, race, ability, etc.)

[a]The articles could discuss these students or include them as participants, but it had to be possible to generalise the inputs or findings to the general population.
[b]The articles could mention these factors only if the discussion was focused on how schools contribute to student success or failure.

The second screening was an iterative process: we independently reviewed the aims, methods, results, discussion and conclusion of 15–20 articles at a time, after which we met to discuss disagreements identified within the software before continuing with the next set. We discussed each conflicting article in depth until we agreed on a decision; we never had to seek third-party advice. By the final round, we had 93% inter-rater reliability, which is above the 90% threshold recommended by Wolfswinkel et al. (2013). A total of 39 articles were selected for inclusion.

Data analysis

This review assumed a mixed methods approach to analysing the data, which were coded both deductively and inductively.

Descriptive coding

To begin, we split the articles to code the relevant information for each article: date published, dates of data collection, number of student participants, age of student participants, individual factors, other participants (teachers, counsellors, etc.), school context (level, location, type), research design, instruments and whether the study used large international or national data sets. Next, we calculated the frequencies for each item. We used a spreadsheet to organise the aforementioned information, along with each article title, author(s), aims and results.

Conceptualisations of educational opportunity

We used Nvivo 12.6 Pro to analyse articles for how opportunity was conceptualised, coding excerpts related to the two distinct forms of opportunity identified by Lazenby (2016): opportunity *for* and *through* education. We began by scanning documents to get a sense of words that were used to describe EO. Then we conducted word queries in each article using the following terms (some of which are stemmed): opport, equit, equal, participat, access, right, chance, path, career, employ, work, universit, college, future, provide. The excerpts were only highlighted if the words were used in reference to EO. Even with the word search, not all the authors' (of the reviewed articles) ideas related to EO were represented; thus, we also scanned each article to pull out pieces that alluded to EO. For example, from Datta and Banik (2014) we coded, 'There is widespread consensus…to ensure compulsory universal primary education', as 'for' opportunity, despite it not including any of the words from our query. In addition, because the purpose of this paper was to examine compulsory education, reference to university or higher education was coded as opportunity through education. To establish inter-coder reliability, we reviewed 13 of the articles together and established 100% agreement.

Inputs and outcomes: development of opportunity framework

Though counterintuitive, we coded for outcomes prior to inputs as they helped inform the input analysis. Using NVivo 12.6 Pro, school outcomes were coded deductively based on four outcome categories: cognitive, psychological, behavioural and other. Even though outcomes were coded based on theory and previous research, the coding was flexible enough to allow unexpected variables to be coded, which was necessary when the data were qualitative and the content was latent. During the initial coding, outcomes were identified as either positive or negative, but the number of negative and positive outcomes will not be provided given that in general, negative outcomes were a result of an absence in opportunity and positive outcomes were a result of receiving that opportunity.

First, cognitive outcomes relate to a student's ability to think critically, solve problems (Bowman, 2010), and obtain academic success based on the school's curriculum. Indicators of cognitive outcomes include standardised tests, a student's grade point average (GPA), grade retention, and referral to special education (Anderson et al., 2003; Coyle & Pillow, 2008).

Next, psychological outcomes were coded based on Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory (SDT), which posits that human beings have certain psychological needs; the fulfilment of these needs—along with one's physiological needs—contributes to overall health, motivation and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Although this study is not using SDT as a theoretical framework, the SDT model was used to categorise psychological outcomes as anything related to competence, autonomy, relatedness, motivation, mental health and well-being.

Behavioural outcomes differ from psychological given the focus is on how one acts, rather than how one feels. Outcomes related to behaviour can include truancy, tardiness, drop-out, classroom disruption, dress code violations, refusal to participate in class, incomplete assignments and fighting/aggression (Anderson et al., 2003; Gray, 2004; Stevens, 2007; Welsh & Little, 2018). In this review, the aforementioned are negative behavioural outcomes, whereas participation in school and extracurricular activities, volunteerism, and a good work ethic are considered positive behavioural outcomes.

Finally, in addition to psychological and behavioural outcomes, there are other non-cognitive outcomes to consider. These are skills students gain from school that might not

reveal themselves through traditional test scores, but can still affect how a child does later in life: creativity, imagination, artistic skills, learning strategies, communication, cooperation and social skills (Bourke & Schofield, 2004; Gray, 2004; Steele, 2016).

After analysing for outcomes, the first author conducted a grounded theory analysis of the 39 articles. She began by reading each article, highlighting excerpts related to inputs, and open coding those excerpts. Using both the input and outcome coding, and referring to the original text, she then used axial-coding to identify higher-order input categories before using selective coding to integrate and refine the categories in order to answer the research questions (Wolfswinkel et al., 2013). This process was intertwined and iterative: she used constant comparative analysis—a method often used for integrative reviews—to review and adjust the categories as she encountered new ideas or received feedback from the second author (Wolfswinkel et al., 2013).

Throughout the entire process, the second author questioned various aspects of the analysis and we rationalised ideas together. In the end, the second author randomly and independently coded nine (23%) of the articles to check for inter-coder reliability. Agreement was 100%. Finally, the second author completed an audit of the final report to verify the rigour and maximise the accuracy, hence minimising researcher bias. Through this analysis, we developed a conceptual framework to represent educational opportunity that directly responds to the overarching research question, and consists of input categories, input sub-categories, and outcome categories (Figure 1). Though we recognise that individuals and groups may differ in needs and goals, we chose to focus on how inputs produced positive outcomes across students and groups in order for us to develop a framework that applies to the majority of students.

RESULTS

The results will be presented in the same order in which they were analysed. We will begin with a summary of information about the articles included in this review. We will then discuss how EO is conceptualised by the authors of the reviewed articles, including the types of obstacles that are mentioned. Finally, we will briefly summarise the coding of outcome categories, before diving into the EO framework where we will present the connection authors made between inputs and outcomes.

Descriptive data for reviewed articles

When coding for research methods, authors often failed to mention either the type of data used or the study design, leaving them to be inferred. In addition, authors may have mentioned several study designs; thus, for the sake of simplicity, we report on the design that appeared to be most prominent. Case studies were used the most ($n = 7$, 18%), followed by comparative ($n = 6$, 15%; 1 was an international comparison, 5 were causal-comparative), correlational and longitudinal ($n = 5$, 13% each), exploratory ($n = 4$, 10%), cross-sectional ($n = 3$, 8%), and phenomenological ($n = 2$, 5%). The following were only used once: experimental, grounded theory, sequential mixed methods, observational, narrative oriented, descriptive and critical interpretivist.

Over half of the articles were conducted within the United States ($n = 21$), either at a national level, or within certain cities or states. Between one and two articles were conducted in each of the following countries: Turkey, China, England, Kenya, Switzerland, Denmark, Iran, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Uganda and India. Three of the articles used multinational data. Furthermore, the articles included data primarily collected from students, but
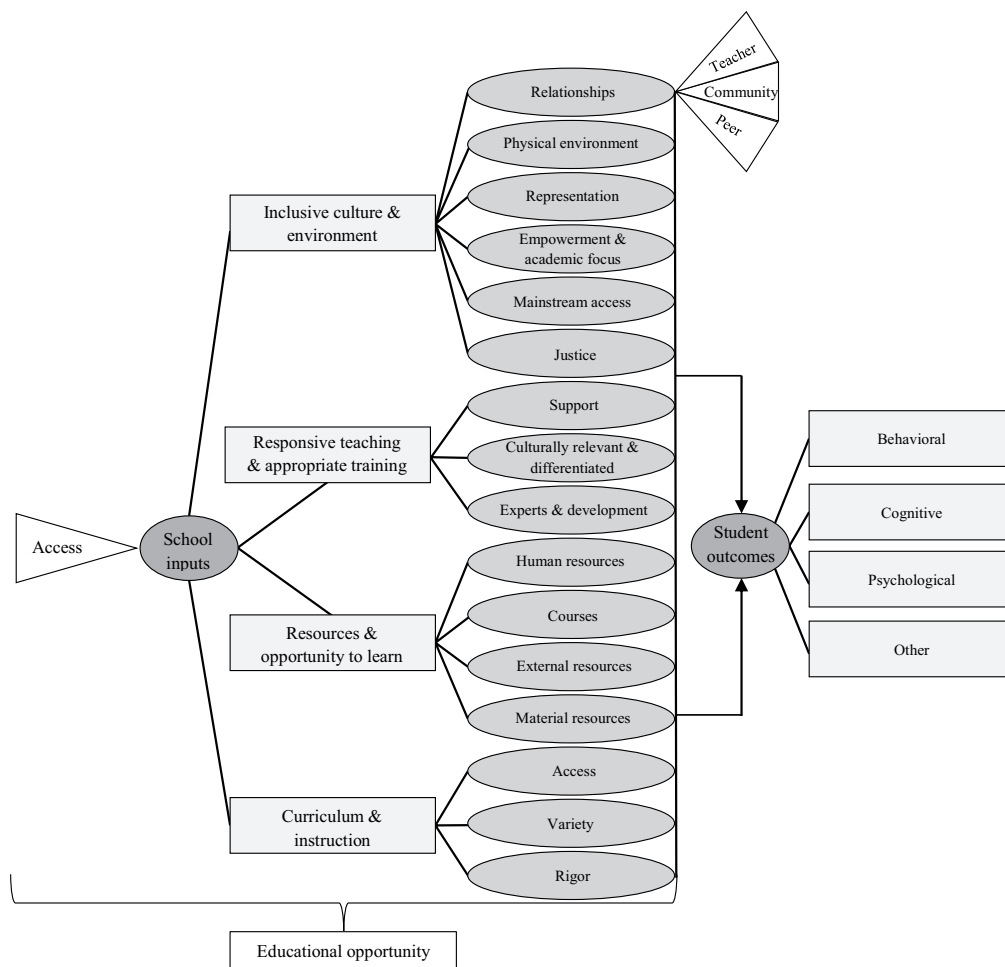
FIGURE 1 Educational opportunity framework

also from teachers, principals/school leaders, parents, counsellors, school psychologists and other staff. The observed levels of education were primary through secondary school, and the types of schools included public, private, charter, vocational, alternative learning centre, juvenile delinquent centre and special schools.

All but three of the articles (92%) identified individual factors (circumstances, social constructs or characteristics) that were not controllable by the school, but potentially could create unfair sources of difference. The 36 articles that included individual factors were not necessarily looking at differences in outcomes, but instead many looked at outcomes when controlling for certain individual factors. SES was the most frequently observed individual factor, found in 23 (59%) of the articles, followed by race and/or ethnicity ($n = 19$, 49%; including one study on an indigenous population) and then gender ($n = 17$, 44%). Other factors that researchers considered to be important were whether students were immigrants or refugees ($n = 6$, 15%), the students' native language ($n = 6$, 15%; first language was different from the language of instruction/official language), the students' academic level or whether they were receiving specialised services ($n = 9$, 23%; e.g., special education, gifted, high achiever), and parent background ($n = 14$, 36%; e.g., education, occupation, whether there were two parents at home).

Conceptualisations of educational opportunity

Surprisingly, none of the studies directly defined EO, which is why it was necessary to extract excerpts and code them. We identified 14 (36%) studies that solely focused on opportunity for education, one (3%) that focused on opportunity through education, and 24 (62%) that had both. Given that the research we included had to present inputs and outcomes, it is logical that most of the authors presented opportunity for education as most educational outcome measurements are looking at what occurs in school, not after.

Opportunity for education

First and foremost, authors argued that students must have access to education (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Bhowmik et al., 2018; Datta & Banik, 2014; Foulds, 2014; Henderson & Barnes, 2016). Without access to school, students cannot access the opportunities within schools. Furthermore, access to education and the opportunities offered must be equitable. Multiple authors spoke of organisational constraints that lead to inequity, such as closed enrolment (Baker, 2012; Militello et al., 2011), cost (Zhang & Luo, 2016; Zuze & Leibbrandt, 2011), need for parent involvement (Zhang & Luo, 2016), time (Zuze & Leibbrandt, 2011), and tracking (Gonzales et al., 2015; Schoener & McKenzie, 2016; Wilson et al., 2016).

Authors emphasised the importance of including all learners, meaning everyone—regardless of individual factors—should be able to participate in what the school offers (Baker, 2012; Bhowmik et al., 2018; Byrd, 2015, 2017; Chambers et al., 2014; Datta & Banik, 2014; Gonzales et al., 2015; Heafner & Fitchett, 2015; Henderson & Barnes, 2016). Unfortunately, this often is not the case, resulting in an opportunity gap where students who have been systemically marginalised or disadvantaged receive substandard classroom practices and fewer opportunities than their peers (Heafner & Fitchett, 2015). Specifically, authors spoke of differential access to foreign language courses (Schoener & McKenzie, 2016), arts (Baker, 2012), STEM (Grossman & Porche, 2014), and a rigorous maths curriculum (Spielhagen, 2010). For this reason, having advanced courses (e.g., advanced placement [AP]) or restricted entry into courses can create more inequity within schools.

Even when in the same classroom, opportunity for an equitable education is not guaranteed. Andersen and Andersen (2017) pointed out that student-centred instruction can reinforce inequity of EO, as its success depends on cultural knowledge and skills acquired or supported by one's family. Meanwhile, Foulds (2014) shared how the representation of women in Kenyan textbooks reinforced women's marginal position in the community. Thus, schools must first consider whether students are physically present in the school and classroom, and then whether the school is supporting individual learning needs by presenting a curriculum that empowers all learners and ensuring the learning material is appropriate.

Opportunity for education is also often discussed through the concept of opportunity to learn (OTL). OTL is a well-established concept that considers learning as a function of the time students are exposed to the intended curriculum (Wilson et al., 2016). Some authors simply defined it as time-on-task and exposure to subject matter (Liu et al., 2015; Oketch et al., 2012; Wilson et al., 2016), whereas others considered resources and variety in teaching, grouping and learning activities (Azigwe, 2016; Heafner & Fitchett, 2015). Despite the different interpretations, it is a well-established concept that recognises the importance of providing students with equitable access to the required content. Although many authors discussed 'learning opportunities', 'opportunities to learn', and 'opportunities for learning', only five (13%) referred to the established concept of OTL.

Opportunity through education

Authors also viewed education as a pathway to further opportunity (Gonzales et al., 2015), enhance self-sufficiency (Datta & Banik, 2014), and increase economic and social mobility. Specific opportunities that can arise from attending school include higher education enrolment and success (Bhowmik et al., 2018; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Gonzales et al., 2015; Sammons et al., 2018; Sattin-Bajaj et al., 2018; Taylor & Yan, 2018), career options and preparation for sustained employment (Bhowmik et al., 2018; Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Tatum, 2014), a high standard of living (Datta & Banik, 2014), gaining qualifications (Taylor & Yan, 2018), increased future prospects (Bhowmik et al., 2018), and developing to one's full potential in order to live a productive and meaningful life (Baker, 2012; Datta & Banik, 2014). Not only do schools equip students with the necessary skills to pursue these opportunities, but they also provide guidance about future options (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016).

Moreover, schools can be places where students cultivate a sense of citizenship, community and belonging in order to be able to contribute and participate in the wider community (Foulds, 2014; Gonzales et al., 2015). This is especially important for immigrant students, who can gain access to social membership as well as opportunities to experience civic and political engagement (Gonzales et al., 2015). Baker (2012) raised the point that a high-quality education 'empower[s] citizens to produce quality goods and services needed for advanced societies' (p. 23). Therefore, a quality education serves society, but at the same time it also enables students to attain social equity (Baker, 2012).

Gonzales et al. (2015) related this idea to the case of *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), where in the United States schools are meant to be places for undocumented students to access opportunity and hopefully contribute to the nation's progress. However, at the same time Gonzales et al. (2015) were wary, raising concern about the civic empowerment gap where access to resources and the opportunities to develop civic skills were limited in low-income communities with large immigrant populations. Even though schools can be havens for students and vehicles for mobility, larger structural issues may still impede full access to opportunities outside of school for some groups of students. Finally, Foulds (2014) directed the conversation back to the students themselves, saying that when we place the focus of equality onto the benefits to society and development, the pressure to improve is then placed on the students, rather than 'discriminatory societies' and 'institutionalized inequality' (p. 654). Therefore, in order to truly provide opportunity through education, system-level barriers must also be addressed.

Toward an educational opportunity framework

The framework was developed by first identifying school outcomes that authors discussed, and then by conducting a grounded theory analysis to identify input categories and subcategories that resulted in the outcome categories. The framework also includes *access* because before students can be affected by the identified school inputs, they must first have access to school.

The point of the framework is not to show direct correlations between individual inputs and outcomes, but rather to present the variety of inputs that have been reported to lead to outcomes within the reviewed articles. Table 3 presents the number of articles where input sub-categories intersect with each outcome category, but the absence of intersection does not denote that a relationship does not exist, it simply means that the relationship was not discussed within the reviewed articles. For instance, peer relationship was never presented in these articles as affecting behavioural outcomes, but it is likely that peers do in reality influence each other's behaviour.

TABLE 3   Number of articles with each input category and outcome

Input	Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other
ICE				
Teacher relationships	12	13	13	1
Community relationships	3	3	3	–
Peer relationships	3	–	6	–
Physical environment	6	6	3	–
Representation	6	3	10	–
E&AF	9	9	8	2
Mainstream access	4	4	7	2
Justice	6	5	6	2
RTAT				
Support	10	9	11	2
CR&D	8	5	5	3
Experts & development	8	9	10	1
ROTL				
Human	10	8	5	–
Courses	8	6	5	1
External	3	3	2	–
Material	6	3	3	–
CI				
Access	4	1	6	–
Variety	5	4	7	3
Rigour	11	7	6	3

Abbreviations: CR&D, culturally relevant and differentiated; E&AF, empowerment and academic focus.

Identifying student outcomes

In this review, we separated outcomes into four categories: cognitive, psychological, behavioural and other. Of the 39 articles, 64% ($n = 25$) looked at cognitive outcomes, 56% ($n = 22$) psychological, 44% ($n = 17$) behavioural, and 15% ($n = 6$) other. Even though we defined the outcome categories prior to the search, we were flexible in our approach, enabling unexpected variables to be coded. Table 4 presents the final items coded into each outcome category. Some items overlap between outcome categories; for instance, responsibility was coded as psychological when related to one's feelings and coded as behavioural when related to actions. In addition, most items could be coded as either negative or positive, but several psychological and behavioural items are only negative outcomes (as noted).

School inputs resulting in student outcomes

From the 39 articles (see Appendix for coding of each article), we developed four input categories: Inclusive Culture and Environment (ICE), Responsive Teaching and Appropriate Training (RTAT), Resources and Opportunity to Learn (ROTL), and Curriculum and Instruction (CI). This means that students should be able to attend a school that provides

TABLE 4 Final outcome coding

Cognitive	Achievement, Scores, Grades, Reading skills, Referral to special education, School track, AS/A-level success, Cognitive ability, Performance, College/ university readiness, Advanced placement success, Cultural knowledge
Psychological	Mental health, Interest, Engagement, Autonomy, Self-reliance, Freedom, Feeling responsible, Inclusion, Belonging, Well-being, Motivation, Trust, Confidence, Self-concept, Self-efficacy, Competence, Hope, Aspirations, Acceptance, Tolerance, Perceived fairness, Perceived control, Feeling capable, Community feel, Empathy *Negative only*: Exclusion, Marginalisation, Alienation, Feeling different, Being bullied, Humiliation
Behavioural	Participation (school, mainstream classrooms, political, clubs, college, rigorous courses, foreign language, programmes), Attendance, Behaviour (good/bad), Work ethic, Transition to mainstream, Generosity, Responsibility, Choice to attend good school, Preparedness (school, college/university, class) College/university applicant, Career plans, Drive, Studiousness, Involvement, Graduation *Negative only*: Drop-out, Agreeing to violence, Retention, Suspension, Absenteeism, Punishment
Other	Civic values, Civic engagement, Sport/club participation, Self-regulation, Ability to set goals, Social skills (communication, conflict resolution, group work), Leadership skills, Time management, Learning skills, Cultural competence, Processing skills

them with ICE, RTAT, ROTL and CI in order to succeed behaviourally, cognitively, psychologically and in other ways.

We focused the framework on inputs leading to positive outcomes; hence, when there were negative outcomes, we adjusted the input categories and sub-categories in order to present recommendations for what schools *should* do rather than *should not* do. For instance, 'lack of resources' changed to 'resources', and a decrease in grades, as a result, changed to an increase. Though this adjustment contributed to the development of the EO framework, we still report the findings of the articles (negative and positive) as stated by the authors, and more detailed results can be viewed in the Appendix.

Interestingly, in all but two cases, inputs resulted in exclusively negative or positive outcomes. The first exception was overly rigorous coursework that enabled some low-achieving students to feel more academic belonging but also struggle with self-efficacy and academics (Green et al., 2016). The other was unsupportive teachers, which forced students to be more self-reliant despite the other negative consequences (Vega et al., 2015). A final study also had mixed correlations, but because the study was testing the reliability and validity of a scale, this is to be expected (Byrd, 2017).

During our subsequent presentation of each input category, we at times reference sub-categories that fall under different input categories than the one under review. Although each input sub-category is nestled within an overarching input category, the inputs are not mutually exclusive; rather, they typically function in combination with other inputs. For instance, good teacher-student relationships (sub-category of ICE), in combination with rigour (sub-category of CI), may lead to positive cognitive and psychological outcomes. In another instance, a teacher may have positive relationships with students but their lessons lack rigour, resulting in merely positive psychological outcomes.

Inclusive culture and environment

Inclusive culture and environment was coded most frequently of all the input categories, found in 32 (82%) of the articles. ICE consists of six sub-categories, one of which—relationships—was coded into three distinct groups (peer, community, teacher). Teacher relationships were

coded for affecting cognitive, behavioural and psychological outcomes more than any other input sub-category. Teachers and staff play a strong role in setting the school culture and norms: by genuinely caring, showing students respect and having high expectations of all students, teachers/staff can help meet students' psychological needs and empower students to learn, resulting in increased cognitive and behavioural outcomes (Militello et al., 2011). Relationships are also important between teachers and the community—and students and the community—given that collaboration, communication and shared roles resulted in positive cognitive, behavioural and psychological outcomes in a couple of studies (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Militello et al., 2011). The final relationship group—peers—was presented in seven of the articles where it was found to affect cognitive and/or psychological outcomes. For instance, Green et al. (2016) found that peer support on schoolwork had a positive effect on students' academic belonging, self-efficacy and perception that they were able to meet challenging academic demands.

The physical environment is another component of ICE that affects students behaviourally, cognitively and psychologically: schools should be safe with proper facilities, and students should not be lost in the crowd; rather they should be able to build close relationships with their peers, teachers and staff (Gonzales et al., 2015; Henderson & Barnes, 2016). The physical environment and supportive culture should enable students to feel welcome and a sense of belonging within a community. This applies to all students, meaning their differences are embraced without allowing majority values or biases to be presented as normative.

To be truly inclusive, schools must also consider another ICE sub-category: representation. For instance, Pásztor (2010) suggested that immigrant children often possess different norms, values and cultural practices than those required by the school, meaning, 'school advice may embody gendered or raced practices' (p. 68). One way to ameliorate this lack of alignment is for schools to follow Chambers et al.'s (2014) suggestion and hire staff that are racially representative of the student population. School content also matters for representation, as was discussed in Foulds's (2014) research on the reinforcement of gender roles in textbooks. In nearly all articles coded for representation, the articles were also coded for empowerment and academic focus: school culture should empower learners by emphasising academics for all and providing the necessary information to enable students to make informed choices.

In addition, schools should provide adequate support to ensure students can participate in mainstream classrooms as much as possible. Henderson and Barnes's (2016) research into whether alternative learning centres (ALCs) promoted dimensions of social inclusion encompassed most of the ICE categories, with an emphasis on mainstream access. Instead of suspension or alternative school placement, which reinforces school exclusion especially for economically disadvantaged ethnic minorities, students were placed in ALCs for 10–90 days as a result of extreme or repeated transgressions. Although the purpose of ALCs was to temporarily remove students from mainstream classrooms, what occurred within the ALCs ultimately provided the opportunity for students to gain skills and successfully transition back to school; thus, affecting all outcome categories. Henderson and Barnes (2016) found several key factors that facilitated a path for these students to return to mainstream classrooms: trusting relationships with adults, a focus on empowering students to make good choices, positive behavioural and academic support, and smaller learning environments that are responsive to students' needs.

Inclusion in school and in classrooms also requires practices and policies that are positive, non-discriminatory and just (sub-category: justice). Mahmoudi et al. (2018) claimed that when students perceive an unequal distribution of educational facilities and opportunities, their academic motivation decreases, leading to feelings of academic alienation (psychological outcomes). Similarly, Gorard's (2011) unique study into potential determinants of students' sense of justice revealed that the students who are treated best in school 'tend to

have the most positive outlook on trust, civic values, and sense of justice' (p. 49). The resulting positive behavioural, psychological and other outcomes were due to just practices combined with RTAT inputs, such as teachers' respect for all their students and their opinions, teachers providing students autonomy and the ability to work at their own speed, teachers only using discrimination in proper domains (differentiation based on need), and the lack of abuse from other pupils (Gorard, 2011).

Responsive teaching and appropriate training

Responsive teaching and appropriate training affected outcomes in 30 (77%) of the articles, complementing ICE in highlighting teacher-student relationships. Each RTAT category was found to affect all outcome categories at least once. The sub-category of support entails teachers listen to, respect and protect their students' privacy. In one study, low-achieving migrants were made the target of jokes because students' scores and class rank were posted publicly (Zhang & Luo, 2016). Though the practice was meant to motivate students, it resulted in public shaming and further ostracism (Zhang & Luo, 2016).

Support also means having high expectations for students. For instance, St. Mary et al. (2018) found that teachers played a vital role in the academic success of Black and African American students. In particular, students often encountered negative perceptions and stereotypes related to race, SES and their home environment, but this could be countered with teachers' high expectations of students regardless of background, and their awareness of their positionality in relation to their marginalised students. When teachers ignored students' background or exhibited colour-blind attitudes, Byrd (2015) found that students felt more disconnected from school and viewed their academic abilities more negatively. This relates to culturally relevant teaching (sub-category: culturally relevant and differentiated) where teachers must acknowledge students' cultures and use their background as a resource (Byrd, 2015, 2017).

Culturally relevant teaching aligns with differentiated instruction because lacking certain knowledge or capital should not impede learning. Differentiation is often linked to student-centred, interactive approaches, which have been popularised as a means to reduce social inequity. However, two authors specifically argued against this approach. First, Andersen and Andersen (2017) saw this movement as counterproductive, claiming student-centred instruction might actually perpetuate inequity by assuming students understand certain social and cultural codes. Student-centred teaching is often less explicit making it harder for students who are economically disadvantaged to access the curriculum. Furthermore, Heafner and Fitchett (2015) found experiential, multimodal instruction was negatively associated with achievement on US history tests, possibly due to the loss of more direct instructional time. Although these two examples appear to contradict the general shift toward student-centred pedagogy, they actually show that student-centred classrooms can also use more traditional approaches. Essentially, teachers must consider the backgrounds first, then plan and differentiate curriculum based on those needs, ensuring the instruction is relevant to the students.

In order to provide support, differentiation and culturally relevant teaching, staff (counsellors, teachers, school psychologists, etc.) must possess a variety of knowledge and skills, and schools should focus on continuous professional development (sub-category: experts and development). Teachers need to have the proper training to effectively implement the curriculum, but staff must also be trained in supporting the needs of all students (trauma, ability, language, intercultural competence, etc.). For instance, Aydin and Kaya (2017) found that Syrian refugee students struggled in Turkish schools partly because the schools lacked trained psychologists who could help them overcome trauma (psychological outcomes).

Experts are also necessary when it comes to ensuring decisions are not marked by bias. Lanfranchi (2014) analysed the assessment procedures primary school teachers and school psychologists in Switzerland used to decide whether to refer students for placement in special education or in-class support. Lanfranchi (2014) found that school psychologists demonstrated less prejudice and higher intercultural competence in their decision-making when compared to teachers. Considering this, schools must deeply consider who makes decisions and by what criteria they are made to ensure decisions are equitable and those responsible are informed experts.

Resources and opportunity to learn

Opportunity to learn is a well-established concept that has been interpreted in a variety of ways. The ROTL category involves aspects of the traditional OTL concept, but we chose to call it ROTL in order to not complicate the concept of OTL by contributing yet another interpretation. ROTL was coded in 23 (59%) articles and it consists of four sub-categories: human resources, courses (what is offered), external resources (what forms of connections schools have to external agencies, universities/colleges, and parents), and material resources. Human resources were discussed in 13 (33%) articles, impacting cognitive, behavioural and psychological outcomes more than any other ROTL category. This relates to the ICE and RTAT categories, where the human factor is most salient.

For all ROTL sub-categories, both quantity and quality matters, but the emphasis is on availability. In the case of human resources, a large school may have excellent counsellors, but if the student–staff ratio is too low then they will lack the time needed to reach each student (Gonzales et al., 2015). This lack of time can impact teacher morale and well-being, which ultimately affects students' cognitive outcomes (Palardy et al., 2015; Zuze & Leibbrandt, 2011). At the same time, larger schools may be able to offer more courses (sub-category): in Burney's (2010) study of 339 public high schools, students in larger schools tended to perform better (cognitive outcomes). Burney (2010) discovered that the size of school correlated with the number of AP course offerings, which could explain the variance in achievement. Thus, school size matters to the extent that it affects what the school can offer the students.

This is evident in Militello et al.'s (2011) research into 18 award-winning US high schools with a high percentage of low SES students. In order to improve college readiness (cognitive), the schools implemented policies and programmes that made courses openly available, including open AP enrolment (Militello et al., 2011). In fact, the study touched on all four ROTL sub-categories (as well as the three other input categories), which contributed to positive psychological, behavioural and cognitive outcomes. For example, the schools employed external resources (sub-category), such as developing strong relations with alumni and providing opportunities for students to visit colleges with teacher mentors (Militello et al., 2011).

As highlighted, availability is key to ROTL. Concerning the final sub-category, material resources, Morningstar et al., (2015) noticed that classrooms where learning technologies were available and used by teachers had the greatest potential for learner participation (behavioural outcomes). Similarly, Oketch et al., (2012) found that the availability of non-basic learning material (e.g., visual aids, charts), in addition to smaller pupil–teacher ratios, positively affected cognitive outcomes.

Unfortunately, through tracking and other organisational constraints, exposure to resources (material, human and external) and courses is often unequitable (Gonzales et al., 2015; Pásztor, 2010; Schoener & McKenzie, 2016; Wilson et al., 2016). For instance, in a study of maths tracking, the 8th graders assigned to a lower-level maths group—which they felt was based on behaviour not ability—believed their teachers lacked experience and competence, whereas the advanced group attributed much of their success to their

teachers (Spielhagen, 2010). The differences in access to advanced maths courses and skilled teachers affected all four outcome categories (Spielhagen, 2010).

Curriculum and instruction

The final input category, CI, was found in 25 (64%) articles and it consists of three sub-categories: access, variety and rigour. The sub-category of access refers to the necessity for the curriculum to be comprehensible to all students, meaning a 'hidden curriculum' and biased beliefs should not inhibit the success of certain students (Foulds, 2014; Zhang & Luo, 2016). Instead, students should be provided with need-based modifications, adaptations, remedial support and technological resources to support them in accessing the curriculum (Morningstar et al., 2015).

Moreover, students must have the option to participate in a variety (sub-category) of experiences and courses to build twenty-first century skills, including access and enrolment in foreign language courses (Schoener & McKenzie, 2016), arts education (Baker, 2012), and AP courses (Militello et al., 2011; Taylor & Yan, 2018). For instance, Cajic-Seigneur and Hodgson (2016) showed how a mixture of academic and vocational hands-on subjects led to students' re-engagement with education because students could see the relevance of these courses to their future career options, improving both psychological and cognitive outcomes. Similarly, Proehl et al.'s (2017) research revealed the importance of variety in broadening opportunities through education. Proehl et al. (2017) investigated the factors that made one US Catholic school successful in developing students' non-cognitive skills, which partially contributed to the high rates of graduation and college enrolment. In addition to a shared mission, family culture, high learning expectations and goal setting, the school also incorporated socio-emotional learning through a counselling programme, class retreats, extracurricular activities, and classroom and family meetings. Through these experiences, students developed communication skills, the ability to deal with conflict and leadership skills (other outcomes), all of which contribute to success in school and beyond (Proehl et al., 2017).

In addition to a variety of offerings, numerous authors discussed the importance of rigour (sub-category). Rigour includes the complexity of texts and materials, high teacher expectations, modelling to meet those expectations, and considering what is rigorous for each individual. For example, in a study exploring a differentiated approach to a science and technology curriculum that emphasised depth and complexity, the group who experienced the more rigorous curriculum performed significantly better on the post-test for academic achievement (cognitive outcomes) and scientific process skills (other outcomes) than the control group (Çalikoğlu & Kahveci, 2015). In another study of a rigorously academic STEM school, researchers found that the rigorous environment supported many of the students' sense of academic and/or social belonging; however, some students reported feeling out of place when they struggled to achieve academically (Green et al., 2016). The authors suggested that schools consider Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, ensuring students are challenged enough, but not too much where they experience academic failure (Green et al., 2016). Moreover, Green et al. (2016) explained that schools must find a balance between high expectations and creating a warm, supportive environment with caring relationships, hence balancing ICE and CI.

DISCUSSION

What has been reiterated throughout this article is the need to focus on how schools can improve outcomes for all students. This means that schools should adapt inputs based on

the needs of students, and they should also consider how these inputs affect psychological, behavioural, cognitive and other outcomes. Over half of the literature considered cognitive outcomes, such as good grades, high test scores, college readiness and advanced school track, to be positive results from school inputs. The fact that most researchers focused on cognitive outcomes is logical, given the primary purpose of school is to educate; however, the common desire to hold schools accountable to ensure student learning often leads to creating tests that 'reduce learning to the acquisition of economically useful skills (human capital)' (Labaree, 2014, p. 2). Thus, the articles also made evident the necessity of considering the other ways in which schools can influence students. Without other skills or having one's psychological needs met, students may struggle to apply their academic knowledge, or they may not even have the motivation to do so. All outcomes are inevitably connected, meaning support must be directed towards all of them.

An additional layer in assessing outcomes is considering whether opportunity is for education or through education. Authors typically viewed open access to education as the first step to opportunity for education. Once students have access to an education, the education provided must be equitable, with schools putting the needs of all their students at the forefront. By doing these things, students can also be successful outside of school, resulting in opportunities through education. Even though opportunity for education was presented the most, those researchers often discussed opportunity through education as well. In most cases, it is necessary to first achieve opportunity for education before opportunity through education, and so both standpoints are valued.

What the opportunity looks like in practice is represented by the four input categories we developed through the grounded analysis: ICE, ROTL, RTAT and CI. The input category that was found in the most number of articles was ICE. The prevalence of ICE could be due to it consisting of more sub-categories than the other categories, or because ICE acts as an overall foundation for what occurs within the school. It includes the actual physical structure along with a welcoming culture, which envelops many of the other input categories. Teacher relationships, a sub-category of ICE, was also found to impact behavioural, cognitive and psychological outcomes in more articles than any other sub-category. The human element of education appeared in all of the input categories and many of the sub-categories, and it could be argued as being the most important contributor to the success of students. The adult figures in school are responsible for supporting, empowering and engaging students, and without good relationships, student success primarily depends on the student. Moreover, schools must provide adequate resources, a variety of experiences and courses, a rigorous curriculum, and ensure these experiences are relevant to the needs of the students.

To return to Westen's (1985) framework for making statements about opportunity, we claim that schools should provide all students (agent) with equitable EOs (input) to support psychological, cognitive, behavioural and other outcomes (goal), regardless of individual factors (obstacles; e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, SES, ability, etc.), and absent of restrictive organisational structures (obstacles; e.g., tracking, closed enrolment, cost, etc.). Conceptually EO in the statement encapsulates both opportunity for and through education, but in practice it refers to the four input categories. These input categories are interconnected and ambitious, but not impossible. This is also not a recipe for success, rather a guide for schools to consider. As renowned educationist Dylan Wiliam (2006) said, 'Everything works somewhere and nothing works everywhere'. Thus, the concept of EO operationally defined here is not prescriptive, but considers all students, both as a group and individually, when considering how ICE, ROTL, RTAT and CI can be present in schools. It is context-dependent, in that certain schools need to place more weight on one input category or sub-category over another based on the student body. It also must be based on the needs and values of society.

In its current state, EO is often provided based on the needs and norms of the dominant group (Chambers et al., 2014). In order to achieve true equity, schools must reconsider

whom schools are designed to support. For instance, if a low SES female and high SES male wish to pursue a career in chemistry, they should have equitable opportunities to do so with the appropriate support based on their individual needs. This means that they both should have access to that pathway, but they may require different support in order to be successful. This also means that a third student who wishes to pursue art can do so, and the outcomes expected of the three are not the same.

With that said, this review comes with limitations, such as:

> …we do not know *a priori* which kind of life different individuals value and which achievements are a matter of individual choice or social constraint, and so may end up using proxies in the form of goods (educational expenditure, school facilities) and achievements (learning outcomes).
>
> (UIS, 2018, p. 21)

Furthermore, Lazenby (2016) argued, 'often when people claim they are in favor of equality of opportunity, they are, consciously or not, invoking some further value' (p. 74). Despite the attempt in this review to remain value-neutral, we still write under the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognised the rights of all children to grow and develop in safe, loving environments (United Nations, 1989). Therefore, the concept of EO presented here is not without its limitations or biases, but it is also based on research from a range of cultures and contexts, both individualistic and collectivist. The main contributor was the United States, a highly individualistic country, but the reviewed articles also included research conducted in 11 (excluding the three multinational articles) other countries.

Although the four input categories appear to align with individualistic values, they in many ways can be observed within both individualist and collectivist contexts; one can still have individual goals within a collectivist society, and those goals are often best met by pedagogical practices that are in line with societal values. For example, relationships in collectivist societies are typically seen as hierarchical, where the large power distance dissuades students from disrespecting their teachers through questioning (Hofstede, 2001). Although individualists may see this as silencing, collectivists see it as necessary to sustain harmony (Hofstede, 2001). Thus, positive relationships, among other inputs, manifest differently between contexts.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this review was to explore how researchers have measured EO, and to develop a more comprehensive understanding of what EO looks like in practice. The four input categories that we identified through the grounded theory analysis—ICE, RTAT, ROTL and CI—represent EO applied in schools. The framework derived here considers EO as something that contributes to a variety of outcomes in order for each student to succeed in school and out, without restrictive organisational structures. Rather than solely focusing on cognitive outcomes, schools should also consider how they are affecting psychological, behavioural and other outcomes.

Opportunities received in school can influence one's life outside of school, but students must have the skills and motivation to apply what they have learned. Therefore, the concept of EO outlined in this paper supports opportunity for and through education, and the framework also suggests schools reconsider their intended outcomes. Moreover, the school inputs may not be the same for everyone, but they should be equitable based on the student's needs. In the same vein, outcomes will not be the same for everyone, but they should also

be equitable based on individual goals. Students are often expected to fit into the requirements of the curriculum, teachers and/or staff, rather than the teachers and staff adjusting to meet the diverse needs of students. Thus, the framework is flexible in both structure and application. Educators can use it to consider areas they may want to improve or emphasise based on who their students are and the learning context, or to celebrate what they are doing particularly well. Researchers may also choose to use the framework as a tool to explore EO within specific contexts, and if necessary, adapt it or make further suggestions.

That said, this review did not address personal effort nor system level factors that may impede one's ability to access opportunity for or through education. Student outcomes are also affected by systemic barriers, such as the lack of access to preschool, tracking systems, between-school segregation, gender-based societal expectations, lack of qualified and diverse teachers, and costs related to further education. The issues outside of a school's control that contribute to outcomes must also be fully assessed, but this requires analysis into country-specific policies and practices. We recommend further research into the intersections of individual characteristics as they relate to EO, as well as system-level barriers to opportunity for and through education. Moreover, we did not present the various theoretical and historical works on EO because the aim of this paper was to conceptualise it through others' empirical research. However, a review of the theoretical and historical literature could further contribute to the conceptual framework presented in this paper.

ETHICS APPROVAL STATEMENT

Due to the nature of this article, we did not need to consider ethics as it pertains to participants' rights. Instead, the data in this article comes from reviewing already published peer-reviewed articles, thus we are mostly concerned with transparency. For this reason, in the Appendix we provide specific details of how we coded each reviewed article. Furthermore, both authors have been in total agreement regarding the content of the manuscript and order of authorship.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Public data sets are used.

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APPENDIX

The coding of each article in the table below presents the connection between the input categories and input sub-categories, and the student outcome categories. A key for the abbreviations is presented after the table.

TABLE A1   Coding of articles

Article	Study details[a]	Opp.	Input Codes	Input Categories	Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other	Summary of results
					Input sub-categories resulting in each outcome category				
Andersen and Andersen (2017)	Denmark; Comparative; Questionnaire and exam data	For	Student-centred teaching	ICE RTAT CI	Rep, CR&D Access				Student-centred instruction had a significant negative effect on student math achievement ($p \leq 0.01$), but the effect decreased as parental education increases
Aydin and Kaya (2017)	Turkey; Case study: Interviews, observations, and documents	For	Language support, trauma training/ psychologists	ICE RTAT ROTL	MA, E&D, HR	MA, E&D, HR	E&D, HR		A lack of language training and psychological counselling creates challenges for refugees to integrate, find academic success, and overcome trauma
Azigwe (2016)	1st stage OECD countries, 2nd stage UK, Canada. New Zealand, Japan, Korea, and Tunisia; Comparative, cross-sectional; PISA data	For OTL	Diverse reading materials, qualified teachers, expectations, disciplinary climate	ICE RTAT ROTL	Support, MR, HR, Justice				OTL (e.g. diversity in reading, joy/like reading) variables and factors related to the school learning environment (e.g. qualified teachers, disciplinary climate) had a significant positive effect on reading literacy ($p < 0.05$). Low expectations from teachers had a negative effect ($p < 0.05$)

(Continues)

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Article	Study details[a]	Opp.	Input Codes	Categories	Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other	Summary of results
Baker (2012)	USA; Comparative; Test scores and course enrolment (Louisiana Educational Assessment Program)	For, Through	Enrolment in arts	ROTL, CI	Courses, Variety				Students enrolled in music performed 5–9 points better on English and 4–8 points better on maths tests than those who did not take music class
Bhowmik et al. (2018)	Hong Kong; Case study; Interviews and documents	For, Through	Expectations, discrimination, support, cultural understanding	ICE, RTAT		TR, Support			The student's choice to drop out of school was likely influenced by the lack of a welcoming school environment, low expectations, and little personalised support
Burney (2010)	USA; Correlational; Demographics and test scores (PSAT, SAT, AP)	For	# of AP courses	ROTL, CI	Courses, Rigour, Variety				While a large part of variance in performance was explained by sociocultural context (63.1%), the availability of advanced academics did have an influence (17%). In addition, the number of academic extracurricular activities and competitions offered at elementary level also had a small influence (7%)

Input sub-categories resulting in each outcome category

(Continues)

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Article	Study details[a]	Opp.	Input		Input sub-categories resulting in each outcome category				Summary of results
			Codes	Categories	Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other	
Byrd (2015)	USA; Cross-sectional; Survey	For	Colour blind, quality interactions, learning about cultures, school racial climate	ICE RTAT			TR, Rep, E&D, PR		Students who perceived teachers and peers held negative stereotypes and who received more colour-blind messages reported lower feelings of belonging and competence ($B = -0.25$, $p = 0.02$; $B = -0.23$, $p = 0.02$). Perceiving opportunities to learn about other cultures resulted in greater feelings of belonging ($B = 0.29$, $p = 0.01$)
Byrd (2017)	USA; Correlational; Scale	For	School racial climate, general school climate, culturally relevant teaching	ICE RTAT CI	Justice, PR, Support, Variety, CR&D		Justice, PR, Support, Variety, CR&D		Equal status was moderately positively associated with clarity of rules ($p < 0.001$). School racial climate correlated with support for cultural pluralism ($p < 0.001$). Perceived discrimination had a moderate correlation with equal status ($p < 0.001$), and a high correlation with stereotyping ($p < 0.001$). Culturally relevant teaching correlated with cultural socialisation and critical consciousness socialisation ($p < 0.001$). Most indicators of a positive racial climate were associated with positive academic outcomes ($p < 0.05$)

(Continues)

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Article	Study details[a]	Opp.	Input Codes	Categories	Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other	Summary of results
Cajic-Seigneur and Hodgson (2016)	England; Case study, longitudinal; Documents, discussions, interviews, and questionnaire	For, Through	Support, respect, class size, # of staff, vocational classes, positive discipline, collaboration w. families	ICE RTAT ROTL CI	TR, Support, PE, HR, Courses, Variety, Justice, CR, ER	TR, Support, PE, HR, CR, ER	TR, Support, Courses, Variety, Justice,		The study shows the need for appropriate and engaging curriculum. In addition, the supportive environment that gave students autonomy and freedom helped improve behaviours and academic outcomes. Different teaching strategies and learning experiences enable engagement of different kinds of learners
Çalikoğlu and Kahveci (2015)	Turkey; Experimental; Pre- and post-tests	For	Differentiation, depth and complexity in science curriculum	RTAT CI	CR&D, Rigor			CR&D, Rigor	The treatment group (differentiated science curriculum) performed significantly better on the post-test for academic achievement and scientific process skills than the control group ($z = -2.084$, $p < 0.05$, $r = -0.64$). There was no significant difference in attitudes between groups, though both increased post-test
Chambers et al. (2014)	USA; Phenomenological; Interviews and focus groups	For	Racialised school structures	ICE ROTL CI			Rep, Courses, Access		School spaces racialised as White caused students of colour to feel isolated, to struggle with identity, and to be put on display as an icon of school success

(Continues)

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Article	Study details[a]	Opp.	Input Codes	Categories	Input sub-categories resulting in each outcome category				Summary of results
					Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other	
Datta and Banik (2014)	India; Longitudinal; Enrolment and exam data	For Through	Teacher training, empathy, play-oriented	ICE RTAT		Support, CR&D, E&D, TR			The platform schools were successful due to their flexibility, interactive teaching methodology, emphasis on functionality, using familiar objects as aids, and the use of performance arts. The enrolment number increased over time, as did the number of students who graduated to class 3 and then were admitted to government schools
Foulds (2014)	Kenya; Case study; Interviews	For Through	Hidden curriculum, gender responsive curriculum/books	ICE ROTL CI			E&AF, Access, Rep, MR		School textbooks reinforced women's marginal position and send mixed messages about their role in society
Gonzales et al. (2015)	USA; Grounded theory; Interviews	For Through	Care, encouragement, promoting democracy/ leadership/ activities, overcrowded, underfunded, tracking, labels, expectations	ICE RTAT ROTL CI		TR, PE, Support, Justice, E&AF, Variety, MR, HR	TR, PE, Support, Justice, E&AF, Variety, MR, HR, Rep, Courses	Justice, Support, E&AF, Variety	Positive interactions with teachers and counsellors provided students opportunities to develop leadership skills and gain relevant civic experiences, enabling them to develop identities inside the cultural membership. Schools with fewer resources (human) and larger classes left students feeling excluded from the system

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Article	Study details[a]	Opp.	Input Codes	Categories	Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other	Summary of results
Gorard (2011)	Belgium, Czech Republic, England, France, and Italy; Comparative; Questionnaire	For Through	Fair, principles of equity, respect, modelling good citizenship, bullying	ICE RTAT		TR, Justice, Support, E&D	TR, PR, Justice, Support, E&D	TR, Justice, Support, E&D	Students that were respected and treated fairly in school were more trusting, tolerant and had stronger positive feelings towards social justice/what is fair in the world. Students that had been bullied in school were less in favour of discrimination for fairness (giving extra help to those who struggle) and more tolerant of violence
Green et al. (2016)	USA; Longitudinal; Interviews	For	Social environment (support), level of rigour, care	ICE RTAT CI	TR, PR, Support, CR&D, Rigour		TR, PR, Support, CR&D, Rigour		Perceived academic fit, availability of academic challenge, and acceptability of academic values helped students feel a sense of belonging at STEM school. Students with a strong sense of academic belonging found enjoyment in the school's academic structure and how school would benefit them in the future, while those who didn't feel academic belonging reported their difficulties in achieving academic success. Support with academic work from peers or teachers also increased academic belonging

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Article	Study details[a]	Opp.	Input		Input sub-categories resulting in each outcome category				Summary of results
			Codes	Categories	Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other	
Grossman and Porche (2014)	USA; Sequential; Survey and interviews	For Through	Microassaults, perceived support for STEM	ICE RTAT			TR, PR, Rep, E&AF, Support		Higher science aspirations significantly predicted perceived STEM support for girls (OR = 1.46, 95 percent CI: 1.03, 2.06). Family and teacher support helped students cope with perceived microaggressions
Heafner and Fitchett (2015)	USA; Correlational, cross-sectional; National Assessment of Educational Progress in US History data	For OTL	High concentration of poverty/black students, online instruction, text-dependent instruction, multimodal pedagogy	ICE ROTL RTAT CI	PE, MR, TR, PR, CR, CR&D, Access				Motivational indicators, exposure to instruction, and text-dependent (not multimodal) instruction were significantly associated with students' performance
Henderson and Barnes (2016)	USA; Exploratory; Interviews, site visits, documents	For Through	Support, trust, safety, expectations, psychosocial skills, positive behavioural modification	ICE RTAT CI	TR, PE, E&AF, Support, MA, CR&D, Variety	TR, PE, E&AF, Support, MA, CR&D, Variety, Justice, E&D	TR, PE, E&AF, Support, MA, CR&D, Variety	MA, CR&D, Variety	The alternative learning centres provided a means for social inclusion through access, success through empowerment, participation and engagement. A majority (67%) of students in the alternative learning centres successfully transitioned back to traditional classrooms

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Article	Study details[a]	Opp.	Input Codes	Input Categories	Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other	Summary of results
Lanfranchi (2014)	Switzerland; Comparative; Questionnaire and hypothetical paper case	For Through	Perceptions (psychologists/teachers), experience, intercultural competence, resources	ICE RTAT ROTL	Rep, E&D, Justice, PE, MR, HR, ER				School psychologists' attitudes were mostly unbiased and applied fair and culturally competent assessment procedures. Teachers' referral choices were more ethnically biased, referring the supposed Kosovo-Albanian student for special education or behavioural disorders significantly more often ($\chi^2 = 6.23$, df = 1, $p < 0.05$, or $\chi^2 = 4.20$, df = 1, $p < 0.05$)
Liu et al. (2015)	28 OECD countries; Cross-sectional; PISA	For OTL	Disciplinary climate, school organisation/ management, teacher behaviour	ICE	Justice, TR				Disciplinary climate and student morale and had significantly positive effects upon maths achievement ($p < 0.01$), as did teacher behaviour, though at the 0.05 level. School autonomy and teacher participation in school decision-making had significantly negative effects ($p < 0.05$). High SES schools seemed to have better school climate (better discipline, higher morale). Low SES schools seemed to give more support to students and had higher consensus among teachers on maths teaching

(Continues)

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Article	Study details[a]	Opp.	Input		Categories	Input sub-categories resulting in each outcome category				Summary of results
			Codes			**Cognitive**	**Behavioural**	**Psychological**	**Other**	
Mahmoudi et al. (2018)	Iran; Correlational; Questionnaire	For	Meeting psychological needs, school culture		ICE RTAT CI	TR, MA, Support, E&D, Variety, Rep, Justice, E&AF		TR, MA, Support, E&D, Variety, Rep, Justice, E&AF		Student-teacher relationships and educational opportunity (quality and quantity of educational services) had a significant negative effect on academic alienation ($p < 0.001$). Feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness also negatively influenced students' feelings of academic alienation ($p < 0.001$)
Militello et al. (2011)	USA; Case study, descriptive; Interviews, observations, memos	For Through	College counselling centre, college connections, expectations, open AP enrolment, bilingual staff, mentor programme, shared responsibility		ICE RTAT ROTL CI	TR, CR, PE, Support, MR, HR, ER, E&AF, CR&D, Courses, Rigour	TR, CR, PE, Support, MR, HR, ER, E&AF, CR&D, Courses, Rigour	TR, CR, E&AF, ER, MA, Access, E&D, HR		The schools improved college readiness by developing collaborative practices. This included more flexible roles and shared tasks by stakeholders, college visits, parental outreach, forming external partnerships, and more

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Article	Study details[a]	Opp.	Input		Input sub-categories resulting in each outcome category				Summary of results
			Codes	Categories	Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other	
Morningstar et al. (2015)	USA; Descriptive; Observations, field notes	For Through	Teaching from board, flexible groupings, co-teaching, learning technologies, individual support plans, modifications	ICE RTAT ROTL CI		TR, E&D, HR, Variety, MA, MR, Justice, CR&D, Access	TR, PR, MA, Access		Co-teaching contributed to high levels of student participation. Whole class instruction and flexible groupings were most successful. Learning technologies used by educators helped students access the content and participate. Teachers presented the content in a variety of ways and students were given multiple means of expressing their learning. There were positive classroom climates and individual behaviour support plans
Oketch et al. (2012)	Kenya; Observational; Video observations, questionnaire, and test scores	For OTL	Content coverage, non-basic teaching and learning materials, pupil teacher ratio	ROTL	Courses, MR, HR				An increase in pupil teacher ratio (above 45) was associated with a significant decrease ($p < 0.05$) in pupil IRT (item response theory) gain score. Students' IRT score was significantly higher in schools with non-basic teaching and learning materials ($p < 0.01$)

(Continues)

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Article	Study details[a]	Opp.	Input Codes	Categories	Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other	Summary of results
						Input sub-categories resulting in each outcome category			
Palardy et al. (2015)	USA; Longitudinal; Survey	For Through	Teacher morale, school size, emphasis on academics, classroom disruptions, school-wide disorder	ICE ROTL CI	HR, E&AF, Rigour, PE, Justice	PE, HR, E&AF, Rigour			School segregation negatively impacted teacher morale, academic performance, and school behaviours morale ($p < 0.01$). Teacher morale and academic performance were also positively associated ($p < 0.1$). There was a positive association between homework and achievement ($p < 0.1$) as well as school behaviours ($p < 0.05$). School-wide disorder and abuse was negatively associated with school behaviours ($p < 0.05$) and level of classroom disruptions was negatively associated with academic performance ($p < 0.05$)
Pásztor (2010)	Netherlands; Narrative, exploratory; Interviews	Through	Mislabelling, expectations	ICE RTAT CI	TR, Rep, E&AF, E&D, Rigour		Rep, E&D, Rigour		Cultural differences can cause teachers to misinterpret behaviours or hold biased opinions. The selective school system can result in students being placed on the wrong track

(Continues)

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Article	Study details[a]	Opp.	Input		Input sub-categories resulting in each outcome category				Summary of results
			Codes	Categories	Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other	
Proehl et al. (2017)	USA; Case study, exploratory; Documents, observations, interviews, and student essays	For Through	Positivity, expectations, goal setting, service/volunteering, socio-emotional learning, leadership opportunities	ICE RTAT ROTL CI		TR, E&AF, Support, Rigour, CR, ER, Variety, MA, Courses	CR&D, Variety, Rigour, CR, MA	CR&D, Variety, Rigour, MA	The school's shared mission of providing choice and options for the poor, the family atmosphere emphasising relationships, the holistic education, the staff's commitment to student-centredness and high expectations, and the safe learning environment resulted in positive non-cognitive outcomes. Students were able to persevere in the face of challenges, set goals for the future, commit to serving others, develop strong socio-emotional skills (effective communication, conflict-resolution, collaboration), and possessed grit

TABLE A1 (Continued)

| Article | Study details[a] | Opp. | Input | | Input sub-categories resulting in each outcome category | | | | Summary of results |
			Codes	Categories	Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other	
Sammons et al. (2018)	England; Longitudinal; Interviews, questionnaires, and assessments	For Through	Trust, respect, fairness, formative feedback, monitoring, focus on learning,	ICE RTAT	Support, E&D, TR, E&AF				The experience of enrichment activities (outside of school learning opportunities) increased the likelihood of students to attain four or more AS-levels nearly fourfold ($p < 0.001$). Attending a secondary school rated as high quality increased the probability of students attaining the AS benchmark and attending a primary school of high quality increased the chances of children being identified as high attainers ($p < 0.05$). Students who reported positive educational experiences in lower secondary school were more likely to attain four or more AS-levels ($p < 0.05$ to $p < 0.01$)

(Continues)

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Article	Study details[a]	Opp.	Input Codes	Categories	Input sub-categories resulting in each outcome category				Summary of results
					Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other	
Sattin-Bajaj et al. (2018)	USA; Comparative; Interviews, survey, and administrative data	For Through	Directional vs. generic vs. procedural counsellor	ICE RTAT ROTL		TR, E&AF, CR&D, E&D, HR			The directional counsellors on average had more experience and the students seemed to benefit from their approach. However, this approach might be largely dependent on teachers' knowledge and experience. Students served by counsellors giving generic advice did better than those who had procedural counsellors, but worse than those with directional counsellors
Schoener and Mckenzie (2016)	USA; Critical interpretivist; Interviews, Focus groups, achievement data, and documents	For Through	Deficit views, colour blind, paralogical beliefs, organisational constraints, foreign language access	ICE RTAT ROTL CI		TR, Rep, E&AF, E&D, Rigour, PE, Courses			Equity traps (deficit views, racial erasure, paralogical beliefs and organisational constraints) contributed to the foreign language achievement gap

TABLE A1 (Continued)

| Article | Study details[a] | Opp. | Input | | Input sub-categories resulting in each outcome category | | | | Summary of results |
			Codes	Categories	Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other	
Spielhagen (2010)	USA; Exploratory, case study; Interviews	For Through	Tracking, teacher competence and experience, misjudging based on behaviour, teaching to the test	ICE RTAT ROTL CI	TR, Rep, E&AF, E&D, HR, Courses, Rigour	TR, Rep, E&AF, E&D, HR, Courses, Rigour	TR, Rep, E&AF, E&D, HR, Courses, Rigour	E&AF, Courses, Rigour	8th-grade mathematics experiences impacted students' academic and social experiences as well as their future plans. Those who took algebra felt positive about their academic experiences, planned to attend 4-year colleges, and shared career goals. Those who did not take algebra were less positive about their academic experiences and took fewer maths courses. All the students perceived that policy of assigning students to algebra was determined by developmental behaviours, rather than cognitive ability. The students felt that algebra instruction for all would level the playing field and open the gates to further academic opportunities

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Article	Study details[a]	Opp.	Input		Input sub-categories resulting in each outcome category				Summary of results
			Codes	Categories	Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other	
St. Mary et al. (2018)	USA; Phenomenological; Focus groups	For Through	Messages, stereotypes, support, expectations, language	ICE RTAT ROTL CI	TR, HR, MA, Rep, Support, E&AF, Rigour, CR&D, E&D, Access		TR, MA, Rep, Support, CR&D, E&D, HR, Access		The quality and perception of the student-teacher relationship, including differentiated expectations (based on race, gender, etc.), can impact student achievement. Feelings of racial tension and power difference caused students to internalise negative messages, become aware of racial inequities and feel invisible. Special classes and after-school programmes aided in some students' success
Tatum (2014)	USA; Exploratory; Autobiographical and biographical accounts	For Through	Meaningful, enabling texts	RTAT ROTL CI			E&D, MR, Rigour		Too few of the African American male adolescents had meaningful literacy exchanges with print. Many of the texts' enabling characteristics were soft knowledge rather than hard knowledge, which focuses on students' cognitive orientations. The students' relationships with texts were diminished due to teachers' misinterpretations and misapplications of culturally relevant pedagogy

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Article	Study details[a]	Opp.	Input Codes	Categories	Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other	Summary of results
Taylor and Yan (2018)	USA; Cross-sectional; Administrative data	For Through	AP and concurrent enrolment participation	ROTL CI	Rigour, Courses	Rigour, Courses			Students who participated in both Concurrent Enrolment (CE) and Advanced Placement (AP) had the highest rates of college access (86%) and retention (84%), followed by AP-only (64% and 71%) and CE-only (63% and 63%)
Vega et al. (2015)	USA; Exploratory, case study; Interviews	For Through	Care, involvement, punitive discipline, unjust, barriers	ICE RTAT	TR, Support	TR, Support, Justice	TR, Support, Justice		Perceived barriers to positive educational experiences included negative relationships with teachers (lack of care, negative attitudes, unfair), and school counsellors (minimal assistance), as well as school policies (negative or unfair rules) and a lack of safety in their communities

TABLE A1 (Continued)

| Article | Study details[a] | Opp. | Input | | Input sub-categories resulting in each outcome category | | | | Summary of results |
			Codes	Categories	Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other	
Wilson et al. (2016)	New Zealand; Longitudinal, exploratory; Participation and achievement rates, observation.	For Through OTL	Tracking, teacher-directed, uncomplicated tasks	ICE RTAT ROTL CI	Rep, E&AF, E&D, Courses, Rigour	Rep, E&AF, E&D, Courses, Rigour	Rep, E&AF, E&D, Courses, Rigour		The participation rates in English reading standards were 20%–35% lower in the low SES schools and 30%–40% lower for Maori and Pasifika students. Students in lowest SES schools, Maori, and Pasifika students also achieved at lower rates than the national rates. The students in the lowest SES schools had quantitatively and qualitatively different opportunities for reading and literacy than high SES schools, where instruction involved shorter and simpler texts. They also had fewer opportunities to participate in extended discussions, have one-on-one conferencing sessions, receive teacher modelling, and activate prior knowledge
Zhang and Luo (2016)	China; Case study, exploratory; Observations and interviews	For	Expectations, change without support, exclusion due to cost/time/parental support, publicly displaying scores	ICE RTAT ROTL CI	TR, E&AF, E&D, Rigour, MA, Support, Access		MA, Support, Access, CR, ER, Variety, PE		There were three key aspects of exclusion in migrant children's schooling experiences: access to school, in-class participation, and peer interactions. The 'hidden curriculum' prevented migrant children from integrating successfully and finding academic success

(Continues)

TABLE A1 (Continued)

| Article | Study details[a] | Input | | Categories | Input sub-categories resulting in each outcome category | | | | Summary of results |
		Opp.	Codes		Cognitive	Behavioural	Psychological	Other	
Zuze and Leibbrandt (2011)	Uganda; Correlational, cross-sectional; Questionnaire	For, Through	Resources, long teaching hours	ROTL	MR, HR				Physical resources improved educational quality and social equality ($p < 0.05$). Heavier teacher workloads negatively affected low-income students ($p < 0.05$)

Note: *p*-values are reported as they were in each article.

Abbreviations: CI, curriculum and instruction; CR, community relationships; CR&D, culturally relevant and differentiation; E&AF, empowerment and academic focus; E&D, experts and development; ER, external resources.; HR, human resources; ICE, inclusive culture and environment; MA, mainstream access; MR, material resources; Opp, opportunity through education and/or for education; PE, physical environment; PR, peer relationships; Rep, representation; ROTL, resources and opportunity to learn; RTAT, responsive teaching and appropriate training; TR, teacher relationships.

[a]Location; research design; instruments/data.

Katz, H. T. (forthcoming).
The toll of the racial status quo: A case study of Black students' experiences in
a majority-White U.S. high school. In J. Keengwe (Ed.), *Handbook of Research
on Race, Culture, and Student Achievement.* IGI Global.

II

The Toll of the Racial Status Quo:

A Case Study of Black Students' Experiences in a Majority-White U.S. High School

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ABSTRACT

Majority-White schools in the United States have been found to produce better academic outcomes than schools with high concentrations of students of color. This paints the false image that majority-White schools are the optimal learning space when in fact Black students face many complex and subtle challenges within these school settings. Guided by critical race theory and system justification theory, this embedded case study aims to first capture the racial status quo of a majority-White high school, and subsequently explore the diverse ways Black students within that school experience the racial status quo. The results point to a cycle of racial inequity stemming from White normativity and racial unknowing. Although some students were highly critical of this, others found ways to rationalize injustices. Based on the results, suggestions are made for transforming the racial status quo of majority-White schools to ensure all students have equitable opportunities to succeed.

Keywords: Racial Inequity, Critical Race Theory, System Justification Theory, Color-Blind, Educational Opportunity, White Normativity, Meritocracy, Anti-Racism, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

According to historian Ibram X. Kendi (2019), racial inequity is "when two or more racial groups are not standing on approximately equal footing" (p. 18). In the case of the United States, research often points to the persistent achievement gap between Black and White students as evidence of racial inequity, but Wiggan (2008) argues that using White students' performance as a benchmark reinforces the normativity of whiteness and the idea that Whites in the United States are an academically successful group. Though disparities in achievement are effective in demonstrating that racial inequity exists, combatting inequity requires an understanding of the school- and system-level factors that maintain and reproduce unequal outcomes. Therefore, it is useful to frame racial inequity as a gap in opportunities instead of achievement, moving blame away from individual students and onto the structures that create barriers to success (Heafner & Fitchett, 2015). This requires research that centers on inputs rather than outcomes, enabling a nuanced exploration into racial inequity that is inclusive of students at all achievement levels. This is important because even the most academically successful students can experience inequity at school, and research focusing on between-group disparities fails to address how these inequitable experiences can create a gap between an individual student's achievement and their own potential. With this in mind, this chapter foregrounds Black students' experiences within a majority-White high school in order to capture the complexity of school inequity. Majority-White schools serve as an appropriate location to examine the mechanisms reproducing within-school racial inequity given the ways majority-White schools simultaneously benefit and marginalize Black students.

BACKGROUND

Research shows that students who attend majority-White schools typically perform better than those in schools with high concentrations of students of color (Bohrnstedt et al., 2015; Owens, 2020; Reardon et al., 2019). Based on this, one might falsely conclude that majority-White schools are inherently better, which reinforces the belief that White students are academically superior. In fact, racial segregation

between schools is linked to rates of poverty, meaning students in schools with high concentrations of Black students also have more students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Reardon, 2016; Reardon et al., 2019). This of course creates space for an opportunity gap through an unequal distribution of resources, such as books, qualified teachers, rigorous course offerings, and up-to-date technology (Bohrnstedt et al., 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Orfield & Jarvie, 2020). For instance, in 2017 60% of Black children attended high-poverty schools with a high percentage of students of color; consequently, Black students in those schools performed worse than students in low-poverty, majority-White schools (Garcia, 2020).

The potential improvement of academic outcomes as a result of attending a majority-White school (with greater resources) may come at a cost to Black students' well-being and academic attitudes (Carter, 2016; Goldsmith, 2004). Specifically, studies have found that Black students attending majority-White schools are exposed to differential treatment and stereotyping from peers and adults (Chapman, 2014; Chapman & Bhopal, 2019; Hope et al., 2015), lack strong relationships with adults in school (Chapman, 2014), experience more depressive and high somatic symptoms (Walsemann et al., 2011), and report less optimism and less pro-school attitudes (Goldsmith, 2004). These experiences can have a ripple effect on other outcomes, both in and out of school, including future career and college choices, self-concept, and access to rigorous courses (Chapman, 2014). Moreover, Black students attending desegregated schools still face within-school segregation due to tracking, with Black students being overrepresented in special education and lower academic tracks (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Carter, 2016; Diamond & Lewis, 2019). Inequity through tracking is exemplified in a study of fifth graders in New York City where Conger (2005) found that in-school segregation would be reduced if students were truly grouped by ability (academic performance). Extensive research has also demonstrated the disproportionate rates of discipline for both Black girls and boys when compared to their White counterparts (Carter Andrews, Brown, et al., 2019; Chapman & Bhopal, 2019; Diamond & Lewis, 2019). Therefore, simply attending a majority-White or racially balanced school does not guarantee equitable academic opportunities or outcomes.

Despite the plethora of empirical evidence demonstrating the systematic inequities in opportunity provided to Black students, many still perceive racism as an issue of racist individuals (Bonilla-Silva, 2019), and people rationalize these inequities through ideologies (color-blindness, individualism, meritocracy, egalitarianism, etc.) that reinforce the status quo (Blasi & Jost, 2006; Bonilla-Silva, 2018). In reality, racism is a systemic issue; thus, analyses must focus on the mechanisms that sustain the cycle of racial inequity. Bonilla-Silva (2019) specifically advocates for more research examining the complex ways ideology operates, and the practices contributing to the racialization of space. Similarly, Carter (2016) claims, "if researchers want to truly understand the persistence of educational disparities, then they must examine more deeply how inequality penetrates social relationships in school environments" (p. 160). Carter (2016) highlights the importance of examining the sociocultural context to better understand the relationship between educational disparities, the school's culture, and educational opportunities.

This chapter expands upon the growing body of research foregrounding Black students' experiences in majority-White schools by employing an embedded case study design that draws on two units of analysis: the school and Black students within that school. This study aims to capture how race and racism operate (i.e. the racial status quo) within a majority-White high school, including the mechanisms and ideologies that contribute to the racialization of space. The second aim of this study is to explore the diverse ways Black students experience the racial status quo. These aims help answer the overarching research question: *What does the racial status quo in a majority-White high school mean for Black students' school experiences and opportunities?*

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Critical Race Theory and Racial Inequity in Schools

Critical race theory (CRT) was first introduced in the 1970s by legal scholar Derick Bell, and by the mid-1990s Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate began applying it to educational research (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Although there is diversity within CRT, there are several foundational beliefs and approaches held by CR scholars that inform this study.

First, it is well established that race is not scientifically real, but CR scholars agree that race - as an unfixed social construction - holds power, and as a result, it can significantly alter one's life chances (Gillborn, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Second, racism is normal, meaning it is not isolated incidences committed by individuals with distorted beliefs about a racial hierarchy, but it is deeply ingrained within society (Gillborn, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Therefore, we cannot accept popular claims of color-blindness or that we live in a meritocratic society because these ideologies benefit the dominant group who are then able to rationalize their place in society (Gillborn, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2013). With that said, CR scholars reject essentialism, which is the "belief that all people perceived to be in a single group think, act, and believe the same things in the same ways" (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 40). Instead, they take an intersectional approach to understand how people who share one social category (in this case race) can experience oppression or privilege differently depending on other aspects of their identity (e.g., gender, class, and sexual orientation; Ladson-Billings, 2013).

Finally, CR scholars make use of storytelling and first-person accounts to present a contrasting perspective to the majoritarian stories that privilege "Whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these social locations as natural or normative points of reference" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28). Majoritarian stories are not only told by the dominant group but they can also be told by people who have been oppressed because they are positioned as the norm - the objective reality (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). Therefore, the use of counter-narratives that draw on personal experience helps scholars to "both challenge racism and validate its reality" (Christian et al., 2019, p. 1735).

In order to use CRT to explore racial inequity in schools, it is important to not only understand oppression but also privilege. This requires a critical examination of whiteness and the role it plays in enabling racist systems to persist in the United States. It also entails recognizing how whiteness has been constructed as the ultimate property, with property being defined as a right to certain privileges, not a physical thing (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). According to Applebaum (2016), "whiteness involves a culturally, socially, politically, and institutionally produced and reproduced system of institutional processes and individual practices that benefit white people while simultaneously marginalizing others" (p. 3). The normativity and power of whiteness are sustained and reproduced through institutions, such as schools (Applebaum, 2016; Harris, 1993).

Due to the historical exclusion of Black people in the development of U.S. public schools, White norms and values formed the foundation of educational institutions, and academic success was defined by Whites (Moore & Bell, 2017). Despite extensive research highlighting the importance of representation for students of color (Carter Andrews, Castro, et al., 2019; Carver-Thomas, 2018), the majority of U.S. teachers are still White (79% in 2017-18), and the number of Black teachers is on the decline (7% in 2017-18; National Center For Education Statistics, 2020). As a result, Whites continue to dominate school discussions, and their norms, values, and racial socialization shape classrooms (Moore & Bell, 2017; Picower, 2021). Though commonly framed as race neutral, these "White institutional spaces" enable the reproduction of power and privilege, given that students are often rewarded for conforming to White norms (Chambers et al., 2014; Moore & Bell, 2017, p. 101), and within racially diverse schools re-segregation occurs through systems of tracking (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). To overcome the dominant narratives that help Whites rationalize their privilege, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) "contend that the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system" (p. 58).

Ideology and Justifying the Status Quo

All of the aforementioned tenets of CRT inform this study, but it is necessary to take a closer look at color-blind ideology given Bonilla-Silva's (2018) claim that it is the dominant racial ideology in the

United States, replacing unscientific beliefs in a biological racial hierarchy. Color-blind ideology stems from Civil Rights discourse that views racism as an individual act (López, 2003); thus, one must be color-blind to avoid being seen as racist. Although the aftermath of Trump's election led some to believe that old-fashioned Jim Crow racists (overtly prejudiced) are the crux of the matter, Bonilla-Silva (2019) reminds us that, "America's 'race problem' has never been about a few rotten apples, but about a shaky apple tree" (p. 1777). Addressing the root of the problem requires examining the mechanisms and ideologies that sustain the racial status quo.

According to system justification theory,

The evidence demonstrates that people are motivated not only to hold favorable attitudes toward themselves and toward members of their own groups (as other theories assume), but also to hold favorable attitudes toward the existing social system and the status quo. (Jost et al., 2004, p. 912)

In order to rationalize the status quo and justify disparities, people develop frames through which information can be interpreted (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). In his analysis of survey and interview data from college students and Detroit residents, Bonilla-Silva (2018) found four frames used by the majority of Whites that are central to color-blind racism:

- **Abstract liberalism:** Explaining racial matters by abstractly using ideas typically associated with political or economic liberalism. It involves viewing everyone as an individual with the right to make choices, a strong belief in meritocracy, and opposing forms of preference for certain groups.

- **Naturalization:** The idea that all people naturally choose to surround themselves with other similar people. It is used to explain racial segregation or same-race relationships as natural occurrences based on personal preference.

- **Cultural racism:** Excusing inequality by generalizing other groups' ways of living through stereotypes, such as viewing Black people as lazy or assuming they do not value education.

- **Minimization of race:** Considering racism to be overt individual acts rather than a core aspect of the system. By not understanding the subtlety of racism, Whites see racism as mostly dissolved and no longer affecting the life chances of marginalized groups.

When Whites use these frames to falsely deny seeing color, they ignore the cost to Blacks of being othered, and they are released from the responsibility of tackling systemic racism (Ullucci & Battey, 2011). As with majoritarian narratives, Whites can ignore their own racial identity and privileged position, enabling "'White,' 'normal,' and 'human' [to] converge into a disturbing synonymous relationship" (Allen, 2004, p. 126).

With that said, most Whites are not intentionally trying to harm other racial groups in the United States; however, consciously or not, their choices and mere existence as racialized subjects mean they participate in the reproduction of whiteness (Bonilla-Silva, 2021). For instance, the choice to move to a better school district may stem from parents' desire to ensure the best life for their child(ren) without considering how their decision could contribute to systems of racial inequity through re-segregation. Real change in racist systems would be uncomfortable for many Whites; thus, color-blind frames free them from having to address their own biases and privilege whilst sustaining the status quo.

When people use system-justifying ideologies, such as color-blindness, to rationalize inequity and ignore race, they are fulfilling underlying social and psychological needs to reduce threat and uncertainty, and establish a "shared reality with others" (Bahamondes et al., 2019, p. 1392; Jost & Hunyady, 2005). Unfortunately, this prevents real change in common practices and policies that could improve inequitable systems. In one New Zealand study, Yogeeswaran et al. (2018) found that Whites' endorsement of color-blindness predicted greater system-justifying beliefs and decreased support for policies that could promote equity between racial groups. When it comes to schools, the promotion and

adoption of system-justifying beliefs can be particularly harmful. In one experimental study, Apfelbaum et al. (2010) discovered that when elementary students were prompted with a color-blind mindset – as opposed to being prompted to appreciate diversity - they were significantly less likely to detect explicit racial discrimination and less likely to describe the events in a manner that would raise alarm and require adult intervention. By promoting egalitarian values within schools, marginalized groups may risk experiencing racial aggression that is left unrecognized (Apfelbaum et al., 2010).

For advantaged groups, system justification is less costly because it aligns with one's self-interest (Blasi & Jost, 2006), as in the case of Whites using color-blind ideology. Though used differently, Bonilla-Silva (2018) found that Black people use the color-blind frames as well, for instance, to rationalize school segregation. Because color-blindness is a dominant ideology, it is easily transmitted and adopted into people's belief systems – along with the frames and values used to support it. When considering people who have been systematically oppressed, the motive to justify the system often overrides people's motives to maintain a positive self-image (ego-justification) or a positive group image (group justification), possibly because advocating to change the status quo is socially, economically, and psychologically draining (Bahamondes et al., 2019; Jost et al., 2004). Employing system-justifying beliefs can reduce perceptions of discrimination and alleviate the distress that comes with feeling as if one is targeted for characteristics one cannot change (Bahamondes et al., 2019). In essence, system justification protects members of disadvantaged groups' sense of well-being, while disabling real action toward systemic change (Bahamondes et al., 2019; Schmitt et al., 2014). Therefore, even though color-blindness has been found in some instances to benefit minoritized groups because it reduces instances of prejudice (Levin et al., 2012), Bonilla-Silva (2018) argues it is as effective as the old form of racism (overt) in maintaining the racial status quo.

METHODS

Although it is well established that racial inequity exists within U.S. schools, it is necessary to look closer at what this inequity means for Black students attending schools where they are a racial minority. This study was conducted using an embedded case study design, which enables an in-depth examination of a given phenomenon in the real-world context (Yin, 2014). The embedded design in this study involves two units of analysis: the school as a whole and Black students. This creates space to first establish the racial status quo of the majority-White school under study, and subsequently examine how Black students within the school experience the racial status quo.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected from 15 Black students (5 girls, 10 boys) in 11th and 12th grade at Norchester High School (NHS; pseudonym), a public school located in a Northeastern U.S. suburb. Of the nearly 1,830 students enrolled at the time of data collection, 76.2% were White, 9% Hispanic/Latino, 5.8% Black, 5% Asian, and 4.1% other. The choice to focus on Black students was due to the fact that racism occurs differently depending on a group's shared history, meaning the influence of the status quo will vary based on how one is racialized. Although it is also important to explore how it may uniquely impact different groups, the purpose of this article was to look closely at the diversity within one group's racialized experiences.

The 15 students participated in one-on-one sessions that began with a questionnaire, followed by a narrative about their school history, which transitioned into a semi-structured interview that included follow-up questions to their earlier responses. The questionnaire, which included both open- and closed-ended questions, was mainly used as a means to elicit openness from the participants who may have been more hesitant to speak about race with me, a White woman; however, aspects of the data were used for triangulation. I also worked to build rapport early on with participants to minimize the influence my identity (White, woman, adult, researcher, educator, etc.) could have on their responses.

To gain further insight into the dominant ideologies at NHS, data were also gathered through a mostly open-ended questionnaire completed by 12 NHS educators (teachers, special educators,

paraprofessionals, etc.) using convenience sampling, as well as follow-up Zoom interviews with three educators, and public data and documents. The semi-structured educator interviews occurred as a response to events within the United States following the original data collection in the fall of 2019. Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, a new wave of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement emerged in response to police brutality, leading to an increase in racial awareness among some, and racial animosity among others. Therefore, in February 2021 I reached out to the five educators who provided their contact information during the initial data collection to explore whether actions had been taken at NHS to address the current social justice movement. Three educators responded and these interviews give further insight into what the racial status quo was during 2019, based on hindsight as well as the changes that have occurred since then.

Ethics

Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the Board for Research Ethics at Åbo Akademi University, the Norchester school district, as well as the two principals at NHS who were gracious enough to help in recruiting student participants (based on the criteria provided) and coordinating the process. The student participants provided both signed and verbal assent, as well as signed consent from a parent/guardian. The educators provided signed consent, and those who participated in interviews completed a second consent form and consented verbally to being recorded. To maintain confidentiality, any specific information about the participants that did not contribute to the results was not included.

Reflexivity and Data Analysis

Given my positionality as a White woman researching Black students' experiences, I found it particularly helpful to follow Milner's (2007) framework for researchers to engage in racial and cultural introspection. Reflecting on one's positionality is an important part of the data collection and analysis process, enabling an interpretation and representation of the data that is respectful to the community under study (Milner, 2007). As the primary research instrument, I recognize that my interpretation of the qualitative data is not neutral, but it is informed by my values, history, and background.

In my own experience as a White educator, I have witnessed firsthand the lack of racial awareness and recognition within myself and others. I have attended and worked in majority-White schools where race simply seemed irrelevant. I did not consider how a lack of racial reflection was a result of considering whiteness as normative, nor did I consider how my White students could benefit from racial self-reflection. Although I have developed my understanding of racism and hegemonic whiteness, breaking down and resetting one's ideologies and ways of seeing the world is not easy. We inherit and become attached to ideologies through the systems we are a part of, meaning we must focus on breaking the cycle through which these ideologies are transferred.

With that in mind, I approached the data with the goal of dissecting the overarching systems and normative frames, not criticizing individuals. Moreover, in order to deconstruct hegemonic ways of knowing and being, I foregrounded and prioritized the students' lived school experiences and perspectives. For these reasons, the educators remain nameless in this study as they merely represent the norms of NHS, whereas the students are given pseudonyms and represent the primary participants.

Race talk is often guarded and hidden through color-blind frames (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Matias & Zembylas, 2014); thus, it was necessary to take a critical analytic approach to unearth the implications of the data, especially the more latent content. Using NVivo 12.6 software, I analyzed the data in two separate phases that involved a combination of open coding and coding informed by the research aims and theoretical framework. In the first phase of analysis, I coded the corpus of data to fulfill the first research aim (Saldaña, 2013). I simultaneously coded the data based on manifest descriptions of race or racism at NHS, as well as the levels of racial understanding among participants. I then searched for patterns across the codes and developed categories to describe the racial status quo (Saldaña, 2013). In the second phase, I reexamined the student data, coding it to understand what the racial status quo meant for their experiences and opportunities. Again, I searched for patterns across the codes to develop

categories to describe the students' responses. The analysis during both phases was iterative, meaning I revisited and revised the codes and categories as I progressed through each set of data (Saldaña, 2013).

Trustworthiness

Credibility and plausibility were established through a systematic process, engaging in reflexivity to ensure transparency, using multiple sources and types of data for purposes of triangulation, and connecting the data to preexisting theories and concepts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yardley, 2000). The fact that this is a case study focusing on one school disallows generalizability to the whole U.S. population, but it is possible to make analytic generalizations (Yin, 2014). Using the results in combination with theory enables a discussion of patterns that may be found in similar school contexts, and leads to suggestions on how education systems and educators can work to de- and re-construct the status quo (Saldaña, 2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On the surface, NHS has a lot to offer students and these positive opportunities must be recognized before delving into the research results. NHS has a variety of educational paths students can pursue based on their interests, some of which provide students with a certification upon graduation. The student participants perceived most of their teachers as good and qualified, and many of them could name certain adults in school with whom they connected. The students also mentioned supportive resources, such as teacher tutoring and after-school technology access in the library. Furthermore, many of the students participated in school clubs or after-school sports, which gave them a sense of community.

The Racial Status Quo at NHS

Despite the many positive opportunities at NHS, it was evident that race was not considered a priority at the time of data collection. Through the first phase of analysis, three main categories were identified that represent the racial status quo at NHS: 1) White normativity; 2) Racial unknowing; and 3) Racial inequity and discrimination. It must be noted that several educators were consistently critical in their responses, and showed a real awareness of systemic racism. Their observations and reflections on racial matters brought to light issues of racial unknowing and inequity at NHS, whereas their colleagues' perspectives reflected this racial unknowing firsthand.

White Normativity

Through analysis of demographic data as well as participants' responses, White and whiteness were the norm. At the most basic level, this means the majority of students at NHS were White (76.2%), compared to the < 6% of students who identified as Black. The staff were also disproportionately White (97%), and there were no Black teachers. Several educators felt the lack of Black teachers was due to a lack of Black applicants, but another noted, "a few years ago our only [teachers of color] were fired maybe because they were struggling to control the classes' behavior, but admin didn't support them or work with them to make them better." Regardless of the intentions, the racial demographics of the staff were not proportionate to that of students.

According to one educator and corroborated by public documents, the racial composition of the Town of Norchester (84% White in 2018) reflects the "great White flight" from a nearby city that occurred in the 1970s as a response to the city's desegregation efforts, "busing, and racial tensions." Thus, the present-day lack of diversity stems from intentional re-segregation efforts by White people. As a result of this historical racism, the same educator remarked, "a ton of White people … grew up in this culture of … intense race relations" which likely still affects residents' approaches and perspectives on race today.

Therefore, *White normativity* reflects not only the racial demographics but also the dominant perspective. One educator noted, "the curriculum often has a white and male bias" and "many of my

colleagues take a 'love it or leave it' approach to US history, only teach [people of color] stories as stories of struggle, use 'othering' language … ." During an interview, another educator reflected on her recent realization that people do not see the world the same, and she had to adjust her approach to represent "more voices." She also shared her students' observation that they felt they were learning "White European history" not history of the world.

Substantiating this, a couple of students took issue with majoritarian stories at NHS. Lucia described the school as, "Whitebased. Since [Norchester] isn't that diverse the school system mainly focuses on their white students." Jocelyn discussed whitewashed history, criticizing how White historical figures were often placed on a pedestal, whereas "everything you read about a Black person is about how they were like a radical rebellion or they murdered all these people." She also felt her peers generally did not care about issues of race, and when race was discussed during class, she was perceived as "radical or … racist to White people" because she would tell them "the hard truth that none of [them] want to swallow."

Racial Unknowing

Racial unknowing (lack of awareness and/or knowledge) was made evident through the language used to discuss race, the adoption of color-blind frames, the perception of racism as an individual act, and educator interviews that revealed the school's drive for change. To begin, some of the educators replaced the term White with "Caucasian," which is viewed as an outdated term because it stems from the dismantled understanding of race as a biological reality (Mukhopadhyay, 2018). They also used terms, such as "culture," "ethnicity," and "minorities" synonymously with Black or race. How these terms were used (at times as othering language) revealed both a lack of awareness and the discomfort some felt directly acknowledging race.

The uncertainty, inaccuracy, and use of racial terminology linked to historical racism were also found in some of the responses from students. For example, Simon was not sure whether he could say the word, "Black," and Gabriel and Ricardo both used "colored" to describe themselves or people of color. The language used to discuss race by both educators and students reveals how discussions of race were likely limited within NHS classrooms. This was further evidenced by the school's program of studies where only two courses referenced race or racism in their description. Moreover, the terms were placed among a list of other topics, indicating they were not the primary focus. Without creating deliberate discussions about race, students may be improperly equipped to combat systemic oppression. In essence, the school failed to support racial literacy, defined by Harrelson (2021) as, "the ability to recognize, describe, and respond to the racial nuances of complex social settings" (pp. 203-204).

Racial illiteracy was also revealed through the lack of criticality toward racial issues from both educators and students. The majority of educators appeared either color-blind or lacked knowledge about race, racism, and anti-racist pedagogy. For example, when explaining whether race can impact one's educational opportunity, one educator responded, "many minorities don't have families that put a high importance on education." Despite having professed to be color-blind, this educator clearly saw race, making a sweeping generalization about "minorities," which in this context appears to mean non-White families. The cultural racism frame that the educator employed helps rationalize educational inequities by shifting the blame from school to parents. Prior to this statement, the educator discussed their disadvantage as a White person compared to "minorities" when it comes to affordable educational opportunities. This educator failed to recognize that services and policies, such as affirmative action, exist to improve equity in a country where Whites have been systematically advantaged.

The few educators who were race-aware acknowledged the existence of racial inequity at NHS, were critical of color-blindness, and reflected on their own practices and biases. As one of these educators noted, among colleagues, "the predominant, or, like, the safe way was like, 'I don't see color, you know … every kid is the same to me.' [But] we just know that that's not true." Substantiating this observation, several of the educators rationalized their choice to not see color because they treated all students the same.

At the same time, many educators also expressed a seemingly opposite notion: they viewed students as individuals; thus, there was no need to see color. However, to see students as individuals means seeing every aspect of them. The same educator who was critical of color-blindness reasoned,

> It's like that kid with ADHD also plays soccer … also really likes playing video games … we have to stop looking at, at color as like, 'color is the major identifier.'… But it's one more part that we have to appreciate as part of that student's identity.

Seeing color does not mean educators only see color, nor does it make everyone within one racial group the same. It simply means educators are aware of and can include different points of view, they can self-reflect on their own identity and potential biases, and they recognize that inequity stems from systems that privilege certain groups.

Both egalitarianism and individualism can be used to justify the status quo and are captured in the abstract liberalism frame of color-blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Choi, 2008; Yogeeswaran et al., 2018). Unfortunately, many of the educators and students used this frame to rationalize inequities by placing the responsibility of outcomes on the individual (meritocracy), and not external factors (such as racial bias). The use of this rationale aligns with the belief in racism as an individual - not systemic – issue; a belief expressed by many of the students and educators. By not understanding how embedded racism is within the system, it can be viewed as an issue that occurs elsewhere. As one educator explained, "there are still racist educators out there. The United States is very diverse and regionally some states and areas are more open minded than others. Where racism exists it has been an ongoing battle for centuries." This separation of racism from oneself and one's school alleviates the pressure to address systemic racism and instead enables the school to maintain the illusion that it is race neutral.

Another educator minimized the effects of race today: "it is becoming less of an issue as time goes by … Here in the Northeast … I believe we have a higher educational standard for all kids vs. other parts of the country." This contradicts the fact that the Northeast is the most segregated region for Black students (Frankenberg et al. 2019). It is important to note that during the follow-up interview this educator shared his "heightened awareness" not only due to BLM, but because NHS alumni had recently come forward to speak about negative racial experiences during their time at NHS a decade prior. This made the educator realize, "we're not talking about, you know, other areas of the country, [racism] exists kind of right here in our own town." The fact that this educator, along with the school as a whole, were working to educate themselves exemplifies the racial unknowing that had existed during 2019. However, systemic change does not occur overnight and while some were willing to learn and grow, another of the interviewed educators felt that many of her colleagues were resisting these changes.

Racial Inequity and Discrimination

Racial unknowing and White normativity enable the existence of racial inequity and discrimination. By claiming to take a color-blind approach where achievement is based solely on ability, many inequities remain unnoticed or un-criticized. During the 2019-2020 school year, Black students at NHS faced more in-school and out-of-school suspension (21.4% and 7.7% of Black students, respectively) than any other racial/ethnic group, with both suspension rates over twice that of White students. This is consistent with nationwide data showing how Black students are punished more harshly and frequently than students of other racial groups (de Brey et al., 2019). The data also revealed disparities in achievement given that a smaller percentage of Black students (60.7%) were passing all grade nine courses compared to Asian (93.8%), White (80.5%), and multi-race, non-Hispanic/Latino (68.4%) students. The passing percentage for Hispanic/Latino students was the same as Black students. Finally, access to advanced courses also differed: only 44.4% of Black students were completing advanced courses as opposed to 56.8%, 68.5%, and 84.9% of Hispanic/Latino, White, and Asian students, respectively. This discrepancy was recognized by Esther and Amanda, who each noted how weird it was to be the only Black student in their advanced classes. These discrepancies align with CR scholars' claim that racism is normal and ingrained within society (Ladson-Billings, 2013), hence making it difficult to label it unequivocally as racism.

Lucia spoke directly about discrimination, identifying two teachers as racist, and recounting differential treatment between Black and White students (particularly girls) in a variety of circumstances: encounters with school administration, access to practice space for a club "full of minorities," and even dress code. During one spirit day, Lucia wore a bandana that teachers expressed disapproval of, yet she noted how a White peer always had "Confederate flag everything" even after a teacher raised the issue with the school board. The school racialized Lucia's bandana, perceiving it as gang-related meaning it violated the dress code. The Confederate flag, however, was perceived as harmless by the school, despite many people today considering it to be a symbol of violence against Black people. Similarly, during the follow-up interviews with educators, it was revealed that the school was in the midst of a debate over whether the Thin Blue Line flag should be allowed at NHS. Those who wanted to keep it said it symbolized an officer who had been killed in the line of duty, whereas those who wanted it removed felt it created a hostile, threatening environment for Black students. Two dueling petitions were sent around, and the one supporting the use of the symbol received over three times as many signatures as those opposing it. The use of Confederate and Thin Blue Line flags should have never been up for debate because the school handbook explicitly stated that people could not wear "images that create a hostile or intimidating environment." Unfortunately, when it comes to symbols, Whites' perceptions and opinions are often validated in the name of "free speech" even when those symbols are harmful to another group (Diamond & Lewis, 2019; Moore & Bell, 2017).

The inequity around the use of symbols and dress code mirrors Diamond and Lewis' (2019) study of a racially mixed high school. They reported how the dress code was more strictly enforced for Black girls, reflecting a broader trend of Black girls being perceived as less innocent than their White peers (Diamond & Lewis, 2019). Moreover, they observed how hallway rules applied differently to Black and White students (Diamond & Lewis, 2019), which one of the educators at NHS also spoke of:

> The bell would ring and … the only kids that were told specifically, like the head of like, a confrontation were the kids of color. So like, I literally witnessed [differential treatment] … So because I don't their- their culture is loud. So like, they're like, 'you need to get to class!' So it's maybe a decibel level thing. But it happened to also be a skin color thing.

Although this educator was able to recognize the privileging of whiteness in the hallways, she still used the cultural racism frame to provide a potential excuse for the inequitable enforcement of rules.

Other students and educators observed differential treatment from school staff, but they did not always connect it to race. In contrast, nearly all of the students spoke of direct experiences with overt racial discrimination from peers. They shared how common Black jokes were, and it appeared many of the White students felt comfortable and even entitled to use the N-word. In some ways, racism was hidden beneath an innocent façade. However, overtly cruel racialized attacks also occurred: one of the educators shared that during a lesson, "there was a kid in the hallway saying, 'That's right. If this were back then, you'd be my slave.'" The educator referred the perpetrator to the office, but the recipient of this attack later told the educator that nobody had ever spoken up for him before. These incidences demonstrate how racism at NHS was normalized and whiteness was often privileged.

## The Toll of the Racial Status Quo on Black Students

As depicted in Figure 1, the racial status quo at NHS reflects a perpetual cycle of White normativity, racial unknowing (influenced by dominant ideologies), and racial inequity and discrimination. This cycle inevitably affects students' experiences and opportunities. Through the second phase of analysis, two categories were developed to describe students' experiences of the racial status quo: perceptions and (re)actions.

Students' Perceptions of the Racial Status Quo

In Figure 1, students' perceptions are presented through two extremes: critical and accepting. An arrow is used to show the spectrum of perceptions based on levels of intensity and how students conceptualized racism. Namely, some students were highly critical of systemic and individual racism, whereas others

were more critical of individual racism but otherwise accepting of the status quo. As the figure illustrates, accepting is partly linked to racial unknowing, whereas critical is partly linked to racial

Figure 1. The racial status quo and students' perceptions and (re)actions to it
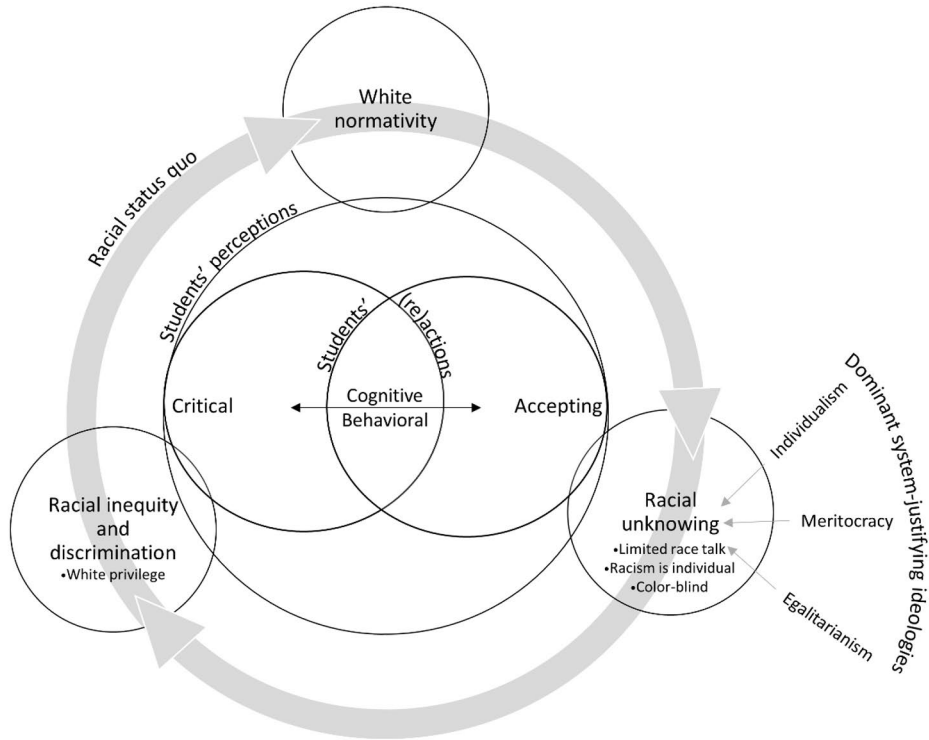
inequity and discrimination to denote how these experiences feed into one's criticality. Given the range that exists even within individuals, students were not assigned a place on the spectrum.

Students spoke critically about issues of between- and within-school segregation, White privilege, the lack of diversity, lessons on race, and experiences of differential treatment, othering, and bigotry. Most of the students appeared more critical of individual experiences of racism than systemic racism. For instance, Simon felt racially targeted by one student at school, who would call him "'stupid'" and say, "'you don't deserve to be here.'" He could not comprehend why this student hated him, or "people like [him]," especially since the kid had Black friends. Apart from this kid, who seemed to consume his entire experience, Simon did not appear overly critical of the school as a whole, just the fact that he sometimes felt he did not belong because of his race.

For two students, their criticality toward systemic racism was reflected in their schoolwork: Lucia chose to focus her senior project on discrimination in a specific work environment, and Jocelyn was planning to make her project "something on being Black." During their interviews, both students expressed how their experiences were not fully understood by their mostly White peers and teachers. Thus, centering race in their schoolwork may have stemmed from a desire to bring attention to their experiences, which had otherwise been overshadowed by majoritarian stories.

Other students also made direct statements related to race and privilege, such as Randall who explained, "I knew … from a young age that like the position I was at in life, like, the way I was like born, like I wasn't like meant like society, like didn't want me to be on top." Randall specifically

criticized the competitiveness in school with everyone trying to get the best grades and be more successful than their peers. Randall felt that as a Black person he had an additional barrier – the "racism barrier" - to overcome before he could compete and "climb up," which was difficult because people "put you into a system" where "you're already so low." Despite this, Randall resolved, "at the end of the day I try my best like regardless, like I see my race like as a problem but I can remember like to strip that away and see myself as an actual individual." This tension between recognizing barriers whilst still recognizing oneself as capable is reflected in Carter Andrews' (2009) study on Black high achievers in a majority-White school. Carter Andrews found that although students viewed the construct of achievement as non-racial, they still recognized that the task of achieving had various racialized barriers. Like these students, Randall pushed back against the misguided belief that success is equated with whiteness. However, the perceptions of Randall and these students demonstrate the need for schools to be aware of the racialization of space and constructs in order to ensure students are not limited in their access to achievement due to their race.

A more neutral perception of the system was found in students' responses about racial diversity. Ben did not feel his experience was affected by the lack of racial diversity among teachers, though he conceded,

> I can connect with the teachers now, but … if there were like, like a Black teacher maybe, that I could like, you know, ask him more personal questions cause he probably know like what I was talking about, stuff like that.

Other students had similar responses, feeling unaffected by the racial demographics, but also agreeing, "it would have been nice" (Ben) to have more diversity. However, for Ricardo, the "White to Black person ratio" was one of the things he would change about NHS, and for Mike, it was the first thing he noticed when he moved from the city to Norchester.

Students who were mostly accepting of the system perceived the school (including administration) as fair, felt that race was not an issue at NHS, saw issues of race as mostly individual or occurring outside of school, and were generally content with their school experience. Some of these students discussed moments where they felt targeted by teachers, but they did not connect this to race. Moreover, some were critical of aspects of the system (e.g., school start time and requirements), but generally not as it pertained to race. Daniel believed one could learn if they "just pay attention," and that what happened in school (e.g., Black jokes) was not "racism racism." Similarly, Caleb explained how "bad experiences" (related to race) may be a result of a lack of "good role models" at home.

According to system justification theory, the avoidance to name discrimination or to perceive the status quo negatively has been found as a strategy "to preserve positive relations with high-status groups," and to alleviate the emotional distress that comes with acknowledging experiences of oppression due to "an unmalleable social identity" (Bahamondes et al., 2019, p. 1404). Caleb and Daniel's participation in sports may help explain why they in particular were more accepting of the system. In Holland's (2012) research into the integration strategies of minoritized students in a majority-White high school, she found boys were more successful in integrating and gaining social status compared to girls due to participation in sports and the utilization of strategies to downplay stereotypes.

Mike also provides a good example of successful integration at NHS through sports. Mike moved to Norchester in 5th grade from a school where he was popular and there were "more kids like [him]," which he later explained means, "Black." He also said that he fit in more with the culture at his old school, which he described as "more social" and "everybody was cool." Eventually, Mike explained, he was able to "make friends [at NHS] because, because of the … team. Yeah. Cause once people found out I was going to play …, that's when I made more friends." Therefore, the boys' participation in sports may have helped them integrate more with other racial groups, leading them to feel less racially isolated and more willing to brush off individual instances of racial discrimination.

With that said, the willingness of some to accept the system was presumably a result of NHS not directly teaching students about systemic racism. If dominant ideologies and majoritarian stories are presented as normative, then students will adopt these ways of thinking. Even Randall, who expressed

awareness of systemic issues, appeared to believe that issues of racism would be resolved if people were color-blind. Randall was not wrong given that color-blindness has been found to reduce outgroup prejudice, but it does not solve the systemic issues that undermine group progress (Levin et al., 2012; Yogeeswaran et al., 2018).

Students' (Re)actions to the Racial Status Quo

Despite the differences in perceptions of the status quo, many students across the critical spectrum (re)acted in similar ways, which occurred in two forms: cognitive and behavioral. Some students had adopted strategies to react to the status quo (reactions), whereas others positioned their actions as aligning with their personal characteristics (actions). It is possible, however, that the latter group may have subconsciously made cognitive and/or behavioral adjustments and then integrated them into their sense of self to fulfill both their need to justify the system and "to feel valid, justified, and legitimate as an individual actor" (Jost et al., 2004, p. 887).

The cognitive (re)action that was most common among both critical and accepting students was normalization. These students normalized aspects of the status quo that may be harmful or unfair (e.g., lack of diversity and racist jokes) by saying they "got used to it" (Daniel). The highly critical students normalized the lack of diversity likely because they could not change it. Meanwhile, students who were more accepting used individualism to rationalize Black jokes, saying, "I don't really let them affect me," (Eric) and "I'm low maintenance … it's not gonna ruin my day" (Caleb). Both Esther and Shandra adopted social creativity, using positive mindsets as a defense against any negative encounters (Bahamondes et al., 2019). By making a cognitive adjustment, these students were able to gain a sense of control, and alleviate what otherwise could be distressing (Bahamondes et al., 2019).

Students employed behavioral strategies to more directly combat racial discrimination, avoid stereotypes, and positively represent the Black community. For several students, this meant having faith in meritocracy and working to break stereotypes by being academically successful. Through individualistic and egalitarian ideologies, they also placed the responsibility of success on students, with Ben and Shandra pointing out how they were "quiet" or "good" in class so they never had problems as opposed to students who were "disruptive."

In times of injustice, students (re)acted behaviorally by either being passive and avoiding what could be viewed as problematic behavior, or by standing up for themselves and/or seeking support. Those who recognized racial barriers used their academic success as a form of resistance, as has been found in previous work (Carter Andrews, 2009). However, students often found themselves in a balancing act between being passive and resistant. Lucia spoke of being "trapped" because she did not "want to prove [students] right" when they stereotyped her, but she also wanted to be able to stand up for herself. Similarly, Randall considered how he acted and who he hung out with to avoid being labeled as either "ghetto" or "whitewashed." Randall had to "balance out with being both in order like to be … socially accepted" and to succeed in a White-normed space.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter sought to draw the connection between the racial status quo and what it means for Black students' experiences and opportunities in a majority-White high school. Though many educators and even students did not feel racism was an issue at NHS, the evidence points to mechanisms embedded in the system (racial unknowing and White normativity) that maintain and reproduce inequitable opportunities for Black students, including an environment where students must cope with racial discrimination. Students and educators frequently expressed dominant ideologies, such as individualism, meritocracy, and egalitarianism, and at times used them to rationalize color-blindness and justify the status quo. As López (2003) explains, "popular beliefs such as color-blindness and equal opportunity have only served to drive racism underground, making it increasingly difficult for people of color to name their reality" (p. 82). The lack of space to discuss racism, and the normalization of dominant ideologies and whiteness disguise the reality of systemic racism. As a result, students are often not

provided the tools or language necessary to combat racism that is often "subtle, invisible, and insidious" (López, 2003, p. 82).

Several students who were highly critical spoke of their own research into the topic of race and privilege, but without actively seeking out information, students may not be informed of systemic racism and remain racially illiterate. They may feel frustrated, angry, sad, or tired of injustice, but they may see it as a problem of individuals that can be resolved through color-blindness. Inevitably, whether students were critical or not, they had to find strategies to cope with negative racialized experiences, unlike their White peers, which can be viewed as inequity in school experiences. Other examples of inequity include the fact that Black students in majority-White schools often do not get the opportunity of having teachers who look like them, which can lead to a disconnect between teachers and students as well as inadequate support (Chapman, 2014). Moreover, they lose the opportunity to experience lessons framed through a Black lens. Instead, they must navigate a White normative space and adapt to White ways of knowing and being, which can take a toll on their emotional and academic well-being as well as achievement (Chambers et al., 2014; Chapman, 2014).

Based on previous research and nationwide data on racial inequity, it appears the racial status quo and students' experiences presented in this chapter are not unique to NHS, but likely exist in other majority-White schools. Therefore, this case study, including Figure 1, can provide a model of what schools can look for to assess the racial status quo within their own context, such as unearthing the dominant perspectives and accepted norms, examining racial awareness, and critically evaluating areas of inequity. Most importantly, schools must provide platforms for students of color to share their experiences, and they must take action when the need for change is apparent. Unfortunately, CRT has made headlines recently in the United States due in part to misinformed parents and politicians who disagree with introducing more critical discussions of race in schools. This backlash is unsurprising, however, as CRT directly contradicts the dominant color-blind ideology. The resistance against CRT demonstrates the power of ideology in sustaining the status quo, and the fear that is evoked when the status quo appears to be threatened. Nevertheless, breaking the cycle of racial inequity requires schools to support students in moving past color-blindness, enabling them to think critically and to reflect on issues of inequity, power, oppression, and privilege.

One necessary step is creating opportunities for more students of color to enter teacher education programs, given the importance of representation on improving academic outcomes and experiences for students of color (Carter Andrews, Castro, et al., 2019). Importantly, teacher education programs should explicitly model an anti-racist and culturally relevant approach (Acquah et al, 2020) that counters "the normative culture of Whiteness" (Carter Andrews et al., 2021, p. 134). Choi (2008) posits that "colorblind ideology is a product of the pre-service teachers' own socialization in K-12 education through both explicit and hidden curriculum" (p. 66). Thus, to re-frame dominant ideologies, teacher education programs must provide space for critical self-reflection about race, privilege, ideologies, and the status quo (Choi, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), as well as opportunities for preservice teachers to engage with and learn from diverse communities and students (Carter Andrews & Gutwein, 2017). As teachers, they can then bring a similar approach to schools, improving the sociocultural context by consciously addressing and critically examining race and dominant ideologies (Carter, 2016). Facilitating intentional conversations and lessons about race should lead to improved racial literacy among students, empowering them to combat inequity (Kaczmarczyk et al., 2019).

Educators already working in schools can partake in professional development and external courses related to anti-racist and culturally relevant pedagogy. However, this requires motivation from educators and the recognition that issues exist. Those who see the need for change likely already have some awareness of racial inequity in education, whereas those who lack an understanding may be less inclined to seek out learning opportunities about race. It also takes time to adjust one's ideologies and understanding of racial issues, meaning even the most well-intentioned educators may struggle to effectively incorporate culturally relevant, anti-racist, and racially conscious pedagogy. Therefore, until we have more racially aware educators entering schools, policymakers and school leaders must take it upon themselves to ensure schools have learning materials that are culturally relevant and representative

of the student population, and facilitate workshops and professional development days. Providing relevant resources and supporting educators in developing skills in culturally relevant pedagogy will help create classroom environments that empower all students to succeed, and enable learners to develop cultural competence and a critical consciousness (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995). In schools where staff lack anti-racist and culturally relevant pedagogical knowledge, it is essential to bring diverse (racially, linguistically, culturally, etc.) experts from the community who can guide the learning process. These experts could provide resources, facilitate workshops that involve both school staff and students, and support the school as a whole in establishing a racial status quo that is inclusive and representative of all. By transforming the racial status quo, educational opportunities will be more equitable, meaning students will have real freedom to achieve their potential.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Using a case study approach enabled an in-depth examination of a single school context, but there is still much to be learned on a broader scale. One limitation is that this study only involved students who identified as Black, but other students' involvement could have provided further insight into the first aim of the study (racial status quo). However, the second aim was to foreground Black students' stories, which is why the scope of participation was not expanded and the focus was on going more in-depth with the target group. In addition, follow-up interviews were conducted with several educators, but it may have been helpful to conduct follow-up interviews with some of the students as well. With that said, it was not possible to predict the movement for racial justice that occurred after the initial data collection, nor was it possible to anticipate any large-scale changes at NHS. Thus, for confidentiality purposes, student contact information was not collected.

Future research could expand on these findings with a racially diverse group of students, examining their system-justifying beliefs, ideologies, and behavioral and cognitive (re)actions to moments of injustice. It would also be useful to explore whether certain factors or experiences push a student to be more or less critical (both about individual and systemic racism), or appears to affect their (re)actions. Lastly, research could examine differences in the racial status quo between schools with different racial compositions to understand how it varies between contexts, and what these differences might mean for student achievement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Anti-Racism: A process of actively working to transform the mechanisms that maintain and reproduce racial inequity.

Educational Opportunity: The freedom to access high-quality learning experiences and receive the proper support to achieve one's goals.

Racial Inequality: When outcomes or opportunities between racial groups are not the same.

Racial Inequity: When opportunities to achieve are not fair between racial groups. Improving racial inequity requires taking into consideration the diversity of human needs, wants, backgrounds, values, etc.

Racial Status Quo: Normalized approaches to handling racial affairs based on commonly held beliefs and understandings of race and racism.

Racism: The systematic devaluation and oppression of a certain racial group, alongside the systematic privileging of another.

Whiteness: A state of being that is viewed as normative and denotes rights to certain privileges in U.S. society.

Katz, H. T., & Acquah, E. O. (2022).

Places of freedom or entrapment? Black adolescent girls' school experiences. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2022.2098401

III

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Places of freedom or entrapment? Black adolescent girls' school experiences

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ABSTRACT

Though research on Black adolescent girls is growing, their lived school experiences have been largely overlooked. In order for schools to effectively provide equitable opportunities and support students' well-being, the experiences of marginalized students must be more deeply understood. This study foregrounds Black adolescent girls by exploring how five high school students make meaning of their lived school experiences. During one-on-one sessions, participants responded to a brief questionnaire, followed by a narrative prompt and a semi-structured interview where they were asked to share and reflect on their K-12 school history. The data was analyzed through interpretative phenomenological analysis, resulting in five superordinate themes: (1) A lack of support; (2) Put in a box; (3) Recognizing division and othering; (4) Trying to fit in; and (5) Finding community and a sense of self. The findings can inform both policy and practice to improve educational opportunities and student well-being.

Introduction

Schools function specifically to support the growth of their students, yet the subjective school experiences of students are often overlooked. For educators to equitably and effectively serve students, we must be asking how students experience school and what their experiences mean to them and their future. Moreover, we must explore the unique experiences of students who have been marginalized by society, such as Black adolescent girls. Research on the lived experiences of Black[1] students is scarce (St. Mary et al., 2018), but what does exist typically focuses on Black students in general, comparisons between racial groups, or the male experience (Neal-Jackson, 2018; Young, 2020). Through a content analysis of literature published in high-impact education journals between 2000 and 2015, Young (2020) found 295 articles focusing on Black males, whereas only 72 articles centered Black females. This supports Crenshaw et al. (2015) claim that when it comes to research on the lives of Black girls, there is a "knowledge desert," (p. 6).

Though research specifically looking into the lived K-12 school experiences of Black adolescent girls is growing (see Carter Andrews et al., 2019; McPherson, 2020; Nunn, 2018), a large portion of this research centers disciplinary patterns, the negative stereotypes Black girls face in school, levels of achievement, and other people's perceptions of Black girls (see Anderson &

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Martin, 2018; Annamma et al., 2019; Edwards, 2020; Epstein et al., 2017; Gibbs Grey & Harrison, 2020). While this research is important, there is a need for more research that captures Black adolescent girls' experiences—the good and the bad—from their perspective. By doing so, we can start to break down the hegemonic White narrative of schooling, while also presenting experiences unique to Black adolescent girls. Therefore, this research aims to provide insight into the lived experiences of five Black adolescent girls in the United States by exploring their K-12 school history.

Black adolescent girls: intersectionality and schooling

Identity is not singular, just as forms of discrimination, subordination and disadvantage do not occur along one axis (Crenshaw, 1989). In 1903 W.E.B Du Bois (2007) introduced the term *double consciousness*, which is the idea that Black Americans[2] always feel a sense of "twoness," where their blackness and Americanness conflict. Scholars later argued that Black women and girls have a third lens or *multiple consciousness*: the feminine lens (King, 1988; Welang, 2018). Black women and girls in the United States occupy a "both/and" position, situated both with and apart from Black men and other women (Collins, 2000; see also Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). Due to this positioning, Black American girls view the world—and their place in the world—differently from other groups (e.g. Asian American girls, Black American boys, etc.), and they also encounter different forms of oppression due to their intersecting identities.

Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, *intersectionality* helps us understand the complexity of the world, people's experiences, and the organization of power by recognizing the ways in which many axes "work together and influence each other," (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 11). It informs our understanding of inequity because through an intersectional lens, "oppression and privilege by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, nationality, and so on do not act independently of each other … instead, each kind of oppression or privilege is shaped by and works through the others," (Garry, 2011, p. 827). Thus, when considering students' school experiences, researchers and educators must consider how school systems function to privilege or disadvantage different groups of students, such as Black adolescent girls.

Researchers have documented the numerous ways school systems disadvantage Black students, including biased tracking, a Eurocentric curriculum, and between-school segregation (Walsemann & Bell, 2010; Zamudio et al., 2011). Black girls experience these racist systems in addition to gendered-racism, which refers to specific forms of oppression (e.g. sexual violence, negative relationships with teachers, biased policies) they face due to the intersection of their race and gender (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016; Nunn, 2018). Research demonstrates how schools are often dehumanizing and silencing places for Black girls (Gibbs Grey & Harrison, 2020; McPherson, 2020; Nunn, 2018). Through adultification, Black girlhood is erased, meaning Black girls' behavior is often associated with stereotypes linked to adult Black women (Epstein et al., 2017). Rather than viewing negative behavior in school as immature and child-like, educators often perceive Black girls as hypersexual, loud, aggressive, and less innocent and feminine than other girls (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Epstein et al., 2017). Exposure to these stereotypes, as well as the threat of exposure, pose a risk to Black girls' psychological well-being and academic performance (Anderson & Martin, 2018). Specifically, a direct result of adultification and the related stereotypes is the disproportionate rate (and harshness) at which Black girls are disciplined in school (Annamma et al., 2019; Epstein et al., 2017; Morris, 2016). Inevitably, these negative experiences cause Black girls to distrust the system and consequently remain silent when facing discrimination (McPherson, 2020).

As presented, Black adolescent girls have unique experiences and perspectives that must be more fully explored. The choice to research Black adolescent girls is based on our understanding of identity and the role identity plays in school experiences, as well as the belief that improving

school experiences for the general population requires a recognition of multiple perspectives. The goal of this research is to explore the participants' experiences and perspectives as Black girls who are also part of the student population. Therefore, we chose to use interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to answer the following research questions:

- How do Black adolescent girls make sense of their K-12 school experiences?
- How do Black adolescent girls describe their identity in relation to their K-12 school experiences?

Method

IPA is an inductive qualitative approach informed by three key theoretical underpinnings: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography (Smith et al., 2009). IPA involves the double hermeneutic process: researchers seek to understand how participants make sense of a given phenomenon through interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher is interested in the particular, moving from individual, detailed claims to more general claims that contextualize the experience and draw connections to existing literature (Smith et al., 2009). IPA influences the entire research process, from data collection to reporting. It requires purposeful selection of a single participant, or a small homogeneous group, for researchers to conduct an in-depth analysis examining both convergence and divergence (Smith et al., 2009). Because of its roots in psychology, IPA research is often concerned with identity (Smith, 2004), making it a credible method for examining the lived school experiences of Black adolescent girls. Furthermore, IPA aligns with Black feminist epistemology given that lived experiences are understood as a credible form of knowledge, and an emphasis is placed on individuality whilst acknowledging collective challenges (Collins, 2000; Muhammad & Haddix, 2016).

Using IPA to explore Black girls' particular school experiences allows for *theoretical generalizability*, meaning educators can draw connections between the research findings and their practice (Smith et al., 2009), and these findings can "effectively migrate from one site of study to other social locations," (Fine & Torre, 2004, p. 29). IPA provides a unique lens into the more subtle, "deeper social dynamics," (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991, p. 615) that quantitative or large-scale research may miss in an effort to find commonalities between entire populations (Oxley, 2016). Thus, by understanding the complexity of Black girls' experiences, educators can better support individual growth, well-being and provide students equitable opportunities.

Participants and research context

Purposive sampling was used to select students who attended Norchester High School (NHS), a public school in a Northeastern U.S. suburb. Students could participate if they identified as Black or African American girls, and were in 11th or 12th grade. We chose to focus the research on students near the end of high school in order for them to be able to reflect on their K-12 experience, while also considering the role school has played in shaping their future goals. Moreover, three students involved in this study (Shandra, Esther, and Jocelyn) were born outside of the United States, but each emigrated between the ages of five and seven. The immigration history of the other two participants was less clear: Amanda is a daughter of immigrants, and English is Lucia's second language. Table 1 presents the profile of each participant, including their age, words they use to describe themselves, and words they use to describe school.

According to the district website, at the time of data collection (fall 2019) NHS had nearly 2000 students, with Black students making up <6% of the student body. The majority of staff and students at NHS were White (>96% and >76%, respectively), and there were no full-time Black teachers. Though this data is relevant to the stories the students told about their high

Table 1. Participant details and responses to questionnaire.

Name	Age	I am …	Words to describe school
Lucia	17	African American. I am a black female living in America.	Undiverse, **white based**, unprepared, problematic, dislike
Shandra	17	A woman.	Fun, **challenging,** difficult, adjusting, an experience
Esther	16	A 16 year old [country of birth] student. Female (She/hers) who is well known around the school positively.	Different, **new**, fun, creative, amazing
Amanda	17	A 17 year-old girl, who as the daughter of two immigrants, wants to work towards being successful for everyone in my family.	Exciting, **challenging,** engaging
Jocelyn	16	Mixed female.	Depressing, **lonely,** boring, fun

Note. Text in bold signifies the word students felt best described their school experience.

school experience, it does not reflect earlier school contexts. The Norchester school district has eight elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school, and several students experienced other school districts. There were other aspects of the girls' identities and experiences we did not control for, such as class, academic ability, and teachers they had. Controlling for these factors would have been difficult due to the small Black population within NHS. Furthermore, the participants naturally reflected on these factors when sharing their stories, providing insight into the ways in which their experiences differed due to unique circumstances.

Data collection

Data for this study was collected as part of a larger project looking at Black students' school experiences and teachers' perspectives on race in majority-White schools; therefore, the choice in school district made sense for our overarching project aims. Prior to data collection, we obtained approval from the authors' institutional review board, approval from the public school district's assistant superintendent, written and verbal assent from participants, and written consent from a parent or guardian. We also removed any personally identifiable information and took adequate measures to protect participants' confidentiality, including using pseudonyms for places and people.

Students individually met with the first author in a quiet space at NHS for a one-hour scheduled session consisting of three parts: a questionnaire, a narrative, and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire involved both qualitative and quantitative data, but for the purposes of this study we are only using the qualitative data. The first author developed the research instruments for this study based on feedback from the second author, as well as a diverse group of educational researchers.

Each session began with the questionnaire, the responses of which are presented in Table 1. The first open-ended question asked students to list three to five words that describe their school experience, and then they were asked to elaborate on the word that best describes it. They were then asked to share how they identify themselves. Students could put a star next to any question they did not want to discuss further.

Following the questionnaire, students orally shared a narrative about their K-12 school experience. Prior to the session, students were given the narrative prompt (Appendix A), providing them the opportunity to contemplate and/or prepare their narrative ahead of time. IPA studies typically use semi-structured interviews, but some participants need more guidance from the interviewer or other forms to express themselves (Gauntlett et al., 2017; Smith, 2004). Thus, the questionnaire and introductory narrative provided different avenues for participants to express themselves.

The oral narrative transitioned into the semi-structured interview once students had finished telling their story. The narrative and interview were both audio recorded, and lasted between 29

and 50 minutes ($M = 38$). Many of the interview questions stemmed from the questionnaire responses and narrative, but the first author also asked questions to gain insight into students' goals, opportunities provided in school, what students would change about their school, how students perceive the adults in school, and the school's racial composition. Students were not specifically asked about gender discrimination, but they were asked about racial discrimination, which could have tilted their responses to be more focused on race. Nevertheless, they perceive their experiences through the lens of both their racial and gender identity, meaning their stories reflect this intersecting positionality (Collins, 2000).

Data analysis

After transcribing the interviews verbatim, I, the first author, followed the IPA steps outlined by Smith et al. (2009). First, I listened to, read, and re-read one transcript before handwriting exploratory notes, which included descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments. I then transferred the comments and notes to Microsoft Word 2016 where I reviewed everything before developing emergent themes. These themes were combined into a master list where I looked for patterns and connections between them. The process was then repeated with the other four transcripts, after which I reviewed all themes and drew connections across cases. The second author audited the entire research process to ensure credibility (Smith et al., 2009), referring to Smith's (2011) guide for evaluating quality in IPA research and Yardley's (2000) guide for evaluating qualitative research. The audit does not require absolute consensus between first and second author but ensures the reported account is plausible, transparent, and systematic (Smith et al., 2009).

Researchers' position

The first author of this study identifies as a White woman, and the second author identifies as a Black man; thus, we recognize that we may not fully understand the students' raced-gendered experiences. However, through our collective experiences and positions as educators, we strongly believe we have provided a credible interpretation of the data. We recognize that as the interviewer, the first author's identity, including differences in power between researcher and student, could have affected students' responses. To mediate this, we engaged in reflexivity by reviewing and discussing the students' responses in relation to the first author. Furthermore, by recognizing power differences between ourselves and the participants, we present the results using the students' language as much as possible, rather than academic language that "often expresses values and understandings held by white, male, 'scientific' culture" (Standing, 1998, p. 10).

Results

The analysis resulted in five superordinate themes: (1) A lack of support; (2) Put in a box; (3) Recognizing division and othering; (4) Trying to fit in; and (5) Finding community and a sense of self. These themes represent a tension in that schools provoke both feelings of entrapment and freedom for students. The prevalence of themes are presented in Appendix Table B1.

A lack of support

Students reported times when "[their] friends were not [their] friends," (Amanda), they were not given care or respect, and they were not listened to or believed. Lucia and Esther both reflected on experiences where their friends' use of racial slurs and general lack of racial understanding made it hard to call them friends. Lucia explained,

I have this one girl and like she claims she's my friend, but I really don't feel like it … she'll always like make excuses and she'll be like, 'Oh like you're too loud, like you're too ghetto or you're too ratchet.'

Navigating adolescent relationships can be confusing, but for these students, the lack of understanding friends had about race was an additional hurdle. This causes them to question how they can be friends with someone who does not respect them or provide them support, but instead uses derogatory words to add to their pain.

White peers in general frequently used the N-word, mostly in a joking or casual manner— as if entitled to use it— without recognition for how it made Black students feel. When Shandra was called the N-word by a peer, she initially "let it slide" because "it was supposed to be a joke." However, the next time it happened she reported the incident to the dean, whose reaction surprised her: "he kind of didn't believe me. And I didn't know why I was like, 'why would I be lying?'" Instead, the dean listened to the offender and other kids who denied the incident had occurred. Even though Shandra saw this as an isolated incident and perceived administration as fair overall, the lack of support from the school pushed her to be more self-reliant. Though becoming more self-reliant can be viewed as a positive, students should be able to turn to their school for support.

Lucia took a more critical stance toward administration, pointing to a general lack of under-standing "minority kids:"

I wish administration was just better with dealing with the problems of the minority kids. Cause it's like we don't have a voice like ever, like it just doesn't- like, we don't matter apparently … I wish they had somebody on the board that was maybe a minority that could understand it … yes, I know [Norchester] is mainly White. Like I understand like that's a big factor, but there are still minorities that go here and we matter too and we should be noticed.

Lucia tried on multiple occasions to talk to administration, whether about practice space for a club "full of minorities" she was in, or mistreatment from a teacher, but "they did nothing." The literal lack of space her club received compounded her feelings of irrelevance in school; Lucia felt unheard, unrecognized, and unrepresented.

These feelings also emerged from experiences with two of her teachers, who she identified as racist, and who caused her to have "mental breakdowns." NHS has pathways students can choose from based on their interests, and Lucia was initially excited about her choice and moti-vated to succeed because of the qualifications she could leave high school with. Unfortunately, Ms. Brandy and Ms. Lowe were teachers in Lucia's track, and similar to the administration, they acted as barriers to her success. At one point, Lucia was trying to comfort a friend and Ms. Brandy "threatened" to take away her practice hours, a requirement for the course:

I ended up having a really bad anxiety attack … I don't cry. I don't ever cry. Like, I try not to. But I, she had me in tears, I felt like my like, throat was closing, I could not breathe and it was just so bad and just. And like, I had warnings from other people like other people would always tell me like Ms. [Brandy] … she's racist like, constantly, … I just didn't believe it until I saw it and I realized that she was.

Through this excerpt Lucia reveals the power these teachers had over her emotions, her daily experiences in school, and her future. The physical effect of her throat closing demonstrates feel-ings of silencing and entrapment from school. The excerpt also reflects Lucia's constant need to prove her experience is real; she uses others' statements to validate her own claims, as if her own experience is not proof enough.

For Jocelyn, her teachers' lack of compassion was one reason she started therapy. She explained, "Um sophomore year was [pause] atrocious. … just school was very infuriating and stressful. Just like the workload and teachers they just they don't care about slowing down or stopping." Thankfully, Jocelyn was able to turn to her guidance counselor who did provide sup-port and was the one who recommended she try therapy. Though the students were sometimes able to find people who supported them, feelings of betrayal from friends, as well as barriers

created by adults, were solidified in the girls' memories and detracted from their overall school experience.

Put in a box

The students' stories often depicted feelings of entrapment due to the formation of categories in school, others' assumptions and misperceptions, and pressure from academic expectations. As "a mixed kid," the labels placed on Jocelyn fluctuated depending on context:

> Um so when I went to my school with more predominantly um minority kids they thought I was gentrified and that I was too White to be in their building. But then when I was in elementary school, they thought that I was more of like a Black kid.

Rather than being accepted and able to fit into a group, Jocelyn was always too much of the wrong race, whereas other students could not escape Black girl stereotypes.

Lucia worked hard to overcome being stereotyped as "ghetto" and "loud," but this was especially difficult in middle school when everyone got placed on teams that were named by colors. Some students, including Lucia, came up with different names to represent how they perceived the groups:

> So the um, the gold team, was like the athletes. The maroon team, … they were just kind of like, the nobodies, I guess you could say. Um, the white team, were all the brainiacs. The red team, were all the rich kids. And the blue team, were all the bad kids.

The grouping sent a clear message: Lucia was placed on the blue team, along with many other Black or "bad" students, whereas only a couple of the smartest Black students were placed on the white team. This incident was one of many where Lucia could not escape others' misperceptions that she was bad.

Lucia felt people who know her understand she is hyperactive and likes to overtly express happiness, but her actions were often misinterpreted as disruptive. This perception carries over into the club that she was a part of:

> Like they see us and like we come in and like we look disorganized and we look like what they're thinking that we are, you know what I mean? And it just sucks because like we're so much more than that.

Lucia sensed NHS did not value what they were doing. Instead, they had a preconceived idea of who they were, and only saw them through that negative lens, a lens the students could not escape no matter what they tried. It was evident throughout Lucia's interview that she simply wanted to be seen— to be recognized— for who she was: a good, talented person.

In contrast, Amanda felt, "99% of the teachers and staff … [were] good," and would "take you as you," but she did witness a couple who were "questionable." For instance, one teacher "dumb[ed] down the way she talk[ed]" to one of Amanda's friends because of her "thick accent." Even though Amanda's friend is smart, the teacher made false assumptions about her comprehension due to her accent. Unlike her friend, Amanda was identified as "bright" early on. Her label was visible to others as evidenced by close friends who made comments about how she was often placed at the "smart table," and in high school she was always in the same classes as the top 5% of her grade. As she put it, "here whe-whe when you're smart, you're smart." However, having this label created certain restrictions with her friends: "I-I'm not supposed to feel like the struggles they do."

All labels or categories these students were given, in a sense, trapped them. As Amanda explained, schools are "very into like categorizing," meaning, "there's less freedom in-at-in your education, or choice to do-to learn things, if you don't fit into certain categories." She wished students had more "wiggle room," where they were free from these categories and able to decide their own path. At the same time, Amanda was trapped by high expectations because of pressure she placed

on herself and feeling she had to live up to the label of bright. For instance, getting her first B in class, combined with her own pressure to be perfect, had a negative effect on her overall well-being:

> The environment around education that's when everyone started taking like grades seriously. And I think, just like the rhetoric around that caused me [inaudible] to start like being anxious about school. Um, and so like, I was in this cycle-that's when my cycle started of like procrastinating school work and then getting anxious about it so I'd stay up all night doing it and then like I have no sleep. And then throughout school I wasn't paying attention cause I was sleep deprived and that kind of like continued into high school.

Even though she did well academically, she found herself in a "kind of … rollercoaster" where she was never fully satisfied, rather she always found new areas she had to improve. She called this "my cycle," as this negative mental rollercoaster had become a part of her.

Despite being a good student, Amanda was not immune to being misunderstood. Amanda recalled first noticing teachers' wrongful assumptions in middle school. One instance with a teacher really stood out:

> The first day she gave us books, I forgot to bring it in the next day, and she she kind of like. I want to assume because I forgot the book she was like, 'Oh, you're going to be one of those students.' And it was like, on the progress report, she was like, 'needs to put more effort into class.' But I was like, I was participating, I was reading to the class every day, I was answering her questions, I was bringing in the homework. It, it just kinda threw me off.

Amanda knew she was a good student, but her teacher— someone with power over her future— did not see her that way. Amanda "want[ed] to assume" this misunderstanding arose because she initially forgot the book, but the unspoken implication is there could be other discriminatory beliefs driving this misunderstanding. Being labeled and pre-judged is frustrating when who we are does not align with how others perceive us. This frustration is amplified when dealing with power differentials, and it leads to feelings of entrapment.

Recognizing division and othering

Students spoke of times they were made to feel different, recognized disadvantages, and frequently compared themselves to others due to their acute awareness of social division and hierarchies. Feelings of difference strongly affected Jocelyn: one reason she felt really angry in elementary school was because she was racially and linguistically different. When she was young, her "English was kind of sketchy, kind of rough," but then she was put in a language class "that kind of completely got rid of" her native language. In a sense, the class erased part of her identity, making it hard to communicate with her extended family.

To Shandra, feeling different was based on individual differences, by having her "own style," "own way of speaking" and "own life path." Even though Shandra appeared mostly unphased by racial differences, she did experience discomfort when she first became aware of racialization:

> Back then I just took it as nobody likes me and, I didn't understand why either I didn't-I didn't really think it was cause of my skin color cause, like I said, kids don't really know much. But as I got into about like middle school I started realizing that maybe it is cause of my skin color. But I didn't hate myself for it and I didn't hate them for it either. I just thought that they, they didn't know that just because I'm darker than you does not mean that I'm any different.

Shandra's growing awareness of race stemmed from moments of othering. She developed a realization that race could divide people, but she saw this division and othering more as a result of ignorance than malintent.

Esther had a similar reflection when topics such as slavery were discussed:

> So uh a lot of the kids would always like, look at me because I was Black. And I was like, okay, I understand now that it was all the influence of like, we're children. So I can't blame it on anyone because again, we're children. We don't know yet.

Both Esther and Shandra experienced moments of othering, yet they forgave their peers' ignorance. Over time, the students mostly learned to accept and live with the lack of diversity and overall racial understanding at NHS; yet, it was through these experiences of othering and division that the girls grew in their own understanding of race.

Although the students were accustomed to being the "minority" race, Amanda and Esther felt it was "awkward" (Esther) being the only Black students in their honors classes. Amanda acknowledged that race was not the "only factor that ma[d]e [her] belong," but sometimes "certain things [didn't] apply to [her]." For instance, as a daughter of immigrants, Amanda was motivated to do well because "the attributes to being an immigrant in this country [were] very like showing towards them." Amanda recognized the disadvantages of being an immigrant, but she was hesitant to describe what it meant for most of her peers to come from successful, non-immigrant lines:

> [pause] I don't want to use the word privilege, I'm not gonna use the word privilege, but there's some like [pause], you definitely start at a different place being a different race.

Amanda chose her words carefully during her interview, remaining somewhat neutral and frequently pausing to think before she spoke. Her refusal to use the word "privilege" could be due to her having learned to be passive in order to succeed (see *Trying to fit in*) or because of the first author's identity as a White person. Nevertheless, she recognized that her starting position in life was not equivalent to her White, non-immigrant peers, which contributed to pressure she placed on herself to succeed.

As a high-achiever, academic success was a prominent area of division for Amanda. She frequently discussed her academic success in relation to her peers: "I'm doing well compared to my class, I'm, high high up there." Amanda did not present her success in order to brag, but more because she valued academic success, and she found validation in doing well compared to her peers. However, because of her comparative mindset, she created a slippery mental rollercoaster, wanting to remain at the highest point, but unable to, and eventually falling into a negative emotional cycle (as discussed under *Put in a box*).

By viewing things through a comparative lens, the students struggled to find satisfaction within themselves. Instead, they viewed themselves in relation to others based on haves and have nots. Lucia framed her experiences by comparing them to the very different, better experiences of White girls:

> We're asking for uniforms this year and we still haven't gotten it yet. And the cheer team, just full of all White people, have gotten it.

> I could ask a question in class and she'll yell at me for asking questions. But then like one of the White girls in the class asks a question and she like makes a little joke about it.

Through this comparative framing, Lucia illustrates the ways in which school functions as a site of division and unequal treatment. Even though she often spoke of race, Lucia also attributed differences to money. When Lucia first got into middle school she realized,

> I was treated differently. And like I didn't get the same opportunities as maybe say like the rich kids in my school. And it wasn't like, mainly about them being White, it was mainly about like, you know, like, Oh they have money or they are higher they like live better lives … or they're like a higher up in like education than me, like they're smarter than me.

The intersection of class and race as factors of division was visible to Lucia. She drew a connection between whiteness and wealth, and realized this combination positions people as "higher up" because they have access to opportunities that are unavailable to Lucia.

Jocelyn also made comparisons related to race, but instead of comparing her personal experiences to others, she made more objective comparisons about systemic inequity, such as White and Black representation in the curriculum, and differing school quality. Through firsthand experience she noticed that, compared to NHS, teachers at more "urban" schools were less

qualified and schoolwork lacked rigor. These noted differences within and between schools leads to disadvantages for certain populations, but regardless of school, disadvantages exist for the students simply from being Black girls in the United States:

> I feel like if we were going to rank people on a ladder, a Black woman falls at the very bottom. Like it goes, you know, men obviously, obviously are always on top. It always goes men, White men. Um, um and then I think maybe like Black men and White women are next to each other and then Black women are-are at the very bottom. (Jocelyn)

Even though Jocelyn is mixed, she claimed to "have more predominantly Black features," placing her at the bottom of the ladder. She emphasized men's advantages by using words, such as "obviously, obviously … always … always," though she then clarified that by "men," she meant White men. As Black girls, structural inequities were obvious and explicit, affecting their schooling and everyday experiences. The frequent comparisons— whether based on wealth, race, ability, immigration, or gender—reflect a collective race consciousness that these girls develop, despite their many individual differences in background, personality, and experience.

Trying to fit in

The students developed strategies to fit in and succeed, including being passive and molding themselves to others. Shandra attributed her success with teachers to the fact that when in class she was quiet, or in "learning mode," thus she "never had any problems." Similarly, Amanda's friend who was treated like a "baby" by their teacher," was not "vocal" about the treatment because she was "committed to passing."

Amanda's own desire to maintain her good student image affected how she presented herself. She was typically in classes with the top students, and she noticed other students never asked questions:

> And then kind of just like, maybe like, not peer pressure but like [pause] like, 'Oh, I can't ask questions so I'm just going to stay confused' and then I'll get upset because like I'm not satisfied with my test scores.

Asking questions would reveal a weakness: it would make her appear less knowledgeable than her mostly White and often mostly male peers. Although self-described as "not sociable," she still worked to blend in by remaining quiet at the cost of her scores and inevitably her well-being.

In Jocelyn's case, her attempts "to be someone [she] wasn't" caused her to become suicidal. She started losing hair, isolating herself, and rarely slept. Eventually, she switched schools and things became somewhat better when she finally got friends. However, she viewed herself as "a public servant," always trying to please others and switching her mood or interests based on who she was speaking to. She actively learned what those around her liked and then researched it in order to have something in common with them. She never talked to her friends about her feelings or told them when she had a bad day because she did not want to put that stress on them. Instead she explained, "You know sometimes I feel like a chameleon cause, kind of just [pause]. I don't know like mold myself to like, fit." Not only does she alter her personality, but she dies her naturally red hair black in order to "seem, more normal." As there did not seem to be a place for mixed kids, she tried to get as close to one identity as possible by accentuating her blackness.

Lucia, on the other hand, tried to separate herself from her identity during class. She learned "from a young age to act a certain way" to fight the stigma that came with being Black. Thus she had worked hard to "calm [her]self down," "nod [her] head," "close [her] mouth," and "just kind of stay in [her] lane and like know [her] place." Despite her efforts, she had problems with numerous teachers, making her feel "so trapped:"

It's like no matter how much I try, like [pause] I'm always going to be viewed like that and there's like nothing that I can change. But like that doesn't mean that I can still like speak out. Like I want to yell at people like there's- I want to hit somebody but like. I know I can't because if I do that then that means they're right. Like I am like this loud and ghetto and ratchet person and like they'll view all Black people like this and that's not what it is.

There was a sense of deep anger and hurt in Lucia's account, but at the same time she appeared defeated. She wanted to fight for herself, "yell at people … hit somebody," but knew that would reinforce the stereotypes placed on her; thus, she remained silent. Although these girls found strategies to succeed, inevitably they were trapped in a box others created.

Finding community and a sense of self

Throughout their school experience, students found ways to resist feelings of entrapment and gain a sense of freedom by supporting themselves, working to remain positive, forming trustworthy and supportive connections, and looking forward to the future. Specifically, they supported themselves through time management, going outside of their comfort zone, knowing their own strengths, and standing up for themselves. For example, when the administration failed to support Shandra against the racist classmate, she took matters into her own hands and dumped water on the boy. This made her realize, "wow I can like stick up for myself I don't need anyone." The incident also made Shandra find confidence, autonomy, and strength to "get rid" of people who were "fake," because they were not there for her when she needed them most.

Both Shandra and Esther chose to have positive mindsets, which helped them navigate their experiences in and out of school. For instance, when asked whether they had experienced discrimination outside of school, they responded:

I mean I experience like grumpy people. But I don't-I don't ever think oh it's because of my skin color. I feel like that's ignorant. (Shandra)

I can't say I faced too much [discrimination] because people know like, why would you say something to like, someone who has such a positive attitude all the time? So that's why I always try to keep like a positive attitude … I'm not going to like fight you over it but I'm gonna be like, that's not cool. (Esther)

Despite both having experienced peers using the N-word, in everyday encounters they chose to give people the benefit of the doubt. Their positive attitudes acted as a defense to any negativity that may present itself. Moreover, they saw themselves as paving the way for other Black students: Shandra liked to think of herself as a model for students to "feel more powerful just being alone," whereas Esther believed her academic success could make the Black community look good. Thus, they liberated themselves from feelings of entrapment by finding strength from within.

None of the participants got to where they were alone; key to all of their experiences were people they related to, could turn to, and who uplifted them. Often, these connections were formed through participation in sports or clubs. Esther and Lucia were in the same club, which they referred to as "our family." They both found support from the club advisor, who Esther described as "open minded, and like you can tell she has like a big heart by the way she acts." At the same time, Lucia appreciated that the club was made up of mostly "minorities:"

… since there's very little minority to the school, which means I don't like really get to see them a lot. And like when I do see them I can relate to them, and that's why I love being [in the club] so much is cause like there's full of people like me, there's full of Black people and there's people that, full of people that have dealt with the same situation than me. And that's why I feel like I can like talk to them more.

Lucia often felt surrounded by White people, who at times invalidated her racialized experiences, and she felt trapped by the labels and injustices she faced in school. Thus, she "realized that like [she] needed escapes and [she] found teachers that were helpful," as well as the club, which was a safe space with people to whom she could relate because of their collective racialized experiences.

Even though Lucia found people and places where she felt free to be herself, she still sought to escape the White bubble she grew up in with the hopes things would be different:

I'm planning to go into … historically Black colleges and universities. So, I just want a chance to just, cause I grew up in [Norchester], like all my life I've been here and I've just realized it's all White, and I wanted to go out and- first off I want to leave [state] cause I want something new. And I just want to be in a place where there's more people like me.

In a way, she had accepted that she did not fully belong in Norchester, but she believed she would find a sense of community once she got out and could choose the people she surrounded herself with. For these girls, a strong sense of self and/or community helped alleviate feelings of entrapment the school engendered through divisive practices, incidences of racism, and restrictive labels.

Discussion

This research provides insight into the convergence and divergence of school experiences for five Black adolescent girls. The stories they shared only represent a small slice of their overall school experience, but they reveal what moments made an impact, and how they drew meaning from those moments. For these students, schools present both feelings of freedom and entrapment. At one end of the spectrum, schools provide students with opportunities to explore their interests, grow into themselves, and gain necessary life skills. At the other end, schools sustain social hierarchies, hegemonic ways of knowing and being, and rigid expectations that are often grounded in historical gendered-racism. Stemming from a natural desire to belong, the girls found themselves caught between trying to mold themselves to fit into a White-dominated space, whilst also fighting to stay true to themselves. Challenged by wrongful assumptions and stereotypes, success and acceptance often felt distant or came at a cost.

These feelings of entrapment can affect students' feelings of relatedness/belonging, competence, and autonomy. According to self-determination theory (SDT), these are three basic psychological needs that, if left unmet, can result in reduced well-being and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2012). SDT can be used to explain the effect the social environment has on intrinsic motivation by linking environmental factors to basic need satisfacation. When considering classrooms and schools, SDT has been used to observe how various forms of feedback (good and bad) can create an environment that is either autonomy- supportive or controlling (Deci & Ryan, 2012). In this study, SDT relates to the various ways environmental factors, such as racist structures and feedback, affected the students' overall school experiences and psychological needs, as well as the ways students fought back against feelings of powerlessness to find a greater sense of autonomy.

According to Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach's (2008) model of intersectional invisibility, "the challenges associated with misrepresentation, marginalization, and disempowerment will tend to be prominent features of the experience of people with intersectional subordinate-group identities," (p. 383). Therefore, it is unsurprising the five girls frequently spoke of the struggle to be recognized, represented, heard, and respected. Yet, in their own way and to differing degrees, each student pushed back against feelings of injustice and skillfully navigated a majority-White high school. In a sense, they all learned how to act in order to be successful and to gain a semblance of control over others' perceptions of themselves, including their competence. This was especially evident with Jocelyn, who did not feel she fit anywhere; thus, she molded herself to whoever she was around, becoming trapped in how she projected herself outwardly at a cost to building genuine connections.

Lucia also worked hard to fit in, but she could not escape feelings of powerlessness stemming from racial and wealth disparities, which distinguish who can (White students, particularly girls) and who cannot (Black students) obtain opportunities. The overwhelming sense of powerlessness and injustice turned into a physical experience of silencing when her teacher caused her to have a panic attack. Despite her efforts to be passive and complacent, conforming to normative

femininity, her teacher had a fixed idea of who she was: the loud Black girl (Morris & Perry, 2017). As Morris and Perry (2017) explain, race "appears to heighten perceptions of nonpassive and therefore gender-inappropriate behavior," (p. 144). By not successfully conforming to hegemonic ideals of femininity, Lucia received more frequent and harsher punishment than her White peers, and for subjective, non-threatening reasons, corroborating research on school discipline (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016). At the same time, Lucia did not want to be silenced, nor move past the blatant inequity she experienced. On numerous occasions she complained to administration, yet her feelings of frustration were only amplified when her requests were ignored. The apparent contradictions in her behavior reflect the *multiplicity of identity:* consistent with research on Black girls in school, Lucia adopted strategies to pass while also pushing back against injustices and stereotypes (Anderson, 2020; Henry, 1998).

Similarly, Amanda adopted strategies in order to be successful in classes where she was often the only Black student. By observing her peers, she learned what was expected of a "smart" student, enabling her to avoid the "loud Black girl" stereotype. Unlike Lucia, Amanda was successful because she was naturally reserved, fitting the dominant conception of femininity. Unfortunately, this came at a negative cost to her grades and overall well-being. Research has linked the threat of being judged by stereotypes and confirming those stereotypes to anxiety, underperformance, low self-efficacy, and negative psychological well-being (Anderson & Martin, 2018). Researchers have specifically noted how being identified as gifted can have a strong negative effect on Black girls because of the exposure to negative racial and gender stereotypes (being viewed as intellectually inferior) along with pressure to be the "all-knowing," student (Anderson & Martin, 2018, p. 119). The psychological effects include a fear of failure (sometimes resulting in not completing assignments), being overly self-critical, and often being concerned with how others perceive one's achievement (Anderson & Martin, 2018). Consumed by school expectations and academic standing, Amanda appeared to suffer from the at times paralyzing psychological effect of both perfectionism and stereotype threat (Anderson & Martin, 2018).

Labels, whether related to giftedness or racial stereotypes, are a form of external feedback affecting Black girls' school experiences (Anderson & Martin, 2018). Not only do they create feelings of entrapment by removing one's sense of control over how one is perceived, but they are also a means of comparison and division. However, they are not merely created by individuals, but they are built into social environments, such as schools, where students are tracked and resources are unequally allocated. Despite this, the girls found ways to resist feelings of entrapment by locating spaces and people with whom they were free to be themselves.

Particularly interesting was Esther and Shandra's use of positivity to escape the effect of negative labels and social division; instead, they embraced their individuality and surrounded themselves with positive, supportive people. Their use of cognitive identity management strategies enabled them to avoid the distress that comes with acknowledging one's marginalized status in the system, resulting in higher levels of well-being and a greater sense of control (Bahamondes et al., 2019).

Conclusion

Findings from this study suggest that gendered-racism in school can have a significant psychological effect on Black adolescent girls. In some cases, schools in the United States wittingly or unwittingly continue to engage in practices that marginalize, silence, and dehumanize Black adolescent girls, resulting in inequitable opportunity (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; McPherson, 2020). The findings point to the usefulness of IPA in examining school histories as it reveals complex racial and power dynamics, and it allows for a more nuanced exploration into the ways in which students perceive their school experiences.

This research has implications for educational leadership and policy. School leaders must reconsider how students are grouped and labeled in order to be more autonomy-supportive and reduce division and othering. Replacing punitive (biased) disciplinary practices with restorative interventions, and promoting positive student-student and teacher-student relationships is key in creating a more inclusive, healthy environment where students can feel a sense of community whilst developing a positive sense of self (Morris, 2016). Furthermore, schools must provide space to hear the perspectives of marginalized populations (with an intersectional approach) to ensure their needs are not silenced. Finally, the curriculum and staff must be representative of the population, providing identify affirming and empowering experiences for all students (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). By adopting culturally- and gender-responsive practices, schools can reduce barriers and create safe spaces that are conducive to healthy development (Morris, 2016). Policies can also address representation by supporting the recruitment and retention of teachers of color.

To improve opportunities and support student well-being, research must continue to closely explore the lives of Black adolescent girls in a variety of school contexts. Their experiences as students who are both Black and female can be used to inform school practices in order to create spaces of freedom rather than entrapment. Although the students' stories were told through a Black feminine perspective, their experiences shed light on larger structural issues within schools that create a culture of division, exclusion, and inequity. Therefore, this research also has implications for the overall student population. We implore researchers to continue exploring these issues in order to reconceptualize the ways in which schools are structured.

Notes

1. We capitalize Black and White because they are used as proper nouns that signify group membership, not adjectives that inaccurately describe people's skin color.
2. American here refers to a citizen of the United States.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Appendix A. Narrative prompt

Please describe your school history and experience in the form of a story starting from elementary school until now. Consider the most important moments in school, and people who stood out. You may have had moments that were influenced by external events (family, politics, sport events, dating, etc.), but try not to focus on those. You may discuss how those events may have impacted your time in school, but this is meant to be a time to specifically reflect on your time spent in school, and what holds meaning in your life. There is no set length for your narrative. Consider the following questions, but remember that this is open for you to tell your own story:

- Were there moments of success? Describe them.
- Were there moments of discomfort or times you felt out of place?
- Were there adults (teachers, principals, counsellors, etc.) who influenced or supported you? How?
- In what ways has or hasn't your school supported you in your goals?
- In what ways has school made you consider your identity (who you are and who you want to be)?

Appendix B.

Table B1. Prevalence of themes.

	Participants				
	Lucia	Shandra	Esther	Amanda	Jocelyn
Superordinate and sub-themes:					
A lack of support:					
A lack of care or respect	✓	–	✓	✓	✓
False friends	✓	✓	✓	✓	–
Not listened to or believed	✓	✓	–	–	✓
Put in a box:					
Assumptions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Categories or labels	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Expectations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Recognizing division and othering:					
Feeling different	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Comparison	✓	–	–	✓	✓
Disadvantages	✓	–	✓	✓	✓
Trying to fit in:					
Molding oneself	–	✓	–	✓	✓
Passivity	✓	✓	–	✓	✓
Finding community and a sense of self:					
Support from oneself	✓	✓	✓	✓	–
Support from others	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Positive perspective	–	✓	✓	–	–
Looking ahead	✓	–	–	–	✓

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Tackling racial equity in U.S. schools: A critical policy analysis of enacted state legislation (2020-2022) [Manuscript submitted for publication]. Department of Education, Åbo Akademi University.

IV

Tackling racial equity in U.S. schools: A critical policy analysis of enacted state legislation (2020-2022)

Abstract

Over the past few years, the United States has experienced a period of racial unrest, which has led to heated debates about school curriculum and policy. Considering the current socio-political context, this critical policy analysis traces the trends in state-level education legislation related to race/ethnicity that was both introduced and enacted between 2020 and 2022. Informed by critical race theory, we analyzed 61 legislative documents spanning 33 states to determine 1) whether the policy promoted or inhibited progress toward racial equity; 2) area(s) of racial equity the policy addressed; and 3) how the policy aimed to address those areas. We observed five key areas of equity the legislation addressed: racial/ethnic knowledge, anti-racism and social justice, disparities, representation, and discrimination. Although the majority of policies (n = 44) promoted progress toward racial/ethnic equity, some of these policies may result in more symbolic action rather than meaningful change. Furthermore, larger structural issues that affect equity – such as segregation - were not addressed. This paper demonstrates the need for education policies to be grounded in research on racial inequity and to intentionally target systemic racism in order to improve educational opportunities. As debates around race and education are ongoing, we hope the findings can be used by both policymakers and leaders in education to help improve equity in education.

Keywords: *racial equity; critical race theory; critical policy analysis; educational opportunity.*

Introduction

For the past few years, the United States has undergone a period of racial unrest. Hate crimes and bigotry toward Asian Americans increased as a result of xenophobia and insecurities caused by Covid-19 (Gover, Harper and Langton, 2020). At the same time, in early 2020 a graphic video emerged showing the brutal police killing of George Floyd, leading to heightened attention directed toward the unwarranted killings of other Black men and women – including Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and Elijah McClain– many of which occurred at the hands of police. Resulting from these deaths is what many are referring to as the summer of "racial reckoning." Although Black Americans for years have been pushing for racial justice and police reform, this was a unique period in history given that many Americans were stuck at home due to Covid-19 restrictions. During this time, people took to social media to show solidarity, participated in Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests calling to defund the police, and read books to better understand the Black American experience. This period of activism against anti-Black racism is illustrated through a surge in public support for BLM (Horowitz, 2021; Civiqs, 2022), along with an increase in references to BLM on social media from members of Congress (Shah and Widjaya 2020). However, the rise in support for BLM was naturally met with resistance through Blue Lives Matter counter-protests in support of the police.

These discussions and debates on racial inequity took a slight turn in September 2020 during a televised interview where conservative activist, Christopher Rufo, claimed that critical race theory (CRT) was infiltrating the government. Rufo called on then President Donald Trump to pass an executive order to stop the "practice of indoctrinating federal employees with left-wing ideas," (Dorman, 2020, p. 1). Soon after, the president's office issued Executive Order 13950[1] entitled "Combatting Race and Sex Stereotyping," which banned federal workplaces from providing racial equity training. Around a month later, a

similar executive order[2] was passed, this time targeting schools. In the order, the president's office took issue with a "radicalized view of American history" where America is viewed as systemically racist (p. 2). Consequently, the order sought to establish the 1776 commission to support and promote patriotic education. These two orders were not only a result of the racial unrest during the summer of 2020, but they also tie back to a *New York Times Magazine* project that had been published a year prior, one which the former president vehemently and publicly opposed.

The 1619 Project, led by Nikole Hannah-Jones, is a set of essays commemorating the 400th anniversary of the beginning of slavery. The purpose of the project was to reframe the way in which American history is told by centering the contributions of Black Americans in shaping the nation, and considering the lasting consequences of slavery. Since its' release, along with the passing of the president's executive orders, school board meetings have been places of contention (Kamenetz, 2021). Many parents fear schools are indoctrinating their children with CRT even as school boards are adamant that CRT is not part of the curriculum, nor does it relate to the 1619 project. For example, the New Jersey School Boards Association (2021) produced a resource entitled, "What you need to know about educational equity and critical race theory," where they explain:

> Critical race theory is not required by the New Jersey Student Learning Standards….It is important to remember that teaching social studies and history will at times require discussion about historic instances of racism. Students should understand the historically accurate past of our nation and that includes some difficult history around racial issues. (p. 1)

Other school boards have taken similar action, and at least four states - Connecticut, Minnesota, New York, and Vermont - have gone so far as to pass

legislation declaring racism a public health crisis.

Given the current political and social tensions, it is important to understand the ways in which the summer of racial reckoning has affected racial equity in schools. Although support for BLM is now back to similar levels as before the summer of 2020 (Horowitz, 2021; Civiqs, 2022), and the two aforementioned executive orders were immediately revoked when the new administration took office[3], things have not completely returned to normal. As will be discussed in this paper, numerous policies have been passed over the past two years that reflect the current unrest, consequently affecting what happens in schools. In this critical policy analysis (CPA), we seek to trace state-level education legislation related to race/ethnicity that has been both introduced and passed over the past two years (2020-2022) to understand how issues of power and extreme political divisions may have led to the development of new educational policies. With that said, the purpose was not to identify which states are doing "better" at improving racial/ethnic equity, as we do not take into consideration laws that were previously enacted; rather, we examine the ways in which these new policies promote or inhibit progress toward racial/ethnic equity in education. Through the framework of CRT, this study anchors the recent legislation in a broader understanding of systemic racism in American society.

Examining educational inequity through CRT and CPA

CRT was first introduced to educational scholarship in the 1990s by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate, drawing from the earlier work of legal scholars such as Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Kimberlé Crenshaw (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). CRT scholars adhere to several main tenets, one of which is the idea that race is socially rather than scientifically real. Unfortunately, arbitrary categories, such as race, help maintain power and privilege, though this may manifest differently among people depending on how

race intersects with other social constructs/identities (e.g., gender, class, and ethnicity; Ladson-Billings, 2013).

CRT scholars also agree that racism is more than individual prejudice, but it is deeply ingrained in the functioning of U.S. society. (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Racial inequality is maintained and reproduced through institutions, and as a result, racism - through gaps in opportunities - still affects the experiences of students of color (SOC; Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Heafner and Fitchett, 2015). For instance, despite the benefits of school diversity for all students, within- and between-school segregation still exists, leading to racial differences in access to a well-resourced, quality education (EdBuild 2019; Francies and Kelley 2021). In 2019, EdBuild reported a $23 billion dollar gap in funding between predominantly White school districts and districts with majority SOC. Though monetary resources contribute to quality education, the people working within schools may be the most significant determinant of student success (Flaxman *et al.*, 2013; Authors, 2021). Research shows that high-quality teachers can greatly affect students' long-term outcomes (Chetty, Friedman, and Rockoff, 2014; Orfield and Jarvie, 2020), but compared to their White counterparts, SOC are more likely to have inexperienced, unqualified teachers, and teacher turnover is higher in majority SOC schools (Flaxman *et al.*, 2013; Owens, 2020).

At the same time, racial representation in teachers is important for SOC achievement and well-being, but the teacher workforce is mostly White and does not reflect the racial diversity in the student population (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Carter Andrews *et al.*, 2019). Granted that, on average, the percentage of teachers of color is growing, the number of Native American and Black teachers is actually declining (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Just as representation among teachers is lacking, the curriculum and school environment typically represent White norms, perspectives, and history (Moore and Bell, 2017; Picower, 2021).

Therefore, scholars have pointed out the importance of culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy, where classrooms are places all students feel validated and empowered to critically engage with the curriculum, and content is presented from multiple perspectives, reflecting the diverse knowledges, histories, and experiences of the student body (Howard, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2021).

Given the influence of race and racism over access to opportunities, CRT rejects race neutrality, color-blindness, and meritocracy, ideas that are often used to defend and rationalize positions of privilege (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). As Gillborn (2014) explains, "CRT views policy not as a mechanism that delivers progressively greater degrees of equity, but a process that is shaped by the interests of the dominant white population" despite being framed as objective or neutral (p. 28). This is explained through interest convergence – another CRT tenet – which is the idea that progress in social justice and racial equality is only made in so much as it aligns with the interests of Whites (Ladson-Billings, 2013). For example, Bell (1980) argued that the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)[4] decision to end public school segregation did not merely serve to benefit SOC, but the decision was also valuable to Whites, offering both economic and political advances internationally. Furthermore, the law forbids explicit segregation, yet de facto segregation still occurs due to white flight, residential segregation, and other forms of resistance, allowing racial inequity to be maintained and reproduced (Francies and Kelley, 2021; Gillborn, 2014; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995).

CPA aligns with CRT in that it problematizes education and how it serves to reproduce inequities, observing the role policies play in the unequal distribution of resources, knowledge, and power (Diem, Young, and Sampson, 2019). Through CPA, policies must be interpreted within the context (political, social,

temporal, geographical, etc.) in which they were enacted (Bradbury, 2020; Molla, 2021). Stephen Ball (2017), eminent education policy scholar, notes that race is often omitted from education policy, only arising during times of "'race crisis,'" (p. 182) and resulting in symbolic actions, rather than real change. Instead, blame is placed on teachers and schools for failing racially minoritized students, and policies remain color-blind (Ball, 2017). However, through an understanding of interest-convergence and the role of values in policymaking, it is evident that policies are not in fact neutral, but subtly serve to benefit the dominant group (Diem, Young and Sampson, 2019; Molla, 2021). Thus, not only is it important to examine what is included in policy, but researchers using CRT and CPA must also examine what and who is omitted (Bradbury, 2020).

Methodology

In this paper, we examine state-level legislation that was both introduced and passed between 2020 and 2022. To identify relevant policies, the first author used state legislature websites, news sources, and larger online databases that cover legislation in all 50 states, including Openstates, National Conference of State Legislatures, and Legiscan. Each state website varied in how legislation was presented, meaning the search process did not look the same for every state and the length of time spent searching depended on how accessible the information was. The first author developed a list of terms related to race, racism, ethnicity, and marginalization, and used these to systematically search for relevant education-related legislation when the website allowed. The first author spent between 20 minutes and one hour searching for legislation for each state, stopping once it appeared all sources were exhausted.

The documents selected for inclusion had to be related to race/ethnicity and directly targeting Kindergarten through 12th grade public education. Therefore, several policies were excluded because education was only mentioned as one aspect of a larger policy targeting the state as a whole, and other legislation was

excluded for targeting higher education, preschool, and charter schools. We also excluded documents specifically related to funding, as this would require a deeper understanding of each state's budget in order to evaluate the effect the legislation could have on equity. However, we included several budget documents did not merely discuss funding but also new programs that were being implemented. The selection process resulted in the inclusion of 61 bills and resolutions (excluding companion bills) across 33 of the 50 states.

Analyzing legislation

The analysis was conducted in several steps involving both qualitative and quantitative methods and informed by CRT. First, we conducted a content analysis (see Bengtsson, 2016) on all policies, coding for whether the policy promoted or inhibited progress toward racial equity, area(s) of racial equity the policy addressed (categorized as *what*), and how the policy aimed to address those areas (categorized as *how*). After reviewing five policy documents together and discussing a coding scheme, the first author conducted an initial analysis of the documents. This was an iterative process, where categories were reviewed and revised as the first author progressed and discovered new information. To establish credibility, the second author independently reviewed the coding, after which we met to discuss areas of disagreement (Bengtsson, 2016). We then quantified the data, counting the frequency of each category, and the number of times each *what* and *how* category intersected. At the final stage, we critically evaluated the coded policies, critiquing policies that were clearly identified as inhibiting progress, as well as considering how policies that are aimed at promoting progress may or may not result in meaningful change.

Given our own clear alignment with progressive policies, we engaged in reflexivity throughout the analysis, allowing us to examine our own biases and remain open to being surprised by data (Molla, 2021). Only the first author is

from the United States and directly affected by these policies; therefore, the second author was able to provide an outsider perspective that was less influenced by current U.S. politics. With that said, CPA acknowledges the fact that social science research is not neutral, just as policy is not neutral; rather, it reflects our own values and assumptions meaning "we can only aim for 'positioned objectivity,'" (Molla, 2021, p. 6). By framing our research through CRT, we make apparent where our values lie and the impact our values have on our interpretive lens.

Results

Through a content analysis, we established five categories that address *what* states are doing for racial/ethnic equity in schools, and eight categories for *how* they are enacting change (Table 1). Many of the policies sought to address several issues at once and in multiple ways, meaning the frequencies for the total codes do not match the total number of legislation. We also used the same *what* and *how* categories regardless of whether the policy was promoting or inhibiting progress. Therefore, if a legislative document is categorized as *inhibiting*, *disparities*, and *tracking*, it means that the tracking of disparities inhibits progress toward racial equity.

Of the 61 legislative documents, we found the majority (*n* = 44) were promoting progress toward racial equity, whereas 10 were inhibiting progress and 7 were categorized as *other*. We categorized policies as *other* if the potential outcomes or general intentions were too vague to classify. For example, Arkansas made a minor amendment, adding John W. Walker to the African-American History curriculum[5,6]. Though representation in the curriculum is important, it was not clear how the addition of a single Arkansas civil rights figure would lead to racial progress. We will not describe the policies categorized as *other*, because

Table 1. *What* U.S. states are doing to promote/inhibit racial/ethnic equity in schools and *how* they are enacting change

	WHAT Categories		Protection	Tracking	Planning & Evaluation	Curriculum	Training	Implementing program	Resources	Teachers	Commission/ Board
		Sub-categories									
Inhibiting progress	Anti-racism and social justice					9	3		2		
	Disparities	Discipline		1							
Promoting progress	Anti-racism and social justice					5	8	9	1	2	5
	Disparities	Access		2	2			1		1	1
		Discipline	1	3	2				1	1	
		Outcomes		3	2						1
		General		2	2						1
	Racial/ Ethnic Knowledge	Black/African American				4	5	3	3		2
		Native American					1		1		
		Latino					1	1			
		Holocaust/genocide	1	3	4	3		3		2	1
		Asian American				1		1			
		Hawaiian			1	1	1	1			
		General			1	3		2			
	Discrimination		10	1					1		
	Representation		1	2		3				3	7
Other	Anti-racism and social justice						1				
	Disparities	Access			1	1		1			
		General			2						
	Racial/Ethnic Knowledge	Black/African American				1					
		Holocaust/genocide				1	1				
	Representation				1						

the focus of this paper is on what states are or are not doing to promote racial progress in education. Instead, in the subsequent sections we will review the policies identified as inhibiting and promoting racial progress. We will not address every document, but we will briefly describe the trends for each category and give examples of documents that fall under each.

Policies inhibiting progress

Of the 10 policies inhibiting progress, nine policies from nine different states

target anti-racism and social justice *training* and *curriculum*. Given the strong reactions nationwide stemming from Christopher Rufo's interview, and the executive orders that followed, the effect on policy comes as no surprise.

Anti-racism and social justice

The primary actions taken by states to inhibit progress in anti-racism and social justice were through *curriculum*, *resources*, and *training*. Quite possibly the most expansive policy on the topic came from Texas: H.B. 3979[7]. Though aspects of the bill are positive for improving *Racial/Ethnic knowledge*, these more progressive movements act as a blanket, concealing what the bill – referred to by senators as "the critical race theory bill"[8] - really aims to accomplish. For instance, the bill requires schools include the history of White supremacy and contributions of marginalized populations, specifically identifying significant historical figures, but history education is not complete without an analysis of their lasting effects. Far too often, notable POC are used to advance a color-blind, post-racial ideology: Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream," speech and the election of President Barack Obama are prime examples. This unfortunate interpretation of events – past and present – reinforce the belief in a meritocracy, which inevitably places blame on individuals for disparities rather than on the system. Though purported to be an anti-CRT bill, it generally misses the mark by centering individual prejudice, whereas a main tenet of CRT is that racism is systemic, not isolated incidences of bigotry (Ladson-Billings, 2013).

The latter part of H.B. 3979 further supports the color-blind approach by directly rejecting the 1619 project and asserting that neither teachers nor students should be subject to race-related training or instruction. The following are several examples of banned instructional concepts: one race or sex is inherently superior; one should feel discomfort or guilt because of their race or sex; and

meritocracy is racist or created by members of one race to oppress members of another race or sex. The language in H.B. 3979 mirrors that of the 2020 executive orders and is found in many of the other legislation identified as inhibiting progress (all of which were enacted after Trump's orders). Without knowing the current socio-political context, this legislation appears to be well-intentioned and promoting anti-discrimination. However, the subtext is clear: through color-blind language the law prohibits authentic discussions about the influence of race, racism, power, and privilege on society today. In the past, classrooms have been places where students can process what is happening in the world, including upsetting race-related incidences, but through this legislation teachers are free to ignore current events. As a result, H.B. 3979 serves to benefit White Americans who have not had to experience racism or feelings of discomfort due to race, whilst silencing the experiences of students who have.

Furthermore, H.B. 3979 posits that schools should not promote activities such as political activism, whilst at the same time requiring the State Board of Education to adopt instruction related to civic knowledge (e.g., histories and traditions of civic engagement). However, providing students an accurate civic education cannot occur without acknowledging how the exclusionary practices related to civic engagement are far from over. Specifically, opportunities for civic engagement are still obstructed through racially discriminatory voter suppression: restrictive legislation, long lines, and closed polling places are just some of the barriers that disproportionately affect voters of color (Wilder, 2021). Instead, this bill enables schools to take a color-blind approach to aspects of education as they relate to modern times. Unfortunately, exposing students to a color-blind mindset can reduce their ability to detect instances of discrimination, or describe racially discriminatory situations in such a way that would evoke intervention (Apfelbaum *et al.*, 2010).

Idaho passed a very similar bill preventing certain concepts from being taught, but the conclusion of the bill[9] presents an interesting contradiction. H.B. 377 states that the banning of certain race-related ideas should not be "construed to prohibit the required collection or reporting of demographic data," (p. 2). The conclusion is inconsistent with the concepts the bill rejects; if inequality did not exist and education were meritocratic, there would be no need for public schools to collect demographic data. In essence, these obstructive documents promote equality (treat everyone the same) at the cost of equity, which ultimately serves the interests of Whites by maintaining – rather than disrupting – the status quo.

Disparities

The only other area of racial equity that was inhibited was through the tracking of disparities in discipline. Although in most cases, collecting data can be useful for identifying disparities, the data that Iowa's S.B. 2360[10] specifies is concerning. Under section nine, the policy instructs school districts to report all incidents of student violence resulting in injury, property damage, or assault, including demographic information. Although this information could potentially reveal racially motivated violence, collecting data on the race or national origin of the perpetrators does not appear to serve any purpose, and instead could lead to perpetuating racist stereotypes were the numbers significantly higher for one racial/ethnic group.

Policies promoting progress

The 44 legislative documents identified as promoting progress spanned 24 states, with the greatest number of states passing legislation related to *racial/ethnic knowledge* (*n* = 14), followed by *anti-racism and social justice* (*n* = 10), *disparities* and *representation* (*n* = 9), and *discrimination* (*n* = 8).

Anti-racism and social justice

Most of the legislation addresses anti-racism and social justice through *training* for teachers, resource officers, personnel in charge of hiring, etc. However, anti-racism and social justice are also being integrated into the *curriculum* and supported with *resources*, which can have a positive effect on student outcomes, ethnic-racial identity development, and awareness of racism (Byrd, 2016). By allowing discussions of racism, culture, diversity, and inclusion, students are better equipped to address inequity and combat the negative effects of racism (Byrd, 2016). Through trainings that improve teachers' racial literacy, cultural competence and consciousness, and understanding of bias, teachers can be better prepared for creating culturally relevant classrooms where these conversations can occur (Howard, 2021).

In some states, legislation requires immediate integration of certain concepts or discussions into the curriculum, whereas in others commissions or working groups are formed to plan, evaluate, and advise schools on best practices for developing training related to anti-racism, diversity, inclusion and/or cultural sensitivity. A particularly excellent bill[11] enacted in Washington directs the state to develop cultural competency training programs for a wide range of staff (from para-educators, administrators, school board directors, superintendents, etc.). S.B. 5044 specifies the importance of identifying model standards and recognizes the need to "continue the important work of dismantling institutional racism in public schools and ... the importance of increasing equity, diversity, inclusion, antiracism, and cultural competency training throughout the entire public school system," (pp. 1-2). The excellence in this bill is in the precision and explicit nature of the language. It does not simply require staff to participate in trainings; rather, it ensures these trainings are properly planned in order to be effective; it requires that at least one professional learning day is used to cover

these topics; and it provides definitions of terms in order to ensure understanding.

Though other legislation is formulated in similar ways, much of the legislation simply requires some form of anti-racism and social justice training or instruction without clarifying what this entails. Maine passed several different bills aimed at training different educational staff. One of these bills[12] requires school resource officers complete "diversity, equity and inclusion training or implicit bias training at least once during that officer's first year of employment," (p. 1). Training directed at resource officers is an important and necessary step, given the racially disparate disciplinary patterns found in schools (Diamond and Lewis, 2019). However, the brevity and lack of specificity around the training makes it questionable whether it will truly be effective or more of a symbolic gesture.

Disparities

Disparities were addressed most frequently through *tracking* and *planning and evaluating*. Legislation generally targeted disparities between students in discipline, academic outcomes, and access to certain courses or learning opportunities, but one Montana bill (H.B. 403)[13] targeted disparities in access to teachers for Native American students. The bill enacted a "grow your own" program, the purpose being to develop a teacher pipeline to serve rural and reservation schools. Ensuring students have access to teachers is important, but even more important is ensuring equitable access to effective teachers. As presented earlier, teachers in majority SOC schools are more likely to have teachers who are less experienced and unqualified than majority-White schools (Flaxman *et al.*, 2013; Owens, 2020), but this disparity was unfortunately not addressed in the legislation we reviewed.

As for student disparities, there are two pieces of legislation of particular interest. The first comes from Vermont, with the aim of collecting data on school disciplinary practices and creating a racially diverse task force for creating equitable and inclusive school environments. S.B. 16[14] begins with an outline of nationwide disciplinary rates and a presentation of who is disproportionately affected (e.g., Black students, students with disabilities, LGBTQ students, etc.). The task force is required to support schools in ending suspensions and expulsions for the majority of behaviors, and to measure the effectiveness of policies and practices at the state and local level. Similar to other legislation deemed excellent, this bill explicitly names race and the need for more equitable practices, and it includes a detailed explanation of how to address the inequity.

The second bill of note is from Washington[15]. The reason this bill deserves recognition is it touches upon intersectionality, targeting SOC who experience additional challenges due to their home life. H.B. 2711 notes that SOC are disproportionately represented in both foster care and homeless student populations, and they perform worse academically compared to their White peers. Considering this, the purpose of the bill is to convene a working group to review general disparities (outcomes, school attendance, school mobility, discipline, etc.), engage stakeholders, make recommendations, and ultimately achieve equality in outcomes by eliminating racial and ethnic disparities.

Racial/Ethnic knowledge

Many of the bills sought to expand *curriculum* by including additional forms of racial/ethnic knowledge. Some of the bills targeted a single racial/ethnic group, some targeted a couple specified groups, and a few were more general in their approach. These legislative documents address educational inequities in who is represented in the curriculum and whose stories are told. Stories are a salient

component of CRT: through counter-narratives, stories of historically marginalized groups can stand in contrast to the majoritarian (dominant group) stories that are often presented as normative (Zamudio *et al*., 2011). As the majority of teachers in U.S. schools are White, there is a tendency to center whiteness in classroom discussions (Carter Andrews *et al.*, 2021). Thus, enacting legislation that requires diverse knowledge is a necessary step toward creating an understanding of history that is more accurate and representative of all key actors.

In the reviewed legislation, Hawaiian culture and language, Latino studies, Native American Studies, and Asian American history were each directly addressed once, though they could of course be included in legislation taking a more general approach. For example, Nevada enacted a bill[16] that requires instruction related to the history and contribution of Native Americans and Native American tribes, people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, different religious groups, and other groups identified as marginalized. Importantly, the bill also calls for a careful selection of instructional materials and textbooks that "accurately portray the cultural and racial diversity" and the "history and contributions" of the identified groups (p. 2). Though other legislation mentions *resources,* A.B. 261 is careful to ensure the resources that are used are appropriate and accurate. Ensuring resources are culturally and racially affirming enables SOC to feel positively represented in their classrooms.

Delaware and Rhode Island were two of the states that passed bills requiring instruction about specific groups. In Delaware, H.B. 318[17] requires schools to provide instruction on the Holocaust and genocide, including discussions about the consequences of racism and intolerance, and how as citizens they can work to combat discrimination and other social issues. Furthermore, schools must offer in-service training and they must report to the Department of Education on

how they have implemented the bill's requirements. H.B. 318 goes further than suggesting schools offer a simple history lesson, but it uses lessons in history to help students understand the ramifications of racial/ethnic hate, and to empower them to be agents of change. Therefore, this bill was categorized as both addressing racial/ethnic knowledge, as well as anti-racism and social justice.

Rhode Island's H.B 5697[18] compels both elementary and secondary schools to provide African American history education. Similar to Vermont's bill addressing disparities, H.B. 5697 begins by providing an extensive description of legislative findings, demonstrating the need for such a bill by outlining Rhode Island's unique history and role in slavery. In H.B. 5697, there is direct reference to BLM and the calls for social justice during the summer of 2020; thus it is contextualized within the current socio-political context. Especially important is the inclusion of a link to the department of education's website where *resources* for the instruction of history are provided. Not only does this bill provide information in detail, but the values and positions of Rhode Island's General Assembly are clearly presented through the language and structure of the bill. This stands in contrast to many of the legislative documents categorized as inhibiting progress, where the values are often hidden through coded, vague, or color-blind language.

Discrimination

Perceived racial/ethnic discrimination can negatively affect one's sense of well-being and other outcomes (Schmitt *et al.*, 2014); thus, creating an inclusive culture and environment where students feel welcome and a sense of belonging is an important aspect of equity (Authors, 2021). In the reviewed legislation, actions against discrimination were mostly taken through *protection and accountability.* Though discrimination can also be addressed through educating teachers and students in anti-racism and social justice, in this section we focus

on policies and practices that directly relate to individual instances of discrimination.

The majority of legislation relates to hair and dress and can be linked to a national movement to end race-based hair discrimination. Since 2019, Dove and the CROWN Coalition have pushed for states to pass the CROWN act, which stands for Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair *(The Official CROWN Ac*t, 2020). Thus far, the official CROWN Act has been passed in 12 states, though other states have taken similar or related action. Given that in this paper we look solely at legislation directly affecting schools, not all of the enacted CROWN acts were included. With that said, we identified six states that over the last two years have enacted bills related to hair discrimination in schools. For some states, this simply meant changing the definition of race to include hairstyles, but others necessitate additional actions related to bullying or discrimination.

Nevada specifically requires in A.B. 371[19] that discrimination based on race – redefined in a separate bill[20] to include hair - should be tracked and categorized as racially motivated or a hate incident, and restorative practices should be provided to both victims and perpetrators. In Illinois, S.B. 817[21] enrolls the State Board of Education to make materials available with information about protective hairstyles, and it stipulates that the failure of school boards to comply with the anti-discrimination regulations will result in penalty imposed on the school district. The act –the Jett Hawkins Law - is named after a 4-year-old Illinois student who experienced hair discrimination at school in 2021 (*Jett Hawkins Law,* 2022).

Another aspect of dress code that states sought to protect was religious dress or tribal regalia. Both Arizona[22] and Washington[23] enacted legislation permitting

students of federally recognize Indian tribes to wear tribal regalia during graduation. Though this is indeed positive, it is a minor gesture and unlikely to create significant change or improvement related to discrimination, given that neither mention any form of accountability measures to ensure these students are protected.

Representation

As has been discussed throughout this paper, U.S. school teachers do not represent the student population in terms of race, despite representation being important for SOC's academic performance and sense of inclusion (Carter Andrews *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, to promote equity, schools must work to hire and retain more teachers of color. At the same time, POC must also be considered for leadership or decision-making positions, as these can also influence students' experiences in school (Carter Andrews *et al*., 2021).

In the legislation, representation was most often reflected in the *appointment* of members in a commission or school board, followed by the *recruitment* of teachers. For example, Vermont's aforementioned S.B. 16 focused on reducing disparities specifies who should be appointed to the task force, including people who are racially diverse. Many of the other bills mirror this approach: appointing members who are representative of the target group. In some cases, the group is appointed to developing a curriculum related to racial/ethnic knowledge, and in other cases the group works to implement anti-racism and social justice initiatives. A couple of the bills focus on racial/ethnic diversity in both appointment of members and recruitment of teachers.

Colorado's H.B. 1010[24] fits into the latter group. Similar to some of the excellent bills mentioned previously, H.B. 1010 begins by discussing the current insufficient state of teacher diversity in Colorado schools despite the known

benefits of teacher diversity for students. To address this disparity and investigate barriers to teachers of color entering and remaining in the educator workforce, the general assembly declares the need to form a workgroup. Furthermore, the workgroup must be representative of the racial/ethnic diversity of the Colorado student population and comprised of at least 50% of people from historically marginalized group. H.B. 1010 also seeks to address representation in the educator workforce by improving transparency in educator preparation programs. This bill takes into account both the need to reduce barriers for teachers of color to enter the workforce, but also the need to include the perspectives of POC in the *planning and evaluating* process.

Discussion

Through an analysis of 61 legislative documents, we observed five areas of racial equity addressed in state legislation that was introduced and enacted between 2020 and 2022: 1) anti-racism and social justice; 2) disparities; 3) racial/ethnic knowledge; 4) discrimination; and 5) representation. Given the content of the legislation, it is clear that this period of "racial reckoning" in the United States has had both a direct and indirect effect on enacted legislation. Although this paper did not include initiatives from state or district boards of education, we still believe the analysis provides a comprehensive overview of how states are addressing racial inequity.

Despite the fact that only ten policies were identified as inhibiting progress, the legislation seeking to suppress conversations about racism continues to grow. The emergence of anti-CRT legislation stems from an unfounded fear that CRT is being taught in classrooms, and it generally misses the point: the legislation over-emphasizes individual prejudice rather the systemic racism that CRT centers on. Bradbury (2020) raised this issue in her paper on developing a framework for CRT education policy analyses: "We should consider how the

creation of one 'problem' can operate as a diversionary tactic, drawing attention away from concerns of racial equity and allowing the concerns of marginalized groups to be forgotten" (p. 247). The creation of CRT as a problem has led to regressive and punitive policies that prevent honest lessons and conversations about race in America.

Fortunately, states are pushing against this trend by enacting policy that encourages a wider range of racial/ethnic knowledge, improves awareness of racism and issues related to social justice, examines racial/ethnic disparities, protects students against racial/ethnic discrimination, and pushes for more representation in teachers and other stakeholders. The fact that the majority of legislation promotes progress is undeniably positive, but it potentially could be explained through interest-convergence. Legislators may feel pressured to enact change in order to appease constituents; whether the change is meaningful is another matter. Although in some cases the legislative documents provide detailed, multi-step approaches to combat racial inequity, others present more symbolic action (e.g., one day of implicit bias training) and very few consider intersectionality.

Policies should orient schools toward creating safe, inclusive learning environments where SOC feel represented, where they are challenged academically, and where they have access to equitable educational opportunities (Carter Andrews *et al.*, 2019; Howard 2021; Authors, 2021). These opportunities should be reflective of the diversity found among students, including their perspectives, histories, and backgrounds (Howard, 2021). Though some of the reviewed legislation seeks to achieve this, it is uncertain whether the application of these policies will bring about real change. Training and curriculum related to anti-racism and social justice must go beyond reductive, superficial understandings of race, and instead enable students and

staff to appreciate the complexity of experience and identity (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Howard, 2021). Through the genuine advancement of racial, ethnic, and cultural awareness, teachers and school staff can be better prepared to provide an equitable educational experience for students; one free from racially discriminatory tracking and disciplinary practices (Byrd, 2016). Providing a space to discuss injustice and build students' racial literacy -rather than silence the inequity that many experience - will ensure students have the language and knowledge to work toward creating a more equitable society.

Furthermore, this analysis does not take into account the numerous policies enacted over the past two years where race/ethnicity was completely absent from the discussion. This relates to a second point made by Bradbury (2020): "What is omitted in policy – the 'policy silences' may be as important as what is included; similarly, particular voices may be silenced in the debate." (p. 247). With that said, the legislation fails to address some of the core structural issues that lead to the reproduction of educational inequity, such as within- and between-school segregation. (EdBuild, 2019; Francies and Kelley, 2021; Reardon *et al.*, 2019). Between-school segregation results in SOC attending schools with a harsher disciplinary climate, less experienced teachers, lower rates of teacher retention, and fewer resources (Reardon *et al.*, 2019; Owens, 2020), whereas racially biased tracking within schools often places SOC in less rigorous classes, even when they have demonstrated similar levels of achievement to their White peers (Francies and Kelley, 2021). Though some of these issues can be addressed through policies that promote anti-racism and social justice training, tracking disparities, and establishing teacher recruitment programs (for both quality and diversity), they also necessitate more intentional legislation targeting structures as opposed to individuals (Owens, 2020; Francies and Kelley, 2021). Policies to address between-school segregation include direct integration efforts through economic incentives, redrawing school attendance

boundaries, and open-enrollment policies combined with family outreach (Owens, 2020; Francies and Kelley, 2021). Alternatively, policies can demand a redistribution of resources, ensuring schools with higher percentages of SOC have the same caliber of teachers and access to opportunities (Owens, 2020). As for within-school segregation, policies can be written to eliminate or minimize tracking and ability grouping (Francies and Kelley, 2021).

Conclusion

In this CPA, we identified the current trends in U.S. education policies related to race/ethnicity in 61 state-level policies. Given the heightened racial tensions, we were not surprised to find a large number of legislation directly targeting race/ethnicity. With that said, Crenshaw (1988) claims, "antidiscrimination discourse is fundamentally ambiguous and can accommodate conservative as well as liberal views of race and equality," (p. 1335). Therefore, through a CRT lens we highlighted legislation that was written to explicitly promote progress for racial equity, contrasting it with more vague or color-blind documents that could either inhibit progress or merely lead to symbolic action. In the latter set of legislation, there appears to be a disconnect between policymaking and scholarship on teaching and learning. Without a clear understanding of research on inequity and patterns of disparity – as was explicitly referenced in some of the more effective policies - the policies overemphasize individual prejudice, as opposed to structural issues that reproduce inequity.

The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision serves as an example of how an understanding of research can provoke positive structural change through policy. Specifically, the decision to end segregation was informed by psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark, whose research demonstrated the detrimental psychological effect exposure to discrimination and segregation had on Black children (American Psychological Association, 2003). Although de facto

segregation still persists, this case demonstrates how research can lead to positive developments in policy and schooling opportunities for SOC when the implications of racism are recognized. In other words, color-blindness in policy and practice enables the reproduction of disparities and inequity; thus, we posit that to reduce barriers to educational opportunities, education policies must be informed by research on race, such as scholarship related to CRT and culturally relevant teaching, and they must specifically target systemic racism.

Notes

[1] Exec. Order No. 13950, 85 Fed. Reg. 60683, (2020).
[2] Exec. Order No. 13958, 85 Fed. Reg. 70951, (2020).
[3] Exec. Order No. 13985, 86 Fed. Reg. 7009, (2021).
[4] Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).
[5] We cite the legislation as bills/resolutions rather than statutes in order to observe all actions taken within a single legislative document, and to contextualize them in legislative history.
[6] H.B. 1029, 93rd Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Ark. 2021).
[7] H.B. 3979, 87th Leg., Reg. Sess. (Tex. 2021).
[8] S. Journal, 87th Cong., Reg. Sess. 2641–2653 (Tex. 2021).
[9] H.B. 377, 66th Leg., 1st Reg. Sess. (Idaho 2021).
[10] S.B. 2360, 88th Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Iowa 2020).
[11] S.B. 5044, 67th Leg., Reg. Sess. (Wash. 2021).
[12] S.B. 1040, 130th Leg., 1st Reg. Sess. (Me. 2021).
[13] H.B. 403, 67th Leg., Reg. Sess. (Mont. 2021).
[14] S.B. 16, 2021 Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Vt. 2021).
[15] H.B. 2711, 66th Leg., Reg. Sess. (Wash. 2020).
[16] A.B. 261, 81st Leg., Reg. Sess. (Nev. 2021).
[17] H.B. 318, 150th Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Del. 2020).
[18] H.B. 5697, 2021 Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (R.I. 2021).
[19] A.B. 371, 81st Leg., Reg. Sess. (Nev. 2021).
[20] S.B. 327, 81st Leg., Reg. Sess. (Nev. 2021).
[21] S.B. 817, 102nd Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Ill. 2021).
[22] H.B. 2705, 55th Leg., 1st Reg. Sess. (Ariz. 2021).
[23] H.B. 2551, 66th Leg., Reg. Sess. (Wash. 2020).
[2424] H.B. 1010, 73rd Gen. Assemb., 1st Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2021).

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Heidi Turner Katz

Far From the Dream:
Exploring the Gap in Educational Opportunities for Black Americans

Substantial evidence demonstrates the inequity in educational opportunity that currently exists for Black students in U.S. schools. Combatting this inequity requires an understanding of what educational opportunity looks like in practice and insight into the various mechanisms that maintain and reproduce inequity. This dissertation uses a multi-method research design to explore the topic of educational opportunity through the lens of race with the aim of identifying the ways in which schools and policies can ensure all students receive the necessary support to be successful both in and out of school. Within this dissertation educational opportunity is examined at multiple levels (individual, school, policy, and conceptual) enabling a more complex understanding of the interconnected factors that contribute to inequity.

This research has implications for both theory and practice. For one, this research resulted in the development of an educational opportunity framework that can be used by researchers and educators to evaluate and improve school practices. In addition, this research examined the racial status quo in a majority-White high school, which was found to reflect a cycle of White normativity, racial unknowing, and racial inequity and discrimination. This research also drew from Black students' experiences within that school, enabling an understanding of how opportunity and (in)equity impact individuals, and leading to suggestions on school practices that are more inclusive, autonomy-supportive, and in line with student needs. Finally, at the level of policy, the findings from this research necessitate the development of education policies that move beyond race neutrality and instead explicitly target systemic racism.